

**SOCIAL EFFICIENCY REVISITED:
A CORNERSTONE OF THE FOUNDATION**

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Introduction

No other single theoretical construct has so substantively affected the philosophical, administrative and programmatic development of vocational education in this country as the doctrine of social efficiency espoused by David Snedden and effectuated by Charles Prosser in the early 1900s.

As we move toward the time when basic federal enabling legislation for vocational education will be re-enacted, it behooves us, as the leadership of agricultural education, to reflect on the philosophical underpinning of our profession. Without a firm grasp on our past, we grope blindly for an unseeable future. Just as the direction of a line requires at least two points to define, so too must we consider our past as well as our present as we chart the future of our profession. With those thoughts it becomes appropriate to examine the social efficiency doctrine and its effect on our current program of agricultural education. This article will neither defend or rebutt the contentions of the social efficiency adherents. Rather, it will merely examine one essential point in our past which helps to define what we are today:

Snedden and Prosser - The Personalities

In 1910 David Snedden, at age 40, was an educational administration professor at Teacher's College, Columbia University. His doctoral work, also at Columbia, and his life experience from abject poverty in the hills of California, had convinced him that the schools had a mission in society and that vocational education was the essential element for accomplishing that mission. In short, his theory was the doctrine of social efficiency. As a severe critic of literary education and a social efficiency advocate, he had attracted the attention of influential

industrialists. Among those was Frederick P. Fisk, founder and president of American Telephone and Telegraph company and chairman of the Massachusetts State Board of Education. An industrialist and an ardent foe of trade unionism, Fisk sought out Snedden and offered him the position of Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts with the mission of developing a vocationally oriented system based on his social efficiency approach and designed to serve the needs of industry.

Charles Prosser had completed his Ph.D. under Snedden and then begun work on the faculty at Columbia. As first a disciple and then a colleague of Snedden, Prosser was named by his mentor to the job of Associate Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts, also in 1910. In 1912, Prosser went to the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE) as its Executive Director. His sole mission in life was to promote the passage of federal legislation for vocational education--what was to become the Smith Hughes Act. Tradition has it that he wrote the legislation at his dining room table. On passage, the Act required establishment of a Federal Board of Vocational Education and Charles Prosser became its first Executive Director. His early commitment to the Snedden doctrine of social efficiency as the underlying purpose of vocational education never faltered and his career was spent in actualizing that theory.

Development of the Doctrine

Snedden combined the teachings of prominent economists, sociologists, psychologists and educators to synthesize his social efficiency theories. Let us briefly list the major contributors to Snedden's thinking.

Edward Ross, a social economist, wrote extensively and persuasively on the subject of social control. He contended that the progress of any society depended on the control of its individual members. His control rested on voluntary conformity by the citizenry to an accepted set of values and social customs. This conformity would result from insights into the social consequences, either positive or negative, of all social acts and was therefore a desirable form of control. It was the mission of education, Ross contended, to delineate those right values and customs and to inculcate them into the students. In short, there was a need for social control and the schools were to meet that need.

Sociologists of the period, as typified by professors Giddings and Ward of Columbia, were convinced that society had a natural tendency toward class differentiation. They concluded that this layering of society into leaders and followers--

thinkers, managers, and workers--was natural and good. They concluded that it was the responsibility of the schools to aid in that differentiation process.

The still famous psychologist E. L. Thorndike, also a professor at Columbia, was developing his landmark theory of learning. Using his theories, Snedden concluded that it was possible to approach teaching in an almost scientific manner. If learning consists of attaching a stimulus to a response by means of a connection resulting from rewarded repetitions, then teaching built upon that process can be readily defended as being correct.

One last person who seems to have influenced Dr. Snedden was Albert Shaw, an educational administration professor whose research had been on the administration and teaching methods of the Hampton Institute. He concluded that Hampton's program provided the ideal education for the lower class child, one which stressed discipline, industry, acceptable deportment, vocational training, and dealt with the rudiments of book learning. Such a school should never lose sight of the range of social and industrial possibilities that the future has in store for such children.

Snedden looked at all these theories and then wrote his dissertation on *Administration and Educational Work of American Juvenile Reform Schools*. He found, like Ward, that schools for lower class youth should emphasize physical training, moral values training, vocational education, and limited literary training.

Doctrine of Social Efficiency

Snedden borrowed from the scholars listed above, gained insight from his own research and experiences, and synthesized an approach to education which has had far reaching implications for each of us. Let us examine the implications he found in the social efficiency doctrine for vocational education.

Premise: The corporate/industrial/urban complex is the way of the future. Dull, routine, factory-type jobs are infinitely more desirable than previous types of work, because they allow for the improvement of the total lifestyle. While work time per se may be less than ideal, greater leisure time and a higher standard of living are made available to all as a result of such labor.

Premise: The group is the primary concern, not the individual. The role of the individual is to better serve society

and to fit within its conventions. The individual who does not conform to society's expectations of him or her is a misfit. School should serve as the medium and education as the treatment for fitting the individual to an appropriate role.

Premise: Society is properly differentiated into socio-economic classes by education. Each member of society will naturally gravitate toward his or her proper role based upon native ability and socio-economic background. Schools are the primary medium for assisting individuals to find and prepare for those roles. Thus, it is the responsibility of the school to determine the probable destiny of the student, then to fit the child to that destiny. Fitting consists of guidance toward, preparation for entry into, and psychological adjustment to that probable life role. Snedden believed that once students were fitted to their place in life, and conditioned to accept that place, then they would have such an intelligent understanding of authority as to make the exercise of arbitrary authority unnecessary.

Premise: The proper education for the privates of industry, the rank-and-file workers, as Snedden called the working classes, is one which is based upon the reform school model which he had studied in his dissertation. It provides for physical training, moral indoctrination, job specific skill training, and the rudiments of literary education but only to the extent that it is necessary to create industrial intelligence among the workers. Moreover, that skill training should be based on existing conditions in industry and significantly not on ideal conditions.

Premise: The ultimate responsibility of vocational education is to produce a productive, happy work force responsive to the needs of industry and contributing to the social good. In order to accomplish that task, several things will be necessary. The direction of vocational education must be kept out of the hands of general educators who will not be responsive to the needs of industry. The curriculum must be built to teach in a sequential order the tasks of the worker. The teaching itself must be in an industrial setting, using realistic equipment, and based on repetition. The skills should be developed as habits. Right moral values should be drilled into the students--hard work, fair play, initiative, love of country, respect for the dignity of the working man and woman, satisfaction with one's lot in life.

Effects on Agricultural Education

How were Snedden's theories translated into action--into programmatic direction? Clearly, the first direct implication was in the establishment of the dual administrative system for

vocational education. Those factors providing impetus to the industrial education movement, and leadership to NSPIE, saw clearly that professional educators were not going to be supportive of industrially oriented programs. Thus, in order to serve society in the most efficient manner, the vocational education program must be run separately. As simply a part of the overall vocational education program, agricultural education found itself with a separate administrative structure. At its federal head have been some of our most prominent agricultural educators over the years. Each state then named its own state supervisor of agricultural education. Assistant or district or area supervisors were appointed. At one time these people literally controlled almost every aspect of the local vocational agriculture program. The establishment of the dual system of administration, which still survives in one form or another in all of our states, traces directly to Snedden's conclusion that vocational education must be separately administered.

The second implication of that same premise gave rise to the separate campus for vocational programs. The separation of administration of the programs had as its logical extension the separation of facilities. Snedden felt that the programs must be located apart from the regular school. In agricultural education, that usually did not mean a separate campus as it did in the industrial programs serving large population centers. Rather, agricultural education usually went to rural schools. The separation of the agricultural facility was still necessary in order to insure that the general school administrators did not tinker too much with our programs. Thus was necessitated the standard, or approved, vocational agriculture facility apart and separate from the rest of the school and mandated by the state supervisors under pressure from the federal board, directed as you will recall by Charles Prosser, David Snedden's prize student.

A third implication of the social efficiency doctrine was the development of a vocational "track" for students. Snedden saw a natural and proper function of education to be to facilitate the class differentiation of students based on their probable destinies. This differentiation should take place fairly early and from that point onward, those predestined for leadership and intellectual roles should be treated in one track and channeled toward college. Those destined for the work force (factory or farms) should be treated in a second track and receive primarily job specific training. Of course, general educators could hardly argue with vocational people who said in essence, "Give me all of you slower students so that we can make them socially productive." As we hear agriculture teachers complain that they don't get the right kinds of students, it would behoove us to remember that vocational education in this country was designed primarily to serve the very students we are still

getting. Agricultural education is certainly no exception to that generalization.

A fourth implication resulted in our federally mandated supervised farming program. It is amazing today to reflect on the thought that the Congress of the United States actually specified curriculum details for our programs as early as 1917; nevertheless that is the case. Trades and industry students could be required to spend 80 percent of their time in shops. Vocational agriculture students could be required to operate farm project programs that would emphasize the value of work and produce a prideful, diligent farm worker. Humanism, as Dewey advocated it, had little to do with the original form of vocational education.

The fifth implication resulted in our emphasis on planning the curriculum to meet the needs of industry. Snedden insisted upon a job-specific type of training that went to industry to determine what to teach. Prosser applied that concept from his positions of leadership. In the trades and industry programs, this means craft committees consisting of laborers and employers in industry. In agricultural education this meant advisory committees consisting of farmers. In trades and industry programs it means labor market studies. In agricultural education, that translated into community agricultural surveys and then later into community agricultural employment surveys. More recently, the old social efficiency insistence on meticulous molding of vocational education to industry needs has been revived in the form of competency based education's skill/task listings validated by incumbent workers. One criticism vocational education has received is that our emphasis on a realistic industry-based curriculum tends to perpetuate the negative as well as the positive aspects of workers' lives. That has always been true. We were founded on the premise that skill training should be in realistic conditions, not ideal conditions. We can hardly refute this charge when it was a cornerstone of our foundation.

Conclusion

Many of the tenets of social efficiency have been supplanted by more humanistic thinking over the years. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 ushered in a drastic change in emphasis toward placing more philosophical concern on the individual as an intrinsically worthwhile human being. We have lost much of the centralized control over local programs long held by state supervisory staffs. More emphasis is being placed on local supervision of vocational education programs, but still notably by vocational people. New programs have been introduced. The emphasis is no longer on strictly job-specific skills. The career education movement has substantially affected our programs.

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