

TEACHER EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION -  
AN APPRAISAL AND SOME CONCERNS \*

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Dr. Lawrence D. Haskew, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Texas, presented a paper at the 1961 Centennial Convocation of the American Associations of Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities on the Evaluation of Teacher Education in Land-Grant Institutions. The paper was based on a study Dr. Haskew had conducted and was read to the deans of the schools and colleges of education making up the Land-Grant Association. In his appraisal of teacher education in the Land-Grant institutions, Dr. Haskew had some things to say about teacher education in agricultural education which I hold to have some significance to our profession. Some of the things he had to say hurt, but in my judgment, pose some implications for strengthening our programs.

Here are some excerpts from Dr. Haskew's paper.<sup>1</sup>

"The greatest contribution of the Land-Grant Institutions to teacher education stands today in partial eclipse. This contribution is the education of teachers of agriculture and homemaking and, to lesser extent, of trade and industrial education. In the fabric of an urbanized, intellectualized, sophisticated world these mundane designs are being embroidered over as rapidly as possible, or shoved into a corner in the hope that Mr. Jacques Barzum or the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education will not notice them. But in the warm light of an appraisal based on having a job to do and getting it done, the clean, crisp, utilitarian lives of those designs still display the signature of true art.

"I submit that no subjects have ever been better taught in American high schools than the subjects of agriculture and homemaking; that no contingent of teachers have ever equalled the teachers of agriculture and homemaking in command of their specialized subject matter; that no more effective curricula -- effective, that is, in achieving the purposes they avowed -- have been designed than those in these two fields; that no set of teachers has kept more abreast of technological and scientific contributions; that no teachers have reached higher average attainments in methodology; and that no teachers have ever made

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence D. Haskew, Centennial Convocation Paper: "Evaluation of Teacher Education in Land-Grant Institutions," November 14, 1961, St. Louis, Mo.

more direct contributions to the improvement of adult community life than have the teachers of agriculture and homemaking. Here is teacher education that begins in the high school, extends throughout college years with display of directed laboratory experiences most other divisions are still trying to emulate, fits the student to his job, goes right there with him and practically forces him to continue to be a student."

Dr. Haskew says that this story is one of the brightest in American education, and may be the finest that the Land-Grant Colleges and Universities will ever write. But he indicates that the story is incomplete. "It is incomplete because it has been written rather than being in the process of writing."

Dr. Haskew's impression is that the sense of crusading, inventive search does not come through now (as it once did) as one talks to agriculture and homemaking educators; it does not emerge from the "whither now" documents produced in their conferences; it does not show up in many school classrooms. He says that in its place is an aura of rote, almost a sainted credo, and that maybe there is being enacted one of the perpetual tragedies of teacher education, the tragedy of lively form congealing toward lifeless formality under the pressure of past success and present weariness.

The fact that Dr. Haskew would highlight teacher education programs in agriculture and homemaking as the Land-Grant institutions greatest contribution to teacher education should cause all of us to take pride in a great accomplishment and in a great contribution. However, the fact that his appraisal indicates, or implies, that teacher education in agricultural education reached the threshold of greatness, then became weary, lost its cutting edge (its zip), and started a slide toward mediocrity, should be of real concern to members of our profession. It should bring forth a challenge in each of us; should cause us, individually and collectively, to seek rather precise answers to questions such as these: Why did we become weary? (Assuming that we did), why did we lose our crusading spirit? What happened to keep our greatness from moving on with the times? Now, I recognize fully well that it could be argued that our teacher education programs are stronger today (or at least as strong) than they have ever been; that they still display the signature of true art; that our cutting edge is still sharp; that Dr. Haskew's appraisal is more provocative than factual, but for our own professional stimulation why not assume that his appraisal, while a bit subjective, contains certain elements of fact; that the appraisal is intellectually honest and straightforward.

Assuming then some validity to Dr. Haskew's appraisal, what happened?

I am sure there could be many theses developed as to what happened (if something happened). One thesis might be that we (as a profession) failed to keep up with the times. We failed to keep our programs moving forward with the socio-economic trends and the needs of a changing economy, including a changing agriculture. State and National objectives and guides were developed in the late 20's and early 30's which were quite in keeping with the needs of those days, but these objectives (with minor changes) were still giving direction to the programs in the 50's and 60's. During this period a revolution, attributed to science and technology, was constantly bringing about changes in our societal and economic structures. We were either unaware of these changes, chose to ignore them, or failed to get their full significance for agricultural education programs. This situation continued

to a point where we were devoting too much of our time and energy to yesterday's agriculture. Times changed and we failed to change with the times and thus for a brief period (historically speaking) we lost the opportunity for continued greatness. Perhaps a lull in progress can be expected in the development of teacher education. Certainly there is the universal difficulty of maintaining a cutting edge on educational endeavors. But the purpose of appraisal and analysis is to locate difficulties and to chart direction -- to offer leads to strengthening programs. So, on the basis of Dr. Haskew's appraisal, and my own beliefs about teacher education in agricultural education, I would like to discuss with you in a very brief way four things with which we in teacher education should concern ourselves in the development of future programs.

1. We must show greater concern for change and the nature of change which is going on in the world.
2. We must show greater concern for research with appropriate emphasis on basic research.
3. We must concern ourselves with new programs as well as the strengthening of existing programs.
4. We must concern ourselves with the competency and commitment of our personnel and institutions.

Concern for Change and the Nature of Change. The world is changing in a startling fashion, and at amazing speed, and these changes are having and will continue to have a tremendous impact on every facet of American life -- including American education and American agriculture. And it is the speed of change that presents us with difficult and far reaching educational problems. Margaret Mead was referring to speed of change when she said: "No one dies any longer in the world to which he was born." The geometric progression of accomplishment in scientific research and technology is the dominant feature of our lives. Unlike most of our predecessors we will never have the opportunity to become fully adjusted to the world as we know it before we have thrust upon us new ideas, new methods, and new products which change our way of life again and again. We can now predict with a fair degree of certainty, if we can avert a nuclear war, that the decade ahead will bring a tremendous increase in the world's population, a continuation of severe international political competition and conflict, a continuation of international economic competition, and a vigorous emphasis on public education as a means of solving the problems emerging from these situations. The most important single problem facing all segments of agriculture and agricultural education is that of making reasonable adjustment to change. Many young people of today will in their lifetime enter occupations not in existence today. This has real implications for the training of occupations -- it will become increasingly difficult to train for occupations per se. So, it becomes imperative that people in our profession understand change and concern themselves with it. Dealing with change involves how to knowledge and how to knowledge is a specific responsibility of teacher education.

Concern for Research. Research is so essential to the advancement of sound educational programs that it can no longer be neglected or given a minor role. We cannot have sound teaching programs unless these programs are based to on increasing degree upon sound and comprehensive research, both as to methodology and subject matter

We have been saying this for a long time, but the void in most of our institutions in research effort directed toward solving agricultural education problems is a black one. It stands out like a dark gray cat in a coal mine. We desperately need to improve our research effort, and we need to direct some of our effort toward basic research.

One can identify many areas in agricultural education where basic research might uncover some new and far reaching ideas. An area that has been in my mind for sometime is the competency approach to program development or course building. Basic research in this area might very well give us a scientific approach to curriculum development in the broad field of educational pursuit. We all know that our present tools for building curricula are not very sharp or scientific. Perhaps our newly established National Center will be able to help us to get moving in this area.

Research is the vehicle which must carry education to genuine advancement, and it must be research of a pioneering nature.

New Programs and the Strengthening of Existing Programs. We must make a greater effort toward providing the type and character of instruction which would largely eliminate the factor of obsolescence in knowledge growing out of the rapidity of technological change. Perhaps outdated knowledge may be made less harmful by placing more emphasis on education in the basic principles and less on skills and practice; by placing emphasis on process as well as product; in keeping knowledge up-to-date by teaching students to remain students throughout their lifetime.

In our effort to strengthen existing programs we need to give greater emphasis to the science side of agriculture at all levels of instruction. We need to take a long hard look at the influence State and National contests, and the accompanying awards, are having on our high school instructional programs. Do teachers select instructional units for their courses because of their worth in helping all students develop needed abilities, or do they select units that will enable a few selected students to participate in contests set up by the State and National FFA organizations under the "guidance" of adult advisers? There are people in our ranks who believe (and not without supporting evidence) that the emphasis we have placed on contests and awards in our FFA programs has served as a major deterrent to sound program development in vocational agriculture. The teacher who spends 25 to 50 percent of his teaching time preparing for and entering contests will not be engaged in teaching the kind of agriculture that meets the needs of our time. Furthermore, there is much evidence to indicate that winning FFA awards (State and National) will have little or no influence in keeping a local board of education from eliminating vocational agriculture from the curriculum of a school.

We need desperately to strengthen and extend our post high school and adult education programs. Agricultural education has pioneered in the field of adult education but, for some reason, we have never been able to exploit our opportunities in this field. Why have we not been able to move in this field? We need to know the answer to this question because the need for this type of education is growing, not diminishing. There is no way for people to remain productive in our economy without continuous efforts in education. So, continued study is going to be a way of life. The opportunities in the field of adult education are unlimited and deserve from us a maximum effort, and this maximum effort should be in terms of action.

We have heard a great deal in recent years about agri-business, about adjusting our teaching to the educational needs of the total industry of agriculture rather than to farming alone to which our present programs are largely oriented. We might best make this adjustment, provide this instruction, by teaming up with the people in distributive education in some type of cooperative arrangement. These programs could be initially undertaken on a pilot or experimental basis. The research aspect of such programs would not be neglected. These programs could call for preparing teachers who could serve effectively in rural and suburban communities in vocational agriculture and distributive education. Distributive education has had a great deal of experience in distribution, marketing and management and would be in a position to give invaluable help in developing instructional programs in the agri-business area of agriculture.

Our teacher education departments have a great opportunity, and perhaps an obligation, to contribute to the development of agricultural education in the so called underdeveloped countries of the world. We have in the past given some assistance to these countries but in terms of meeting their needs our help has been a drop in the bucket. There is outstanding opportunity for service in this field but it will require real professional commitment. It will also involve pioneering.

Competency and Commitment of Our Personnel and Institutions. Someone remarked recently that none of us would like to have a sick child treated by the honor man in the Harvard Medical School Class of 1940 if he had learned nothing since then. I believe this statement holds some implications for the leadership in agricultural education. We will not make our maximum contribution to teacher education unless we can have competent and committed personnel working in all phases of agricultural education -- teacher educators, administrators, and supervisors, and teachers, and we will not have competent personnel unless each person in each of these groups continues to learn and to do this with sort of a passion. The teacher educator will not be very effective in developing in his students the attitude for continued study if he himself stops learning after getting his appointment to a position in teacher education. The supervisor who does not continue to be a student as evidenced by advanced degrees, attendance at state and national workshops, etc., will be in no position to help teachers improve their instructional programs. He may be a positive deterrent to the development of sound programs even though he puts in long hours and much effort.

The task of improving agricultural education in this generation demands new ventures. Our leadership must be sufficiently competent and committed to bring about the modification of laws, to solve problems of financial support, to bring about massive changes in programs, to create new and improved images. Are we in teacher education making inventive contributions to the emergence of this kind of leadership? Are we in teacher education committed to pushing up the norms, pushing back the horizons, or are we committed to compliance, to pretty much the status quo, to meeting certification regulations as established by the State Department of Education? The difference between commitment and compliance has real implications for teacher education.

In summary, I should like to say that I have never been so optimistic about the future of vocational education in agriculture, or about vocational education generally, as I am today. I think that we are now in the process of regaining that cutting edge which Dr. Haskey indicated we seemed to have lost momentarily.

I think the period of 1950 to 1960 was sort of a crisis period in the historical development of agricultural education, and that we are now emerging from this crisis with opportunity that should challenge the best in all of us. I am confident that teacher education in agriculture stands at the threshold of its greatest recognition, encouragement, growth, and opportunity in history. I am also confident that we will make the best of this great opportunity - that our commitment will be genuine.