

A Profession in Need of Academicians

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We in agricultural education have a rich heritage. I am proud to be a more recent part of that heritage. We all ought to be proud and thankful for our roots. There are many persons that each of us could name who have had an influence in our lives and who have helped us to set goals and achieve them. We have had parents, teachers, advisors, ministers, friends, and colleagues that have encouraged and inspired us to become leaders in our profession.

However, we cannot sit on the accomplishments of our past. Records are made to be broken. We need to achieve new heights, but we do face an increasingly hostile environment. As we face this hostile environment, we need to remember that the sum is greater than its parts. We can accomplish more together than we can individually.

The business and industry of agriculture, both on and off the farm, is increasingly becoming more technological, more specialized, more business-oriented, and more efficient. More part-time farmers are "living on a little land." The consuming public has little direct knowledge of agriculture.

Resources for schools are scarce. Few improvements are likely because of the limitation of resources. A declining student enrollment will require more flexibility to serving the needs of students having differing interests, abilities, and attitudes.

We in agricultural education will need to continue to serve students who enroll in our programs for occupational orientation and exploration, for career planning and decision-making, for specialized occupational skill development, for preparation for advanced study, for development of general employment skills, for consumer education, for continuing education, for mid-career changes in occupational goals, and for avocational study.

These students must be served but it won't be easy. Federal support is declining. The socially prescriptive efforts (Sewall, 1982) of the last 15 years, after accomplishing much, are losing their

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political base (p. 603). No longer (Kaplan, 1982) will Washington spur the infusion of career education into the curriculum, or the adoption of competency-based teacher education (p. 594). Schuster (1982) suggests:

National-level education policy, or politics, is being decentralized at a rapid rate; moreover, the forces that traditionally have pressed for a more supportive federal education policy increasingly will be frustrated in their efforts. Among the likely consequences will be a further decline of education as a national or societal priority. A new era is upon us, an era in which the Federal government appears intent on sharply de-escalating its involvement with education. (p. 583)

Rupert Evans (1982), in a seminar at The Ohio State University, suggested that a likely possibility is that Federal funding for secondary vocational education will cease. Even with possible changes in administrations, education will find it increasingly difficult to compete in the national political arena for funds. Social security, social welfare, and national defense dwarf all other concerns in the national budget.

More and more the nature of our program must be determined by those of us in the profession. Otherwise, others will be determining our destiny.

As we face the future it is easy to become overwhelmed. How can we in the profession meet the challenges of our changing environment? The most effective way (Rollo May in Murphy, 1981) to ensure the value of the future is to confront the present courageously and constructively (p. 90). We must neither resist change nor attempt to continue outmoded aspects of our program beyond their time. History (Harold MacMillan in Murphy, 1981) is apt to judge harshly those of us who sacrifice tomorrow for today (p. 90).

We Need Academicians

It is increasingly essential that agricultural education be further developed as a profession. We need leaders in our profession who will work together in charting a new course for the future. We need intellectual discussion and debate concerning the nature of our program based upon our changing environment. This intellectual discussion and debate will require of us that we become academicians and philosophers--and that we develop our students as professionals. WE ARE A PROFESSION IN NEED OF ACADEMICIANS.

Plato was a student and companion of Socrates (Lovitt, 1979). Plato observed, "All the people I talk with, except you Socrates, have similar thoughts and ideas, so that talking with one man is like talking with many others." Following Socrates' death, Plato developed a friendship with Academus and kept the philosophy of Socrates

alive. The garden of Academic became known as the academy and those attending became academicians. Aristotle, a student of Plato, began to organize the knowledge being discussed so that commoners could understand. The academicians then would meet briefly at the academy and then disperse to the fields and the streets to share their knowledge (pp. 26-27). By the 18th century, academies became societies of persons of learning who came together of their own accord for the exchange of opinions and for the fostering of knowledge--not unlike what we in agricultural education are about at this convention.

Some of us need to accept a calling as academicians. As academicians, as philosophers, we need to freely examine our beliefs, concepts, and attitudes. We need to analyze the grounds for our essential premises. We need to search for "what ought to be" through logical reasoning. Many of us hold a Ph.D. Degree. We are Doctors of Philosophy. Our charge as philosophers is to pursue wisdom, to search for truth through logical reasoning and research.

What Are Our Beliefs?

One characteristic of a profession is that there is a body of knowledge and a set of attitudes. Agricultural education has been unique in its set of knowledge and values. We have believed in a community-based program with the teacher as a agricultural leader. We have believed in supervised occupational experience programs, the intracurricular FFA organization, year-around programs, problem-solving as a approach to teaching and learning, the college-prepared teacher, and continuing education for adults.

Our program has developed based upon the premises of former years. Camp (1982) suggested our program was historically based upon four premises relating to social efficiency (pp. 37-38). These premises resulted in vocational education programs with certain characteristics. However, it is likely that all the premises would not be endorsed by our modern society. For example, do we continue to believe that society is properly differentiated into social classes by education? Should it be that way? It was one of the original premises supporting the founding of vocational education. Perhaps a reason we are having difficulty maintaining certain phases of our program is that society may have changed more rapidly than our program. For example, is it reasonable to expect students to have supervised occupational experience programs at home when they live in apartments? Of course not, but do we offer reasonable alternatives? I think not!

Are We Open for Renewal?

In the good old days policy-makers in Washington, D. C. decided what our program would be like. Federal employees of the now defunct U.S. Office of Education and state supervisors would then

gently, or at times not so gently, bring individuals into line. The days of a supervisor casting a "shadow across the door" are over. We no longer have in place a strong cadre of leadership that is setting and enforcing policy from our nation's capitol. Many of our state capitols are in a similar situation.

Perhaps one role of our professional associations should be to fill some of the void left by weakened Federal leadership. Perhaps so, but I have serious reservations. Our profession has never been very open about debating what "ought to be." We really do not want change. If you disagree with me, read the September through November 1982 issues of *The Agricultural Education Magazine* where Lee reports the "National Opinion Poll on Vocational-Technical Education in Agriculture," read the article by Russell in the September 1970 issue of *The Agricultural Education Magazine*, and read the dissertation completed by Sutphin in 1981 at The Ohio State University that reported the thinking of agricultural education leaders on major issues facing our profession.

Let me give you a personal example. A colleague and I developed a paper (McCracken & Newcomb, 1981) proposing a future for agricultural education in the public schools. The paper was written in response to a request from a futures project in the State of New York. We were asked to creatively examine a possible future in agricultural education. A specific charge was that we not be traditional and that we project trends already in evidence. We also presented the paper, with some additions, at our regional conference in Chicago (McCracken & Newcomb, 1982). In the paper we questioned some of our "sacred cows." Some of you may recall that in this lecture last year Bill Drake (1982) stated:

We must stay pliable, open and responsive at every level. The sorest boil on the buttocks of education is probably the idea that what is ought to be. If I were ever to have the opportunity to speak to this group again, my topic would very likely be the roping, throwing, tying, killing, and cutting of sacred cows. (p. 14)

Woodrow Wilson (Murphy, 1981) once said, "If you want to make enemies, try to change something" (p. 39). He was right!

The response to our paper was amazing. A 3-page reprimand was written to my colleague and me on behalf of the Policy Committee of the Agricultural Education Division of the American Vocational Association.

Fellow colleagues, I want our profession to be viable and strong. Vitality and strength will require that we be open in considering ideas that might assist us in adapting to changing conditions. We should be encouraged to think in a visionary way. Potter Stewart (Murphy, 1981) has said, "Censorship reflects society's lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime" (p. 37). John Gardner (Murphy, 1981) has said, "creativity requires the free-

dom to consider 'unthinkable' alternatives, to doubt the worth of cherished practices" (p. 55). Lee, in an August 1982 editorial stated:

Substantive dialogue by scholars in the profession is essential. Attempts by members of the profession to stifle substantive dialogue are unfortunate. When such attempts occur, is it because those who are trying to stifle dialogue are insecure and protective of their personal vested interest? (p. 3)

Surely reprisals (Leighbody, 1972) or reprimands used to suppress scholarly discussions are not the mark of professionalism. In a fully-matured profession there can be no place for such attitudes for they illustrate all too clearly the lack of critical capacity that professionalism demands (p. 173). Freedom requires us to orient the self to the possible, to posit alternatives, to look at things as if they could be otherwise (Greene, 1982). The opposite of freedom is a type of alienation; it is STASIS, petrification, fixity (p. 4). To cherish close community for its own sake is to be a refugee (p. 5). Our profession (Murphy, 1981) cannot have it both ways: to maintain a conforming status quo system AND to have skillful and spirited persons to work in the system. I repeat, we cannot maintain a conforming status quo system AND have skillful and spirited persons to work in the system (p. 49). Thompson in his 1972 lecture asked this group the question:

Have we provided the environment and encouragement for innovation, renewal, and rebirth in vocational agriculture? Are we spending as much time dreaming of the future as we are defensively protecting and preserving what in some instances is not worthy of being saved? (p. 11)

How Might We Achieve Renewal?

Let's think about just one area where unhindered creative thought is needed. Supervised occupational experience (SOE) programs have been a cornerstone of the vocational agriculture program throughout its history. Recent evidence, however, suggests an alarming trend of lower and lower percentages of students with SOE programs. Evidence (Iverson, 1980) indicates at least 40 percent of our students have no SOE project during every year they are enrolled (p. 20). We preach that ALL students are to have an SOE and that teachers should supervise the SOE's of their students by making regular periodic visits. Yet, 42 percent (Miller, 1980) of the teachers do NOT make visits on a regular basis. Horner (1979) projected that survival of out-of-school SOE's for all students each year seems doubtful (p. 7). SOE programs were originally designed to assist students in "growing into farming." They also served as a source of real problems for classroom instruction as well as a laboratory to apply the approved practices that were taught. As off-farm agricultural occupations become important to our program, cooperative placement in

business and industry became an important part of the SOE program of many students. However, a major problem remains. Students who are not from farms lack the opportunity to participate in meaningful SOE programs until they reach an age where cooperative placement is possible and appropriate. Unless a solution is found to this problem, the quality and quantity of meaningful SOE programs will continue to decline. The SOE programs of students must be viewed as relevant and meaningful by students and by teachers. Let's go to work on the problem, unhindered by tradition, and develop one or more solutions that will enrich our program in the years ahead.

Let me throw in a pet peeve of mine. We need to be working to solve problems essential in agricultural education. Too much of our creative time in recent years (Brown, 1980) has been spent in ancillary areas. These areas have been motivated by research dollars but have done little to advance the work of our profession (p. 2). We as teacher educators, and as academicians, need to apply ourselves to the problems which confront us, rather than play the harlot because other areas have more money to spend.

Developing Teachers and Professionals

We not only need to foster the development of academicians among teacher educators, but we also need teachers and supervisors who are creative and innovative. The year I graduated from high school, Hamlin (1957) suggested that:

We have already tried to go further than we can go in making teachers of agriculture purveyors of small bits of technical information and teachers of small skills to an ever-growing constituency. The end of the road we are traveling is a dead end. We shall, sooner or later, have to retrace our steps. When we find eventually that we must reconceive the task of a teacher of agriculture, we should give a high priority to his functions as thinker and scholar. (p. 60)

Thompson (1981) wrote that:

The development of a teacher of agriculture as a scholar is the most important task, and the most neglected task, of graduate programs in agricultural education. The future of agricultural education at all levels is more dependent upon the development of creative thinkers in agricultural education than upon any other factor. (p. 214)

Our current competency-based education checklists are inadequate. Last year, Drake (1982) expressed his continuing fear that prospective teachers may complete 100 percent of a competency checklist and not be able to teach (p. 5). Where are the listings of competencies that require prospective teachers to think and reason, to be scholars and academicians, rather than only technicians; to be

professionals rather than only practitioners? Swanson (1982) suggested that many who involve themselves with vocational education are not professionals--they are only participants. The obligations of professionalism are far greater than the requirement of participation.

Let's Disciple Teachers

The professionals maintain a system of control over the practice of the calling and the education of their practitioners. This includes the specialized preparation for which we, as teacher educators, are responsible. How can we develop our students, our clients, as professionals, as disciples, as committed participants striving to continue the building of our profession? I heard a sermon earlier this year on the subject of discipling new Christians. Much of the content of that sermon is applicable to the development of our students as committed professionals. The four points of the sermon were TIME, TRUTH, MODEL, and EXPERIENCE.

Time

Those of you who are familiar with the New Testament will recall that Jesus Christ called His disciples and then spent the remainder of His life (about 3 years) preparing them for their ministry. While none of us will be as great a teacher as The Great Teacher; we do need to allocate sufficient TIME to prepare our students for this profession to which they are being called. This idea suggests that the professional preparation of our students should be in high quality agricultural education course work. Too often we turn over much of the preparation of our students to generalists in education or vocational educators who have no commitment to the building of our profession. Lee (1982) proposes that "efficiently using time for maximum learning should be a top priority of all teachers" (p. 8). It is essential that we spend sufficient time preparing students for our profession and that the time spent be used as efficiently as possible.

Truth

The second point of the sermon was TRUTH. One of Swanson's (1982) dimensions of professionalism was that we ought to have a claim on a specialized body of substantive knowledge or subject matter. Jesus Christ had a body of knowledge He communicated to His disciples. What is it about agricultural education that we wish to communicate to those entering our profession? I suggest that our students be firmly grounded in the principles underlying the things that make us unique. We should be preparing teachers who use problem-solving as a approach to teaching and learning, teachers who believe in and can orchestrate learning by doing, teachers who encourage students to assume responsibility for their own learning,

teachers who develop activities promoting the leadership and personal development of their students, teachers who use a year-around program to teach seasonal practices in the summer months, teachers who are community agricultural leaders, teachers who believe in and provide for continuing education for their clientele, and teachers who plan and conduct an effective instructional program.

Model

The third part of the sermon was MODEL. The Master Teacher was a model for His disciples. We should set the pattern we would want our students to emulate. Bloom (1982) reports that the "master teacher is very much respected by the student, and the student is usually convinced that it is right and proper that the master teacher's expectations, instructions, and requirements be fully met" (p. 667). Too often students are critical of their instruction in education courses. It is in these courses that the students should be challenged to model their behavior after the professor. Are we the kind of professors we ought to be? Do we provide our students with instruction we want them to model? What should we do about the poor instruction our students often receive in educational psychology and history of education? If we are to efficiently use time, prepare students in our truth, and serve as models it may be necessary to make numerous changes in our programs. Too often we acquiesce to others within our universities to the detriment of our students.

Experience

The fourth point of the sermon was EXPERIENCE. Students should experience the work of the profession as a part of their preparation for entry. Jesus encouraged His disciples to experience the Christian ministry prior to His departure. We need to provide experiences under model teachers so our students can practice and improve. Supervised practice is advocated for the high school students through SOE programs, the school laboratory, and the FFA organization. Do we provide practice that is properly supervised for those entering our profession? We probably do - through our early experience and student teaching programs. However, we probably need to work more closely with our cooperating teachers to insure that proper supervision is being provided.

We can help build our profession by developing our students as disciples. They need to have a missionary spirit - feeling of servanthood. They need to commit themselves to agriculture and to the service of others. Based upon some research completed in our department (Suandi, 1982) we are likely to develop more dedicated and committed professionals if we develop and reinforce their self image, provide them with a feeling of their personal importance, encourage positive group attitudes, and take leadership in developing job autonomy in the position descriptions of vocational agriculture teachers. In other words, we should treat them as professionals.

Gusewelle, associate editor of the Kansas City Star, wrote an editorial on the subject of transience. He indicated that loyalty is one of the costs of transience. Loyalty can neither be commanded nor bought. It is a result of an investment of time and trust. The people who work in a profession must say to themselves:

This is the place to which I am attached, where I will discover my abilities and my shortcomings. Imperfect it may be--what isn't--but I commit myself to the long task of its perfection. (p. 63)

The elements of loyalty, stated in that way sound trite and terribly dated. But subtract them and what is left except communities of strangers, bound together by nothing more than ambition and temporary convenience? Our profession demands more! We need those who would become disciples and lead others to become disciples.

Summary

External pressures are bringing changes in agriculture, in education, and in the agricultural education program. Federal involvement is on the decline. The profession will need to serve a more active leadership role. Its role should be one of encouraging innovation and development rather than one of defending the status quo. Intellectual discussion should be fostered. Solutions to some of our pressing problems are needed. We need to educate our current and future teachers as professionals and scholars. This will require that we spend time with our students, teach the truth of our discipline, serve as models, and provide opportunities for them to experience what is taught. The power of the agricultural education profession is in the sum total of its individuals; each individual rich with ideas, with concepts, and with his or her own inventiveness. Let's develop teachers who believe in our profession, who have a missionary spirit, and who will become our future academicians. Then let's turn them loose. It's easier to develop technicians. However, let's resolve to travel the higher and more difficult road! We are a profession in need of academicians!

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