

## EDUCATIONAL DETERENTS TO VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

by

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There seems to be an agreement among all segments of American society that education is a major key to an individual's contribution to his community, state, and nation. An individual's educational level will ultimately determine to a high degree his present and future occupational outlook. As Mills (1) maintains there has been a definite shifting of education from the status and political spheres into the economic and occupational spheres. The educational segment of an individual's career is closely knit to his entire occupational fate and economic stability.

Considerable research has disclosed that rural youth may be significantly handicapped in the educational realm when compared with urban youth. This factor places rural youth at a marked disadvantage when they compete for non-farm employment in the world of work. Haller and Associates (2) indicate that some of the factors responsible for this are:

1. Educational levels are lower among farm youth than urban youth;
2. School drop-out rates are highest in rural schools and lowest in urban schools;
3. Greater proportions of urban than rural youth continue their education beyond high school; and
4. Many rural schools, particularly smaller ones, are not as well staffed and equipped and have less varied programs of study than larger urban schools.

A recent Mississippi study (3) attempted to pinpoint some of the educational deterrents to rural youth in general, and vocational agriculture students in particular. In order to bring into focus these deterrents, the educational aspirations and expectations of the students were explored as well as sociological, economic, educational and psychological variables.

### Educational Aspirations and Expectations

Numerous research (4) by rural sociologists has found that students who came from farm backgrounds had lower educational aspirations and expectations than did non farm students. When we consider the fact that many of the vocational agriculture students come from farm backgrounds, we must become concerned.

It was expected that students in the Mississippi study would exhibit educational aspiration/expectation differentials. This was generally proven to be the case as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of 400 Vocational Agriculture Seniors, by Educational Aspiration and Expectation Levels.

Educational Classification	Percentage of N Aspiration Level	Percentage of N Expectation Level
College (Doctorate)	19	2
College (Masters)	9	6
College (Bachelors)	23	24
College* (3 years or less)	20	21
Vocational School	11	15
Business School	5	5
No formal education beyond High School	13	27
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\*(In Mississippi most post-secondary vocational programs are located in junior colleges. An extremely high percentage of seniors in this category will enroll in vocational-technical programs.)  
Chi-square value ( $X^2$ ) = 617.61 - Significant at .01 level.

Why do such educational aspiration/expectation differentials exist? Perhaps the most over-worked theory for the difference is based on measured abilities (I.Q., reading, grades, etc.) as indicated by Waters (5). However, the writer is more inclined to believe the answers are to be found in the home environment, peer group influence, and school atmosphere as stressed in other research (6).

Forty percent of the seniors aspired to higher education levels than they expected to complete, while 54 percent indicated no difference between their educational aspirations and expectations. An interesting finding was that six percent expected to obtain higher levels of education than they aspired to. Upon closer examination of the six percent of these respondents, it was found that all of them listed their parents as having the most influence upon their educational objectives. Evidently these parents were encouraging their sons to obtain higher levels of education than the sons actually desired.

#### Educational Deterents

It is the contention of the writer that only by bringing into focus the deterents to the educational aspirations of the forty per cent who

exhibited aspiration/expectation differentials can they and others like them be assisted in achieving their aspirations. As teacher educators gain strong insights into the educational deterrents faced by vocational agriculture students they may in turn assist prospective and present teachers of vocational agriculture in helping their students minimize or overcome these deterrents.

Family Influences. Specific data revealed in this study seem to indicate that the dominant influence in most individual's educational aspiration/expectation level is the immediate family. However, students who exhibit aspiration/expectation differentials were generally exposed to negative family influences. The parents generally desire for their sons to receive more, but not much more, education than they themselves had received. Parents with below eighth grade educational attainment were found generally exerting negative influence upon formal education beyond high school. In contrast, parents who had completed high school, but having no formal education beyond high degrees of positive influence upon their sons educational plans.

There is a strong implication that negative family influence results in students reflecting one of two actions. Under moderately negative influence the youth generally exhibits extremely high educational aspirations and relatively low expectations. If highly negative family influence is present, the youth generally exhibits low educational aspirations and expectations. However, these low aspirations are usually slightly higher than the expectations.

When students confront negative, or apathetic family influences toward education, they apparently turn to groups outside the family for guidance and in too many instances are not receiving it.

Peer Group Influences. Evidently, students from families who receive indifferent or negative influences at home turn to their peers for positive educational influences. However, they apparently turn to peers who come from families exerting the same indifferent or negative influences in the home. The results were strikingly similar in educational aspirations and expectations within separate peer groups within a school.

School Influence. One of the most alarming facets of the study was that many vo-ag seniors with low educational aspirations and expectation levels were not being influenced more by the school atmosphere to aspire to higher levels of education. Apparently the vacuum caused by negative family influence is not being filled by the school for many of these students. The influence of the school could be supplemented in some degree to off-set the negative family and peer influence on these individuals if vo-ag instructors and other school personnel are apprised of the situation.

### Role of the Vo-Ag Teacher

What is the role of the vo-ag teacher in helping overcome educational deterrents to vo-ag students? It is an important role; and it includes some guidance, because most teaching has a guidance dimension which needs to be identified. It is a role that implies more than mere leadership; it is a role that must attempt to offset the educational vacuum that exists in many of these students' home environments. It is a role that develops a desire in vo-ag students to continue their formal education after completing high school in some type of post-secondary program.

Each individual vo-ag teacher can help his students by:

1. Becoming a missionary among other faculty members to make them aware of students facing educational deterrents;
2. Seek out the students who come from homes where educational encouragement is lacking;
3. Exert a positive influence for continuing some type of post-secondary education;
4. Point out to students the benefits they will gain from continuing their formal education beyond high school;
5. Provide adequate information on post-secondary programs available to them; and
6. Point out methods by which they could finance additional education beyond high school.

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