

IS AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION A DISCIPLINE?

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Is agricultural education an academic discipline? This might jolt some who have spent all their professional lives in the field but it is a question that members of many disciplines in the academic community have long been asking and apparently do not feel that they have gotten a satisfactory answer.

The thesis of this paper is that agricultural education is an academic discipline, or rather it is an area of specialization of the discipline of education or, more precisely, pedagogy. Despite the weaknesses of reasoning by analogy, perhaps some analogies will provide a reasonable basis for this position.

Is agronomy a discipline? Most agronomist would argue that it is. It is a discipline only in the applied sense, and in the sense that it has been established long enough that through research and experience there is now a body of knowledge and established procedures of inquiry in the field to justify its recognition as a separate discipline. But, in fact, it is an applied discipline derived from geology, botany, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and other disciplines. Certain aspects of all of these have been pulled together to serve a given purpose, to deal with problems in a specialized area of endeavor.

Is medicine a discipline? No, not a basic discipline, but like agronomy, an applied discipline. Medicine is made up of a combination of several disciplines --- pathology, physiology, anatomy, chemistry, psychology, and several others.

Engineering is another example. It represents an effort to apply to practical problems certain aspects of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and others to develop bodies of knowledge that will serve specialized areas of human endeavor.

There are within the academic community many other well-recognized and honored disciplines which are within themselves applied in nature and depend upon a number of basic disciplines for their existence.

The analogy leads us to education --- pedagogy. Like agronomy, medicine, engineering, and many others, pedagogy is an applied discipline which looks to psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy and other disciplines for basic knowledge from which specialized knowledge designed to accomplish specialized purposes can be developed.

We look to psychology to understand how the individual reacts to various stimuli, to sociology to understand social behavior, to philosophy to establish values for the educative process, to history to tell us what has been done in education in the past and for implications of its potential for future educational endeavors.

Then we call upon the method of science and mathematics (especially statistics) to help us to test the suggestions for action that have been evolved out of the basic disciplines.

Thus, there is, I believe, a discipline of education --- pedagogy. Agricultural education is one segment or aspect of that broad applied discipline --- that part which concerns itself with the pedagogy of teaching agriculture. It, along with adult education, elementary education, science education, social studies education, and many more together form the discipline education.

The question might be more easily solved if it were possible for students of pedagogy to confine themselves to the broad field of education, as a discipline. But the many highly specialized areas of pedagogy make it impossible for one to be highly informed in or to work at a scholarly level in all of them. As a result, each of us chooses one area in which he is most interested and in which he hopes to be able to maintain a reasonably high level of scholarship throughout his professional career. At the same time, he must be trained in and maintain an optimum level of competence in the broad spectrum of pedagogy, in principles that apply to all areas of specialization in the discipline of pedagogy.