

DISTINGUISHED LECTURE

The Distinguished Lecture has by tradition been a highlight of the annual AATEA breakfast meeting held during the Convention of the American Vocational Association. *The Journal* is used as a means of providing a written record of the Lecture and to give wide dissemination of it within the profession. The Distinguished Lecture for 1977 was presented on December 6, 1977, at the Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Recently I attended a national EPDA Workshop on Interpreting Vocational Education. A stated purpose of the workshop was "to raise the level of awareness of participants to an urgent national problem in the field of vocational education." The problem turned out to be the lack of a philosophy in vocational education. We were challenged to re-evaluate who we are, what we are, and why we exist. The challenges came from a variety of sources. Some were subtle. Others were more direct. The strongest and the loudest came from presenters outside the field of vocational education.

The workshop was a worthwhile activity. I found it to be intellectually stimulating and would recommend that similar workshops be planned for the future. If additional workshops do materialize, I hope the purposes will be different. We already have a philosophy in agricultural education. We only need to define and refine it.

Very frankly, I admit to a degree of suspicion when I hear philosopher-kings from outside our field suggest that we don't have a philosophy. Most deal in speculation. A favorite tactic is to raise questions which are either difficult to prove or have no answers. Few, if any of them, ever define and describe the

philosophy of their fields of specialization. It is much easier to ask the questions and raise the issues for others to answer.

There is no reason for any vocational educator to develop a guilt feeling or to be otherwise embarrassed because the philosophy which founds our field of interest is not obvious to persons outside the field. The principles and beliefs which describe and differentiate our philosophy from general education are rather obvious in the outcomes of our educational efforts. The people we serve, the programs we offer, the instruction we plan, and the learning which occurs in vocational education are clearly different--and so is our philosophy.

In addressing the EPDA Workshop, Harry Broudy, renowned philosopher-educator from the University of Illinois, said he thought that if anyone had a philosophy of education it would certainly be vocational educators. He wondered why we were spending three days debating the issue. We do have a philosophy of vocational education; otherwise we wouldn't have spent the past sixty years developing programs which are quite different from education in general. My purpose here is to describe and to contrast some of the philosophical, metaphysical, epistemological, axiological, and organizational premises on which agricultural education and education in general are founded. In so doing, the dimensions of the philosophy of vocational education will be inferred; and the distinctions between the philosophy of vocational education and of education should be evident.

Philosophical Premises

Information presented in Figure 1 summarizes, describes, and contrasts some of the philosophical differences between agricultural education and general education. Agricultural educators are basically pragmatic. Their education counterparts are largely realists, although there is recent evidence to suggest that they are becoming more pragmatic. Career education and life-long learning are relatively recent innovations which are pragmatic in theory. Vocational educators exist in a world of continuing experiences. Their counterparts exist in a world of subject matter.

Metaphysics is the study of the meaning of ultimate reality. Metaphysically speaking, agricultural educators are both analytical and prescriptive in their approach to education while educators, in general, have tended to be analytical and speculative. Agricultural educators spend a greater portion of their time defining and redefining student needs and developing, testing, and prescribing learning resources and strategies. General educators do

Figure 1

SUMMARY OF THE BASIC PHILOSOPHICAL PREMISES OF
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND GENERAL EDUCATION

FACTORS	AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION	GENERAL EDUCATION
Philosophy Metaphysics Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge and Truth)	Pragmatism--World of Experience Analytical and Prescriptive Knowledge is more Temporary Truth is What Works Knowledge and Truth Stem Primarily from Empirical Investigations	Realism--World of Things Analytical and Speculative Knowledge is more Permanent Truth is an Observable Fact Knowledge and Truth have Different Sources: Em- pirical, Rational, Authoritative, and Intuition
Axiology (Theory of Values)	Values are Relative to Time and Circumstances Standards are Changeable Values Grow out of the Need of the Individual and the Rights of Society	There are Permanent Values Standards are More Specific and More Rigid Values are Transmitted and Learned Nature is Law
Education Teacher Method Style Purposes Student	Student and Occupation Centered Research Project Director Problem Solving Discovery Egalitarian Experience Organism Individual Attention	Teacher, School and Subject Matter Centered Demonstrator Lecture--Recitation Transmission Esoteric Sense Mechanism Part of a Group

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Figure 1--(Cont.)

SUMMARY OF THE BASIC PHILOSOPHICAL PREMISES OF
AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND GENERAL EDUCATION

FACTORS	AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION	GENERAL EDUCATION
Learning Environment	Life Oriented	Isolated from Life
Leadership Opportunity	Extensive	Limited
Curriculum	Flexible	Standard
Instructional Material	Field-tested and Occupation Centered Units Teachers Unit Plans and Student Resource Handbooks	Standard Texts
Subject Matter	Problem Analysis from a Scientific Data Base	Factual and Descriptive
Objectives	Cognitive, Affective, and Psychomotor	Cognitive, largely
Classroom	Informal and Flexible	Formal
Standards	Occupational-Careers	Academic
Scope of Service	Intermediate, Secondary and Adults	School Age Students
Administration	Difficult and Elastic	Simple and Rigid

not see the necessity of surveying student needs. Students don't know their needs anyway. Nor do they see the need to redefine their teaching procedures except very periodically. Their values are not that changeable.

Agricultural educators believe that the world in which they exist is real. They know this because they can prove it through extensions of their senses. In this respect, they do not differ from their realist counterparts. Agricultural educators also believe that life has purpose and meaning and that human beings are not determined. Humans have the freedom to determine their own destiny within the constraints of democratic action and the rights of others. The behavior of general educators suggests that they believe that education should be designed to teach the student to learn the permanent laws of nature and to learn to adjust to these laws. For example, students are taught the laws of physics, the theorems of geometry, etc. They should do this to be better prepared to later apply their principles in future life activities. The agricultural educator designs learning situations from present life and work experiences which lead the student to identify problems and discover workable solutions for today, recognizing that new solutions may be necessary in the future.

Epistemological Premises

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and truth. Agricultural educators have little trouble with what it means to "know." Knowledge is discovered through scientific research and human experience. It is relative and changeable with time and circumstances. Empirical knowledge is the stock and trade of the agricultural educator. Problem solving is the basic tool of the teacher and the student. Truth is knowledge which has been verified empirically. It's what works.

The agricultural educator recognizes the temporal and relative nature of knowledge and truth. General educators perceive truth as an observable fact and knowledge as more permanent. Knowledge and truth have different sources, including empirical, rational, authoritative, and intuitive. Agricultural educators see knowledge and truth stemming primarily from empirical investigations.

The agricultural education profession is rooted in the technical knowledge of agriculture and agribusiness, the psychology and the methodology of education, as well as the occupational and social aspects of living and working. By contrast, general education lacks the former and the latter orientations.

Axiological Premises

Axiology is the study of values. Agricultural educators believe that values are both objective and relative. Education has an objective value--it is worthwhile in itself. However, values are not constant, changing as our needs and desires change. Values must be tested empirically rather than rationally. Each value becomes an instrument for the attainment of better values.

Agricultural educators place a much higher value on the principles of self-activity, association, and effect than do general educators. This is not to say that general educators do not use these principles. Production projects conducted by the vo-ag student and supervised by the vo-ag teacher outside the school not only involve the student but also permit the teacher to associate in-school learning activities with the student's life experiences. The effect of this activity on the student is an increasing degree of interest and success in school. Other similar educational activities in agricultural education include the use of student organization (FFA) activities, cooperative education, internships, etc. General educators have limited the students' learning experiences to the classroom, for the most part.

It could be concluded, and I certainly believe, that the FFA and all of its associated intracurricular activities has had a most significant and unique effect on the development of agricultural education as we know it today. Thus, more than any other single activity, it explains our philosophy. No other general education program has developed and used student organization activities to the degree and extent that agricultural educators have.

While on the subject of the FFA, it is helpful to this discussion of philosophy to note that there is a long list of public leaders who speak respectfully of the contributions which the FFA made toward their growth and development. Among them are President Jimmy Carter; the late Senator-elect Jerry Litton from Missouri; Secretary of Agriculture Doyle Conners from Florida; Secretary of Agriculture Kent D. Shelhamer of Pennsylvania; Governor George Wallace of Alabama; Governor George Busbee of Georgia; and Governor James B. Hunt of North Carolina, to name a few. No doubt most of us could cite a personal experience to illustrate how the FFA contributed to our self-actualization.

Agricultural educators believe that preparation for and the pursuit of a vocation which leads to gainful employment and which contributes to the economic and social growth of our

society is fundamentally valuable to our existence. The improvement of social behavior through responsible democratic participation is another prized value of agricultural educators.

Educational Premises

The participants in agricultural education include the students who explore, prepare for, enter, and advance in agricultural and agribusiness occupations, the teachers who direct the learning activities of students, the teacher educators who prepare the teachers, and the administrators, supervisors, and others who provide administrative support.

Agricultural education is student- and occupation-centered. General education is teacher-, subject matter-, and school-centered. The teachers are research project directors in agricultural education while in general education they are demonstrators. Agricultural educators use the problem solving method extensively. Their counterparts rely on lecture-recitation. The teaching style is discovery for agricultural educators and transmission of knowledge for general educators. The purposes of agricultural educators are egalitarian. The purposes of general educators are esoteric.

Teachers in agricultural education regard students as experience organisms who deserve individual attention while in general education they are sense mechanisms who are considered parts of a group (the class). The learning environment in agricultural education is life oriented instead of being isolated from life as it is in general education. The opportunities to develop leadership abilities and social skills in agricultural education are extensive. Such opportunities are more limited in general education.

Agricultural educators use highly flexible curricula. General educators employ standard curricula. Instructional materials in agricultural education grow out of the needs of students and teachers, are developed and field-tested by experienced teachers, and are more up-to-date in content. By contrast, the instructional materials used by general educators are based on established concepts which change ever so slightly with time and then usually in terms of mode of presentation. The materials are usually older, written for wider audiences, and infrequently field tested.

Agricultural educators deal with cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives in proportion to their relationship to daily work and living. General educators seem to dwell in the realms of the cognitive domain, especially "knowledge of the specifics." Agricultural educators are usually more purposeful

in their prescription of objectives, a natural outcome of their daily involvement with the needs of students. General educators are subject matter oriented. They think in terms of which standard principles have been taught and which have not been taught.

Organizational Premises

The agricultural education community, as noted previously, includes teachers, teacher educators, supervisors, and administrators. The community is closely united at the local, state, and national levels in a way that is very clearly different from the general education community. Although there has been a recent trend to generalize and reduce the vocational responsibilities of agricultural supervisors and consultants at the state level, the agricultural education community has persisted. In Minnesota, members of the community have paid their own expenses to attend state conferences to continue their existence.

The agricultural education community is concerned with the continued development of agricultural education. This is reflected, perhaps better than anywhere else, in the teacher education program. Teacher education in agriculture means more than preservice education (certification). It also means in-service and professional personnel development, curriculum and instructional materials, research, and administration. The community of agricultural education has a strong and guiding influence on every function of teacher education in agriculture. In a similar way, the secondary school and adult programs, the supervision of local, regional, and state activities, and the administration of agricultural education are guided and directed.

Summary

Agricultural education does have a philosophy. It is separate and distinct from general education. It is pragmatic, analytical, and prescriptive. It regards knowledge and truth as temporary. Values are relative and respect the democratic rights of others. These values grow out of societal needs and formulate the basic laws of society.

Programs in agricultural education are student- and occupation-centered. The effective teacher is a research project director who makes heavy use of problem solving techniques. The teacher leads students to discover and apply truth and knowledge. The teacher is egalitarian in approach to education. Students learn to develop their skills and abilities in the social environment of the community in which they live and work. Their curriculum is flexible to their needs. The school is but one

of the community's resources which is and will continue to be available for their use.

This is the philosophy of agricultural education as I know it. I believe the agricultural education community prescribes to the same philosophy. I also believe that the philosophy which I have described is obvious to our general education colleagues. It has been a productive philosophy. Let's not apologize for it!

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