

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY THROUGH CONTINUING EDUCATION

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American society refuses to allow practicing physicians to treat human ills with antiquated prescriptions. The American mother will spare no available resources to provide the best treatment for her critically ill child. The physician's skill and his prescriptions must be in keeping with current medical technology to be satisfactory to the mother of the ailing child.

The same requirements for competent performance and effective use of current technology should be expected in our educational system. Programs of continuing education for teachers share the opportunity and responsibility for maintaining and improving education.

Citizens' needs, desires, and goals change. The 1971 college graduate who enters teaching as a lifetime professional career could conceivably remain active in education until 2010 AD. Simple arithmetic reveals that this 1971 graduate could possibly continue indirect influence, through parents, upon the unborn generation that will emerge as the young custodian of society in 2030 AD.

We hope that teachers who exert influence for such a long period of time will measure up to the critical task of teaching so that students will be prepared to meet the challenges of the future. Without a reliable crystal ball, we can only speculate upon the unnamed challenges of tomorrow which society faces. However, if trends continue, we can safely predict that citizens of tomorrow will require occupational skills and knowledge and mastery of environment, social responsibilities, and social opportunities.

Examples of changes abound: (1) Man's need for constructive use of leisure time is increasingly important and demands increasing amounts of resources and efforts; (2) The nature of most occupations continues to shift from the unskilled to the technical and professional; (3) The media continue to highlight emerging concerns of today's youth.

Teachers must understand students. Youth's image needs correction. Correctly or incorrectly, youth are too often painted as undesirables and incorrigibles. In The Greening of America, Charles Reich described the youth of today as "hedonistic, hairy, impulsive, anti-rational, anti-organizational and contemptuous of the straight society."

Whether accurate or not, such descriptions of the heirs of society demand attention of educators to (1) improve the adolescent or (2) correct the descriptions. Neither task is easy; both deserve teachers' reflective thoughts in an environment of formal, directed study. They need to study youth in light of the best available information on youth and the changing world.

For example, the years of depression and World War II affected the goals of society for a couple of decades. People experienced a depression and sought economic security through educational preparation and hard work; they experienced the fear of major war and sought peace through an attitude of unyielding military superiority. From that, there arose three guiding values: (1) Education is necessary; (2) Self-discipline is vital; and (3) Hard work is respectable.

Attitudes may have changed. Teachers often cite examples indicating that students are not motivated as they once were. Is that surprising in a prosperous society with higher standards of living and little fear of economic depression?

Today, teachers function in a society that challenges technological advances and military superiority in favor of individual desires and human fulfillment. (e.g., The SST versus welfare reforms). Is that surprising in a society where: (1) The world is accessible through continent-spanning television; (2) Milk and cakes come from cartons; (3) Warmth comes from atomic energy generators; and (4) Children are not major labor sources for family income?

Isn't it appropriate for teachers of vocational agriculture to study youth in a program of continuing education to assess youth's major concerns, goals, and problems in an attempt to deal with youth's needs--vocational and otherwise?

The teacher's environment changes. Each September vo-ag teachers face new students. Smaller percentages of those students are destined for production agriculture, larger percentages are destined for ag occupations related to production agriculture.

Is the teacher prepared to introduce students to skills and knowledges basic to ag sales and services, environmental services, technical and professional ag careers, and processing and storage occupations? Is he prepared to teach the basics of complex financing patterns or the basics of emerging enterprises such as catfish farming? Is he prepared to match his vo-ag curriculum to the changing agricultural world?

Specialized programs such as Pulpwood Production, Ornamental Horticulture, Agri-business Sales and Services, and Agricultural

Power and Machinery are adequate today because teachers have prepared themselves through continuing education activities.

Continuing education is welcomed. Cardozier and Bail³ suggested that programs of continuing education are vital:

"Pre-service preparation can probably never be entirely adequate, regardless of the time spent in it. Until the individual has experienced teaching, with full responsibility for planning and conducting a program, he cannot completely understand and appreciate the problems of teaching, and, thus gain the motivation for acquiring the competencies needed."

Teachers are easily motivated to gain technical information; they are less motivated to study the social sciences and pedagogy. And yet, both are important.

Vocational educators need to take a page from their own sermons; they should concentrate upon integration of technical information and pedagogy. Integration of the two, through implication and illustration, serves to make both more palatable and more relevant.

Guidelines for continuing education involve teachers, universities, and state departments. Teachers should (1) recognize advances in agriculture and (2) jointly identify continuing education activities which are most useful and meaningful. Universities should (1) commit their resources to continuing education for teachers, (2) provide both Graduate and In-service study--both credit and non-credit courses, and (3) continually evaluate and up-date continuing education programs. State departments should (1) establish and maintain certification standards which encourage professional growth through continuing education and (2) take initiative in organizing plans for continuing education.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Margaret Mead, The Changing Cultural Patterns of Work and Leisure. (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, 1967) pp. 7-14.

² U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Manpower Report of the President. (Washington: U.S. Office of Labor, 1969)

³ V. R. Cardozier and J. P. Bail, "In-Service Education for Teachers of Agriculture," Teacher Education in Agriculture. (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1967) pp. 253-254.

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