

ACCOUNTABILITY: NOT A DESTINATION, BUT A NEVER ENDING JOURNEY

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Introduction

When I was asked to present the 2003 AAAE Distinguished Lecture, I began to reflect back on previous lectures and our colleagues who made those presentations. I thought about the first lecture that I heard in Chicago in 1972. I remembered that Dr. Orville Thompson of the University of California, Davis was the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture (AATEA) Mystery Speaker, as it was called at that time. However, I could not remember what Dr. Thompson spoke about. So, I obtained a copy of his speech, thanks to Drs. Ed Osborne and James Christiansen. I would like to begin by sharing an excerpt from Dr. Thompson's speech, which was entitled "The Possible Dream". I quote:

In the past two years I have asked possibly a hundred teachers – many not in agriculture – what proportion of the students in their classes were "mental drop-outs." The responses have been very discouraging. Estimates range from twenty-five to seventy-five percent with a mean of possibly forty percent: a very sad commentary, dramatically emphasizing a broad gap between society and its educational system. Is it any wonder that parents, taxpayers, and legislators are clamoring for accountability and asking what they are getting for their educational dollars? (Thompson, 1972, p 5).

What struck me about this piece was that we could be speaking about these same issues in many of our public schools thirty-one years later. It is apparent that Thompson (1972) was referring to

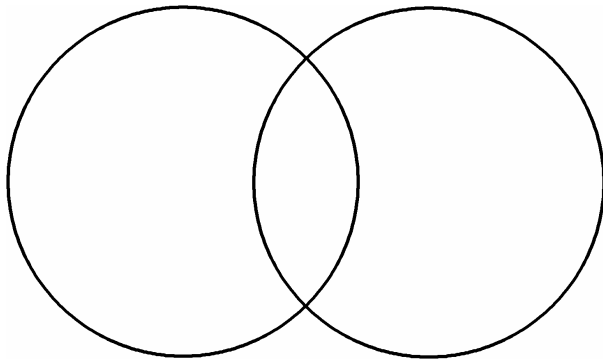
accountability in our educational system. Accountability is still a hot issue today – whether we are speaking about accountability in our K-12 schools or in teacher education. Some of the issues he was referring to had to do with teacher effectiveness. It is through effective teaching that we are going to achieve a greater degree of accountability in education today.

Teacher Effectiveness

What is teacher effectiveness or effective teaching? Are there common characteristics of effective teachers regardless if they are teaching agriculture, mathematics, science, music, history, family and consumer science, or automotive technology? I believe there are. However, there are features about career and technical education programs such as working with the student organization and experience programs that are also considered when labeling those teachers as effective. Let's first look at teacher effectiveness in general.

Someone once said that we think of effective teachers we have had over the years with a sense of recognition, but those who have touched our humanity we remember with a deep sense of gratitude. If we think back on our own education, most of us can name a K-12 teacher or a university professor whom we thought to be effective and for whom we have a deep sense of gratitude. I have provided each of you with a handout that contains a figure of two interlocking circles (see Figure 1). In the left circle, list some adjectives that describe characteristics of an effective teacher you have in mind. Then, in the right side circle, list characteristics of yourself that you feel make you an effective teacher. Now in the overlapping section of the two circles, list the characteristics that are

duplicated in each of the two sides. Did you discover that you possess characteristics of that teacher or professor whom you identified to be effective? I would guess that you did. In an informal way, you have just formed your impression of an effective teacher. You may have come up with descriptors or characteristics like well organized, enthusiastic, caring, personable, learned a lot, used a variety of methods, respectful, or others.



List effective characteristics of favorite teacher/professor.

Overlapping or duplicated characteristics

List effective characteristics of yourself as a teacher.

Figure 1. Characteristics of effective teacher, self, and duplicated characteristics

There are many perceptions of what effective teaching is. During the first class period of my methods course in career and technical education this semester, I asked my students to write a description of effective teaching. Here are the responses of four students:

- “Effective teaching is the ability of the instructor to relate a particular lesson in a clear concise way that the student can associate to the stated objective of the lesson.”
- “When a student walks away from class knowing more about a skill taught. When a teacher feels that all objectives were met and knows that the students have learned.”

- “Effective teaching is the ability to convey knowledge to all students. It is creating a healthy learning environment where all the students feel comfortable to ask questions.
- “Effective teaching is the ability to convey one idea in a number of ways to help aid learning. Above all effective teaching is creating learning.”

Effective teaching is all about obtaining results in the form of student achievement. It’s not about covering the subject matter, it is about student learning. I have a Tiger cartoon in which he is talking to a friend about his dog, Stripe, and he says, “I taught Stripe how to whistle.” His friend replied, “I don’t hear him whistling.” With a disgusted look on his face, Tiger responded, “I said I taught him. I didn’t say he learned it.” Tiger may have thought he taught Stripe how to whistle, but he didn’t obtain the results he wanted. There are people who would feel that if the subject was covered or a skill was demonstrated, they have taught, without thought about whether or not the students have learned.

In the early 1900’s, a good teacher was considered a good person – someone who met the community ideal of a good citizen, good parent, and good employee. At that time, teachers were judged on their goodness as people and only secondarily on their behavior in the classroom (Borich, 1988). I have an edition of a newsletter that reported the accomplishments of the various groups that attended Nevada’s First Annual Vocational Teachers Conference in August 1924 (Nevada State Department of Vocational Education, 1924). The Nevada agriculture teachers apparently spent time discussing what their responsibilities should be and came up with the following list: get acquainted with the community; find needs of the community; select and organize functioning subject matter; select classes of farm boys; develop an organization of farm boys; fit into school organization; teach agriculture; require, develop and complete supervised practical work; improve self professionally; promote vocational education in the community; serve community as a citizen of the community;

provide for the needs of adult farmers; and keep records and make reports. I suspect that if those teachers carried out the list of responsibilities in some fashion of conscientiousness, they were considered to be a good teacher according to the description of how they were judged in the early 1900's.

In the 1960's and 1970's, community ideals became an unrealistic means of judging teaching, and researchers began studying the impact of specific teacher behaviors on the student behaviors. Therefore, good teaching turned into effective teaching. Methods of studying teacher-student interactions were being developed. Good and Brophy (1987) developed classroom interaction analysis instruments to collect data on teacher-student interactions as a means of determining teacher effectiveness.

Rosenshine and Furst (1971) were some of the earlier researchers who studied the relationship between teacher behaviors and student achievement. Their research was conducted with normal classrooms. They found that the teacher behaviors were not consistently related to higher student achievement in any one particular subject area than in others. Their reported strongest teacher behavior variables were clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-oriented and/or businesslike behaviors, student opportunity to learn criterion material, use of student ideas, criticism (contributed negatively), use of structuring comments, types of questions, probing, and level of difficulty of instruction. These variables have often been used in the past to assess instructional quality.

Cultural differences may have an affect on how teacher effectiveness is viewed. A recent study out of UCLA highlighted the findings from a two year investigation of elementary and secondary African American students located in urban schools and their perceptions and interpretations of what characteristics constitute effective teaching (Howard, 2002). While it was indicated that both elementary and secondary students were studied, only results from elementary students were reported in this article. Howard reported that,

One of the most frequently mentioned practices by the students about their teachers' effectiveness was their teachers' ability to structure their classrooms in a manner that mirrored family and community practices, beliefs and values, or, in one student's words, to 'make school seem like home'. (p. 431)

Students mentioned that caring was also important in making their teachers effective. It was interesting to note that students mentioned that the types of verbal communication shown by their teachers conveyed a sense of caring that they possessed about their students' academic welfare – even to the extent that they mentioned hollering or yelling as an indicator of teacher caring, affirmation, and effective communication. Students thought that if the teacher is appropriately yelling at them, the teacher is concerned about them getting their work done, and at the same time doing quality work – an indication of caring.

In his book *Why Do I Have to Learn This?*, Parnell (1995) suggested contextual learning as the best framework for providing a more effective satisfying education for all students. He wrote that,

In contextual learning it is the major task of the teacher to broaden student's perceptions so that meaning becomes visible and the purpose of learning immediately understandable....Teachers must help students understand the larger meaning of a particular study – how it relates to real-life issues and actual life roles. (p. 2)

Christiansen (2001) also emphasized that our teaching and learning should be in context in order to help meet the needs of students. However, he cautioned about over emphasis of contextual teaching and learning and under emphasizing the bases of knowledge in which we work.

We in agricultural education would likely agree with the aforementioned

research that points out characteristics of an effective teacher. Due to the nature of our agricultural education programs, we might also look at effectiveness beyond the walls of our classrooms and labs. We want agricultural education teachers to integrate effective leadership activities through the FFA into their programs. And we want them to conduct supervised agricultural experience programs that provide students with opportunities to effectively apply the knowledge and skills learned in the instructional program in real life settings. Measures of effectiveness for agricultural education should not only take into account the teacher's ability to attain high levels of student achievement in the classrooms and labs, but also student performance through FFA participation and their supervised agricultural experience programs.

Standards and Accreditation

Standards for K-12 education, teacher education, and accreditation have all played a role in attempting to achieve a greater degree of accountability and teacher effectiveness. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) revised their standards for accrediting colleges, schools, and departments of education that prepare teachers and other school personnel. The standards have become performance based. Rather than reviewing inputs, as was done under their old standards, the NCATE (2002) Standards require Boards of Examiners to review outputs or the performance of candidates. Performance based assessment hasn't been a difficult concept for those of us in career and technical education to understand because we have been doing that for a long time. Remember the competency based teacher education movement of the mid-1970's?

NCATE Standard One deals with how well candidates can perform in demonstrating their knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to subject matter content and pedagogy based upon institutional, state, and professional standards (NCATE, 2002). Each NCATE accredited institution must develop a performance assessment system that assesses their candidates at entrance to a

program, at some mid-point in their program, and at the completion of their program.

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) is a consortium of state education agencies and national educational organizations dedicated to the reform of the preparation, licensing, and on-going professional development of teachers. Created in 1987, INTASC's primary constituency is state education agencies responsible for teacher licensing, program approval, and professional development (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2003). INTASC has developed model core standards for what all beginning teachers should know, be like, and be able to do in order to practice responsibly regardless of the subject matter or grade level being taught. Many state education agencies have embraced the INTASC Standards by either adopting them or adapting them to their particular state needs. Out of the INTASC Standards have come state standards such as the New Mexico Entry Level Teacher Competencies, the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission Core Standards for Teachers, and the Kentucky New Teacher Standards. There may be others, but I am aware of the work of these states since I was a member of a NCATE Board of Examiners team that conducted a continuing accreditation site visit in at least one institution in each state. If your agricultural education programs go through a state program approval process by your state agency, you have likely dealt with standards of this nature.

The Nevada Administrative Code requires that each institution preparing teachers in the state use the INTASC Standards, or some form of them. We, in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno, began developing our candidate performance assessment process by beginning with our final assessment, the internship final evaluation. We pulled a group of College faculty, K-12 cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and our Director of Field Experience together to develop a final internship evaluation based upon the ten INTASC Standards. As they worked with the standards, they began to see

the overlap and decided to condense them in some way. They combined the ten standards and ended up with five, which we now call our Five Domains of Professional Competence. The five domains we now use are: 1) Knowledge of Students and Learning Environments, 2) Knowledge of Subject Matter and Planning, 3) Delivery and Management of Instruction, 4) Knowledge and Uses of Assessment, and 5) Professionalism. These five domains have become the foundation of our assessment system. We have found that our candidates have a much easier time dealing with those five domains than the 10 standards defined by INTASC.

Each of the six NCATE Standards has a number of elements under them to help address the intent of the standards. An institution seeking new or continuing accreditation must address each element. Standard One – Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions has an element entitled “Student Learning for Teacher Candidates” (NCATE, 2002, p.16). The intent of this element is for institutions to provide evidence that their candidates are effective in K-12 classrooms and have a positive effect on student learning. Our teacher education candidates should be able to use assessment results to analyze student learning and adjust instruction in order to increase their effectiveness and improve student achievement.

Many teacher education programs have adopted the Teacher Work Sample as a mechanism to provide evidence of their candidate’s effect on student learning. Faculty in my college have used the Teacher Work Sample as a guide in developing our process call the Student Learning Sample (SLS). We wanted to place our focus on students and their learning, thus, the different title. Our Student Learning Sample is patterned after the teaching-learning cycle. It consists of five sections: 1) Setting Goals for Student Learning, 2) Developing a Profile of Focus Students, 3) Documenting the Teaching/Learning/Assessment Cycle; 4) Analyzing Student Learning, and 5) Reflecting on Professional Competence. The Student Learning Sample is something our candidates do and complete during their semester long internship. The SLS was pilot

tested with a small group of interns in the spring semester of 2003. This is the first semester that it is being fully implemented with our group of interns. We lack hard evidence at this time that the SLS had an impact upon how candidates view their teaching and student’s learning. However, we do have anecdotal evidence that indicates that interns experienced some “ah-ha!” moments and found that they can become more effective if required to pay closer attention to student learning through informed assessments.

Over the last several years, policy makers have legislated standards for K-12 education. Many states now have standards for mathematics, science, social studies, English/language arts, and other academic disciplines. Along with those standards, high stakes tests have been developed, which students must pass in order to advance along in their education or even to graduate. It is often implied that meeting these standards and passing the related tests equates to teachers being effective without regard to social issues that a child faces outside of school.

Due to these pressures to meet academic standards, school systems and/or State Departments of Education have responded by increasing graduation requirements, which squeezes out students’ options to take elective courses in areas like the arts and career and technical education. It has been my position that we in agricultural education and other disciplines in career and technical education have to position ourselves to show how the content, skills, and behaviors taught in our programs contribute to students’ ability to meet academic standards and subsequently pass the required tests. I feel that the application of academic skills in the agricultural education context does help students understand the academic content being taught. Let me share an example of an incident that I heard about in my state. A student in one of our rural school districts had difficulty passing the state math proficiency exam. After failing the exam a couple of times, his agriculture teacher suggested to the student that he come to him for help. This agriculture teacher reviewed the math that was included in the welding course that this student took. They didn’t

discuss the fact that they were reviewing math for purposes of passing the test, but that they were simply reviewing the math associated with welding. After that review, the student repeated and passed the test. We don't know for sure that it was this contextual review that put the student over the top or whether it might have been other factors like test repetition. I would like to believe that this agriculture teacher's special interest in the student and attention given to him with the contextual math review is what enabled him to pass the exam.

Legislation in Nevada mandated the development, approval, and use of performance and content standards for K-12 education. Standards have been developed and implemented in the academic disciplines as well as technology and the arts. The Nevada Department of Education Career and Technical Education (CTE) Team became proactive and decided to lead an effort to develop standards for the disciplines in CTE before the legislature mandated them as well. To date, standards have been developed for several areas in agricultural education. In addition to having the defined agriculture standards, each standard has been correlated to the academic standards in math or science that the content meets. This effort has already led to the Agricultural Science Standards being approved by the Nevada State Board of Education to meet science course standards. We hope that these standards lead to greater program effectiveness and contribute to our students' ability to also meet the academic standards as assessed by the state proficiency exams.

Why do I mention these various levels of standards in education today? Because they were initiated, mostly through legislative mandates, in an effort to attain a higher level of accountability in K-12 education and in teacher education. That accountability reflects on teacher effectiveness and our ability as university faculty to prepare effective teachers.

Teacher Education

Not only has K-12 education been under the microscope of the American public, but so has teacher education. I've heard it said

that one enthusiastic flea can worry a whole dog. As the associate dean in a College of Education, I often feel like that worried dog. There are individuals who question the value of teacher education. We have people in our American public who do not feel that teacher education is essential. There is a perception that individuals who have only subject matter knowledge, which is often interpreted as a degree in a content area, can enter a teaching position and be effective. We are constantly defending the importance of teacher education and what we feel it takes to prepare an effective teacher.

A recent study commissioned by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education and the American Council on Education reported on attitudes on Capitol Hill relative to teacher preparation. Referring to the study, Imig (2003) reported that members of Congress believe that education schools in their own districts and states are above the national average while other teacher preparation programs represent the status quo and cannot be trusted.

Is Agricultural Education teacher education a part of the concern? I really don't know, but I suspect we are. If Agricultural Education programs are in Colleges of Education, they are included in the mix of programs under question. Most of us would question how effective a secondary agricultural education teacher would be if he/she did not have adequate preparation. How effective would they be in carrying out an instructional program that meets the needs of our agriculture and natural resources industry, businesses, and agencies while addressing the individual needs of all students enrolled in the program? How effective would they be in advising a dynamic FFA chapter that compliments the instructional program and develops those qualities of leadership we expect out of the organization? How effective would they be in assisting all students in developing a quality supervised agricultural experience program that helps to further develop the knowledge and skills taught in the instructional program? Perhaps some of you who are in states that have alternative licensure programs or other short cuts into teaching in agriculture can answer

those questions. Do we have research to back any claims to the necessity of our agricultural education teacher education programs? Perhaps this is an area in need of investigation.

Several studies have pointed out the importance of teacher education programs. Rice (2003) indicated that teacher coursework in both the subject area taught and pedagogy contributes to positive education outcomes. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), after reviewing the literature on teacher effectiveness, indicated that teachers who have training in pedagogy do outperform teachers without such training. Cross and Rigden (2002) reported that teachers need both content knowledge and knowledge of pedagogy, because while an academic major guarantees that teachers know the subject, it does not guarantee that they know how to teach that subject matter to children. Coffin (2002) reported, "Effective teachers demonstrate command of the subject matter they teach, strong preparation in effective pedagogical practice, and high academic performance." (p. 5). We could go on with more examples about the need for quality teacher education, but I think you understand my point.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires that all teachers who teach core academic subjects be "highly qualified". In general, the Act defines highly qualified as someone who has a major or its equivalent in a content area and shows competence in that subject, usually by passing the teacher competency exams required by their respective state. The Act does not require that teachers be prepared through a teacher education program. As we consider those characteristics discussed previously, it is difficult to imagine that being "highly qualified" can be equated to being an effective teacher. While the highly qualified requirement does not affect agricultural educators in general, it may if an agriculture teacher happens to teach science or any other core subject. They would need to have a major or its equivalent in the subject area they are teaching or pass the teacher competency exams required in their respective state for that subject.

The American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence is attempting to sell

their testing program to states as a means of meeting certification requirements even though there is research to support the need for teacher preparation. The American Board for Certification (2003) alleges that they are addressing the need to place a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. They offer a "Passport to Teaching" certification. To qualify, one must have a bachelor's degree and pass two of their tests – one test in the subject content area and one that deals with professional teaching knowledge. At this time, only certification in elementary education (K-6), mathematics (6-12) and English (6-12) are available, but they are planning on expanding their menu of tests. So far, Pennsylvania and Idaho are the only states that have adopted their certification. Under these provisions, one might meet the conditions of being a highly qualified teacher as designated in the No Child Left Behind Act, but are those who enter teaching in this fashion going to be effective? Teacher education programs provide their candidates with not only the fundamentals of teaching, but experiences working with K-12 students that allows them to apply the fundamentals in real school settings prior to entering the teaching profession. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) after reviewing several studies related to the importance of teacher education programs reported that traditionally certified teachers teaching in their area of certification outperform both certified teachers teaching out-of-field and alternatively certified teachers. Related to this, Margaret Mead once said that the most extraordinary thing about a really good teacher is that he or she transcends accepted educational methods.

A recent study by the Education Commission of the States (Allen, 2003) reviewed 92 studies looking for the most effective strategies for educating and training the nation's teachers. Their study attempted to answer eight questions on teacher preparation. The report refers to the thinness of research available to support various points of view. They pointed out that the issue of teacher preparation calls for more and better research. I would also suggest that the same might be true of research in agricultural teacher education.

Do we have research that provides evidence that what we do in teacher education really does make a difference in the achievement of students that our graduates work with upon completion of our programs? Like teacher education in general, we need to give consideration to research of this nature so we can justify our programs and the need for quality teacher preparation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to share a poem with you taken from Parnell's (1995) book. This poem was written by a ninth-grade Native American student whose name was not disclosed.

THE AVERAGE CHILD

*I don't cause teachers trouble,
my grades have been OK.
I listen in my classes
and I'm in school every day.
My teachers think I'm average,
my parents think so too.
I wish I didn't know that
'cause there's lots I'd like to do.
I'd like to build a rocket, I have
a book that tells you how,
or start a stamp collection – well
there's no use in trying now.
'Cause since I found I'm average
I'm just smart enough you see,
to know there is nothing special
that I should expect of me.
I'm part of the majority,
that hump part of the bell,
who spends their life unnoticed
in an average kind of hell.
(Parnell, 1995, p. 91)*

It appears that this student did not have enough effective teachers throughout his/her nine years of schooling. Effective teachers would have instilled a sense of confidence so that he/she would have built that rocket or started a stamp collection. Dan Rather once said that the dream begins, most of the time, with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you on to the next plateau, sometimes poking you with a sharp stick called truth. This student obviously needed more teachers with a sharp stick who

believed that he/she could fulfill his/her dreams.

As university faculty members, we have the responsibility of preparing individuals, whether they are future agriculture teachers, extension agents, communicators, or international representatives, who can be effective and help people achieve success in their lives so they do not live in "an average kind of hell". We have the responsibility to be accountable. With the collective commitment, initiative, knowledge and skills of you agricultural educators in this room today, I am confident that we will continue to move towards higher levels of accountability in agricultural education. Accountability is not a destination; it is a never-ending journey.

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