

**UNDERGRADUATE METHODS COURSES -  
TEACHING OUR TEACHERS TO TEACH?**

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The success or failure of teaching often depends upon the effectiveness of planning. But does the ability to effectively plan also imply the ability to perform or carry out the activities which were planned? For example, in teacher education programs, emphasis is stressed on how to develop lesson plans and students develop beautiful, ideal lesson plans. Then, we take up teaching our students how to teach. But can and do our students teach in a way we would like for agriculture teachers to teach?

Lecture - The Bulwark

These thoughts lead to the major emphasis of this article, our so called "methods courses." Are our methods courses really teaching our students how to teach? Right away a question surfaces as to what is meant by methods. To some individuals, methods are synonymous with teaching techniques. To others, methods include not only teaching techniques, but instruction relating to many other facets of our program. These facets might include FFA, supervised occupational experience programs, and adult education. Regardless of the viewpoint, teaching techniques for the purpose of this article will be processes or learning activities agriculture teachers use to convey information to students. This includes such learning activities as demonstration, team teaching, role playing, supervised study, discussion, resource people, and field trips, just to list a few.

My concern is whether our Agricultural Education graduates or those meeting temporary certification standards can lead a good discussion, effectively use role playing, or use the problem solving approach. One thing is for certain, agriculture teachers sure can lecture and teach in such a way to avoid student involvement. Exactly what professional vocational educators are not supposed to do.

In a 1965 AATEA Publication, Teacher Education in Agriculture, a study reported that the activity requiring the greatest amount of the agriculture teacher's time was classroom instruction. Now this finding should not surprise teacher educators. But if this finding is realistic, why do our so called methods courses devote on an average only 50 percent of the topics to such areas as motivating students, principles of learning, lesson planning and teaching techniques? Furthermore, when 50 percent of the class topics is devoted to motivating students, principles of learning, and lesson planning, this results in even a smaller amount of time devoted to developing competencies in the use of teaching techniques.

Now don't think the point is being made for the deletion of topics from our undergraduate programs such as the FFA, adult programs, and so forth. But the point is, one of our main missions is that of teaching teachers how to teach, and "How well are we achieving this mission?" The time has come for us in teacher education in agriculture to take a critical look at this role and responsibility and to determine possible courses of action for the future.

The AATEA Journal is our professional journal. Since its first issue 15 years ago, 207 articles have been published. Of these 207 articles, 60 (30 percent) deal directly with our teacher education programs. And of these 60 articles, a mere number of 3 have focused upon the teaching of teaching techniques as part of our programs.

Another reason it is time to take a look at our programs is due to the bandwagon syndrome. PBTE, CBTE, CBC, MBO, and other concepts appear each day which influence program direction. Which should we try to adopt? Which should be avoided? Sometimes we don't really know, and thus, innovations may be adopted which counter effective program development or operation.

#### Review of Ag Ed Method's Course Syllabi in United States

To help in getting a handle in this area of concern regarding the preparation of our students in the use of teaching techniques, the head teacher educators of agricultural education in the United States were contacted in the fall of 1974 and a request was made for the course syllabus of their method's course, the course in which they teach their undergraduates how to teach. Using only one mailing request, a 62 percent usable return was received.

In the review of these course syllabi, it soon became evident that methods courses are offered in a variety of manners and that any statistical analysis would be impossible with the material received. An attempt was made to assess the emphasis devoted to teaching techniques based upon the topics identified on syllabi. Right away limitations can be pointed out. Teachers will vary from syllabi, and the actual amount of time devoted to each topic may vary from the time indicated. Even so, generalizations can be made.

In syllabi where little emphasis was devoted to teaching techniques, many other topical areas were found. Topics such as FFA, SOEP, filing systems, adult education, history and philosophy of Agricultural Education, facilities, equipment, teacher characteristics, program planning, agricultural mechanics, curriculum material development, 4-H, audiovisuals and advisory councils were included. In comparison, syllabi which reflected more emphasis on teaching techniques contained fewer of the topics mentioned previously. Further analysis of the course syllabi returned indicate nationwide, teacher educators in agriculture are devoting one half of the topics in methods courses to lesson planning, motivating students, principles of learning, and

teaching techniques, with a range from 12 to 100 percent. When considering the time devoted to the development of competencies on the use of teaching techniques, the percentage of time would be far less. In addition, some responding institutions indicated that teaching techniques are covered in agricultural mechanics courses, adult education courses, and student teaching related seminars or group meetings. A critical question could be raised here as to just how much teaching techniques could be adequately taught under these situations.

The issue could be debated as to the desirable percentage of time which should be devoted to teaching our students in the use of teaching techniques. Irregardless of the outcome of such a debate, there appears that the variation in our methods courses is too great and that too much of the methods courses are devoted to other topics. Also if our teachers are not expected to lecture but utilize other teaching techniques, then provision must be made for them to develop the basics for using these teaching techniques before entering their student teaching period. Graduates of our programs will not learn how to effectively use supervised study unless he/she has had the opportunity to develop a basic competency of this teaching technique while still in the undergraduate program. Once the graduate is on the job, the development of basic skills needed to effectively use supervised study is left to chance, and in all probability, will result in a negative teacher attitude towards supervised study when it fails due to teacher incompetence. Furthermore, this negative experience will only serve to stifle future use of that technique as well as others which are unfamiliar to the teacher.

### Future Activities for Teacher Educators in Agriculture

Based upon the analysis of the Agricultural Education course syllabi and other observations, the following recommendations are made to help stimulate discussions and possible future actions for teacher educators in agriculture.

1. We should strive to share our ideas more through regional and national conferences and the AATEA Journal concerning just how we prepare or should prepare our teachers to teach.
2. Research efforts be encouraged through masters' thesis, doctoral dissertations, and staff studies in the area of teaching techniques and how to teach teaching techniques.
3. That one course in an undergraduate program considered as the methods course is insufficient if this course also contains topics dealing with the FFA, SOEP, adult education, and other topics. In fact, at least one course should deal with nothing but teaching techniques, how to use and select teaching techniques, and how teaching techniques can be used to apply the principles of learning.

4. Student teaching experiences need to be evaluated and studied. Student teachers should be encouraged, required, or otherwise checked to be sure that all teaching techniques were used several times during their student teaching experiences.
5. Cooperating teachers who work with student teachers should receive in-service education in the area of teaching techniques.
6. Alternative in-service activities should be identified which teacher educators in agriculture could follow in preparation for their role of teaching undergraduates in the use of teaching techniques.
7. The problem solving approach should remain as the overall teaching approach to encourage our prospective teachers to use, with various teaching techniques serving as learning activities to solve the problems identified.
8. Using the Principles of Practice is one way to enhance our students' abilities in the use of various teaching techniques. Thus, we should strive to improve our teacher education programs by identifying alternatives to adopt this Principle in the development of teacher competency pertaining to teaching techniques. Furthermore, teacher educators should serve as models and use the different teaching technique while teaching the methods courses.

#### The Hidden Key - The Ability to Effectively Teach

In conclusion, instruction on the various teaching techniques should be emphasized more in our undergraduate programs. A good FFA program is an asset to a local Agricultural Education program and sound occupational experience programs will serve to develop skills and abilities of the students enrolled. But of more importance to the livelihood and future of our local Agricultural Education programs, deals with the effective ability of our teachers to teach. Once the agriculture teacher achieves the ability to effectively teach, the ability to accept and to successfully fulfill the FFA duties, occupational experience program activities, and other responsibilities associated with the job will then become more of a reality.

#### References

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