

**CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF TRADITIONAL CO-OP PROGRAM
PRINCIPALS AND PRACTICES FOR AGRICULTURE**

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The vocational services having the most experience in Part-Time Cooperative Education have served as models to the other services which have been initiating such programs since 1963. Agriculture turned primarily to distributive education for ideas when it started the placement of students for experience in farm related business, ornamental horticulture and other occupations requiring considerable knowledge and skills in agricultural subjects. As Home Economics Education has expanded its preparation for gainful employment in Home Economics occupations outside the home, it too has relied upon the procedures used by the other vocational services which have engaged in placement-employment programs for several years.

Agriculture has obtained valuable ideas from the other services concerning placement-employment programs. The other services could benefit by studying the program which agriculture traditionally offered, but neither can follow the program of the other without thoughtful consideration and evaluation.

The writer is very concerned about three prevalent practices used in Distributive Education which unfortunately are heavily influencing Agricultural Education. These three practices are 1) requirement of a specific number of hours (540) for all placement-employment experience programs, 2) lack of emphasis on technical information, and 3) emphasis in salesmanship as it relates to small items for personal use instead of larger items which are inputs into a business enterprise.

Also, agriculture should not neglect three of its own important ideas or practices which have been emphasized in education for farming when it expands into preparation for off-farm agricultural occupations. All vocational services should study the relevance of these three ideas or practices to their programs. The three ideas which have been common in agricultural programs for years are 1) involvement of parents to a considerable extent in the educational program, 2) preparation for self-employment--the creation of jobs, and 3) adult education. Educational programs for adult farm owners and farm managers have been a part of agriculture programs since the early 20's. Teachers of agriculture will continue to have something to offer those who own and manage agricultural businesses as would a teacher in any vocational service who delves into technical subject matter farther than the label, tag, or manufacturer's literature.

Rigid Hour Requirement

The first of the six points to be covered in this article concerns the rigid hour requirement which has been required in all Part-Time Cooperative Programs. The requirement is fifteen hours of work experience per week for thirty-six weeks which amounts to 540 hours. Acceptance of this arbitrarily established hour requirement by agriculture would prevent students from preparing for the occupation of their choice if employers in that occupation could not hire the student for the full fifteen hours per week. Many of the agricultural occupations are rather seasonal in nature. A student who is placed at a family camp ground or recreation farm, for example, could not normally be hired fifteen hours a week throughout the school year. The ornamental horticultural occupations are also seasonal in nature. No occupations should be excluded as possibilities to students just because they do not require a uniform work load from September to June.

The hours of experience required to attain a given level of preparation varies from occupation to occupation. Also, the educational value of each hour worked varies from one training situation to another even in the same job title. Stated differently, it is not how many hours the student puts in but what he puts in the hours. The primary focus should be upon the question, "Did the student attain the knowledge, skills, attitudes and work habits or other objectives?" rather than "Did he work enough hours to do so?"

Instead of requiring a uniform fifteen hours of supervised work experience each week, the hours of experience should be allowed to vary between a maximum which the labor laws permit and some minimum consistent with the occupational requirements, the quality of work experience provided, the ability of the student and other relevant factors.

Released school time for on-the-job experience which has encouraged the giving of extra credits has contributed to the fixed hour requirement. Fractional credits could have become common, but the separate, whole credit has become the common practice. Tradition now dictates that one whole, extra, separate credit must be earned and that a fixed number of hours is necessary to earn it.

Technical Subject Matter

Agricultural Education is centered on a field and is concerned with all functions within that field including distribution. Distributive Education is centered on the functions of marketing, distribution and sales in all fields. A field centered vocational

service places more emphasis upon technical subject matter than does a function centered vocational service such as Distributive Education. That which is accorded the status of "technical subject matter" by agriculture is relegated to the status of what is called "product knowledge" in Distributive Education. Furthermore, "product knowledge" is studied mainly on an individual basis by gleaming it from tags and labels or from literature of the manufacturer.

Agriculture and Home Economics Education have emphasized technical subject matter as evidenced by the fact that their students have started learning it through group instruction as early as the ninth grade and sometimes earlier. Admittedly, increased emphasis should be given the occupational exploration at this level, but technical subject matter should continue to be a very important part of the early curriculum. One or two years of study should be required prior to placement in business rather than only requiring "related instruction" or a "prep course" as has been common in the vocational services which pioneered in Part-Time Cooperative Education.

Salesmanship

Knowledge in the technical subject matter of agriculture is an extremely important aspect of agricultural sales. The agricultural salesman often becomes a technical advisor for a major phase of a farming operation.

The sale of large items which are economic inputs into a business operation cannot be sold like the small items for personal use. The agricultural salesman who sells a piece of equipment to a farmer because it will be comfortable, make him look masculine as he rides through the field, or make him the envy of his neighbors without concern for the economic and technical soundness of the investment may not have a customer or employment the next year.

Most books on salesmanship are inadequate for agriculture students. Agriculture teachers cannot stop when they have covered the subject matter of the available salesmanship texts. They must go farther and teach technical subject matter, economics, and management as it applies to agricultural sales.

Parental Contact

Close association of the agriculture and home economics teachers with the parents of their students has been one of the strong points of their programs. Placing students for experience at locations other than the home and home farm will reduce the valued contact with parents. This contact, at per-

haps a reduced level, should be maintained somehow. One way in which it can be maintained is by continuing the home project as a supplementary experience program concurrently with placement in an off-farm business setting. Home projects for students under sixteen years of age should continue to be common.

Another practice which will encourage parental contact is making use of training agreements which require the signature of a parent.

The extent of parental involvement of Distributive Education is usually an orientation meeting for new students and their parents. This activity is very worthwhile and is generalizable to all services, but more opportunities to involve the parents are needed.

The employer recognition banquet of the other vocational services should be expanded to recognize parents as has the traditional parent-son and parent-daughter banquets of agriculture and home economics. The banquets of agriculture and home economics should become dual purpose banquets which recognize both employers and parents.

Self Employment

Agriculture has emphasized education of the employer (self-employed farm operator) in its traditional program. Distributive Education has emphasized education of the employee. It is unbelievable that agricultural educators who switch from education for farming which has been predominately employer (self-employment) oriented to education for off-farm agricultural occupations can adopt the D. E. example of employee oriented education without any apparent awareness of the contrast. A switch from agriculture for farming to other agricultural occupation should not mean a complete switch to employee oriented education.

All vocational services need to keep in mind both self-employment and working for others in the educational programs they devise. It is true that many occupations including farming require too much capital and knowhow for a young person to start his own business. It is equally true that opportunities for self-employment exist in all the vocational service areas. Some examples are child care, care of the aged, grounds care, animal care, small equipment repair, secretarial service, and producing or making items and selling them.

Adult Education

An adult enrollment of 342,566 in agriculture in high schools prior to the passage of the 1963 Vocational Education Act almost equaled the enrollment of full-time students. This commitment to adult education for farming must also be made to those adults engaged in or preparing for other agricultural occupations. Teachers of agriculture will have the necessary confidence to teach managers and supervisors as well as personnel at lower levels who are engaged in agricultural occupations other than farming. This will be true because agriculture teachers are competent in technical agriculture subject matter and farm business management.

Concluding Statement

It is hoped that this article will point out to agriculture and home economics that they should not ignore the features of the old program as they launch into the new. Adult education, concern about technical subject matter, and close cooperation with parents are three of the strong points of the old program. These same features should be evaluated by the other vocational services and used if feasible and appropriate.

Agriculture should and has taken several pages from the D. E. book, but it should evaluate more closely those pages concerning fixed hour requirements, technical subject matter, and salesmanship. The services which traditionally offered Part-Time Cooperative Education will want to take another look at fixed hour requirements and the amount of attention given to teaching technical subject matter.

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