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THE COURSE OF STUDY IN AGRICULTURE

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A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The following is Part II of Dr. A. M. Field's presentation to the teacher trainers in Agricultural Education during the 1937 meeting of the American Vocational Association. Part I was presented in the October 1951 VISITOR.

The trend in the organization for teaching agriculture appears to be in the direction of desirable changes that should better serve the needs of students. There is a tendency to break away from the former plan of teaching all the crop enterprises in one year, all the animal enterprises in another year, and the farm management activities in still another year. Instead, the course of study material is organized, taught or studied the way a farmer farms. The materials of instruction are organized in an integrated sequence so that important enterprises may be studied over a period of more than one year. Such factors as ability of the student, interest, opportunity for practice, difficulty of subject matter, potential need, repetitive training need, and prerequisite value should serve as criteria for the selection and distribution of content. The plan whereby the attitudes, practices and knowledges for each enterprise are distributed so as to be taught or developed over a period of more than one year is sometimes referred to as the "cross-section" or "horizontal" method of organizing the course of study. The complex inter-relationships of the activities in a well-planned farm business suggest the term integrated as a more meaningful concept descriptive of the trend in the course of study organization. In the integrated course of study, the student becomes the focal point of interest. Emphasis shifts to the learner to the end that he may be properly integrated with reference to his total inter-related environment. The medium through which this integration takes place is the course of study. The home "farm-as-a-whole" becomes an important mediary in the work of the teacher and of the learner. It is there where the experiences and problems arise as the basis for the course of study content. It is there where the learner experiences in practice the results from his study.

The integrated course of study is a bi-

dimensional arrangement of the learning materials, the activities and the total experiences of the students. The horizontal distribution makes possible the selection of content and the farm-as-a-whole attack most appropriate for the abilities, maturity, experiences and opportunity for practice on the part of the students. The vertical arrangement makes possible the establishment of the intricate inter-relationships between the enterprises on the farm-as-a-whole. If a school provides four years of instruction in agriculture, for high school students, the course of study should be organized as a unit to represent an appropriate selection of content and activities distributed in a suitable sequence to meet the needs of individual students over a four-year period. It should be conceived as a body of subject matter, activities and experiences designed to develop appropriate attitudes, habits, knowledges and abilities distributed over a unit period of 48 months or more, instead of the usual four units of one school year for each unit.

This plan discards the outmoded idea that freshmen in high school have the interest or ability to understand all the problems in animal husbandry or in crops. Students learn most easily those things for which they feel a personal, realistic need. They learn best when they face a situation of their own instead of one presented by the teacher or anyone else. They will develop best when doing the thing that to them at the time seems most important and interesting. Applying this to agriculture it means that the student will learn best if the problems arise from his own environment and with his own experiences as the point of contact.

The integrated course of study-plan naturally leads the student into individual study. The home farm becomes an integral part of his study and practice activities. There are individual differences in farms as well as individual differences in students. The integrated course of study takes care of both of these important problems in teaching. Throughout this procedure we must remember that our chief objective is to improve the boy rather than the farm. Improvement on the home farm is a secondary objective from the activities of the boy.

Some of our teachers think this plan is too complex and too difficult. That is not true. On the contrary it is a more simple and more logical approach to the learning process. We are not recommending that this individual work be employed to any great

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extent the first year. It is something the students must gradually learn how to do. Occupational explorations, counseling and experience leading to a wise choice of a vocation is sound vocational education. The guidance activities however, should not be concentrated entirely in the first year. It should receive attention at any time after the first year when individual students are in need of wise counsel and mature judgment.

The purposes of Agriculture I are to give the students an overview of the business of farming, to develop a sympathetic understanding of rural life and to help youth to become generally intelligent with regard to the many problems of the farmer. It is generally accepted that occupational choice should precede specialization and intensive preparation in any occupational area. The trend in the philosophy of education is to provide adequate opportunity for exploration and counseling as a basis for choosing an occupation. This has come to be recognized as an important function of the junior high school. The first year of study in agriculture is usually the last year of the junior high school. Therefore, Agriculture I seems an appropriate place to give special attention to orientation activities, individual interests, aptitudes, occupational exploration, occupational counseling and appropriate occupational experiences. The content for Agriculture I is selected to serve the needs of the students who desire to gain a knowledge of agriculture as a mode of life, and also to serve as a background of information and experiences for those who wish to continue the study beyond the first year. Advance problems in the various enterprises are reserved for later years when the students are ready to understand them.

In this connection, Mr. L. B. Pollom, State Supervisor in Kansas writes, "We in Kansas are completely "fed up" on this business of bringing ninth grade boys into our departments, almost forcing them to begin on a purely speculative basis by "re-

quiring" them to purchase livestock for which they do not have sufficient feed and for which they or their parents have not had time to make plans and preparations."

To me Mr. Pollom is quite right. After all these freshmen are mere "kids" who are bewildered by starting in a new type of school. They do not have the interest, the experience, the maturity or the need for starting out on a man size farm experience program. And to expect them to enter whole heartedly into the business of learning and understanding all the materials in an area like animal husbandry is, to say the least, more or less ridiculous.

After twenty-five years of experience it seems to me that we should have arrived at a more uniform understanding of what is considered most appropriate for the first year of agriculture.

A summary of data from sixty teachers distributed over some thirty states indicates that there is a wide variation in what is included for the first year of agriculture. The range extends from a plan where the freshmen are required to set up their entire four year farm practice program the first month in school to plans where farm shop constitutes most of the first year work. Others delve into systems of breeding, balanced rations in feeding and many other problems clearly not within the range of appropriate need of students in Agriculture I.

Agriculture I should have something of value to the many farm boys who leave the farm, to the town boys who will enter occupations related to farming, to the farm girls and the town girls who may become wives of farmers and of course to the farm boys who have decided on farming as their life occupation. The class organization for this is a local administrative problem, meeting the individual needs of each student is a problem for the teacher. For example, it can be vocational for those who need it.

We believe by and large that Agriculture II is the place to begin the real vocational program of instruction. Town boys, poor students, and those not particularly interested in agriculture will probably not be enrolled the second year. The selected group will be ready by interest, maturity, experience and individual need to go ahead with a real vocational program. Individual needs are met through differentiation of content and through individualization of study. Superior students can profit by this type of instruction because they learn best when they face personal, realistic problems of their own. They can profit by individual work because:

- a. They have well developed aptitudes.
- b. They are capable of continuous effort.
 1. Greater time range
 2. Greater learning range
 3. Greater attention range
- c. They are capable of doing original, independent and creative work.

Emphasis is put on the approved practices the student develops in his farming program. In the individual work of the students the home farm enterprises are broken down into teaching units, learning units, approved practices and the related information for the approved practices.

The students begin with a study of the type of farming on the home farm. They begin where they are now. They analyze the present situation and then begin to plan an improved farming program. They determine where to begin, the direction they shall go, the goals of achievement to be accomplished and how to do it. The classroom becomes a place where students gather to do intellectual work. They progress according to their ability, interests and needs. The intellectual loafer who has been hitch hiking on the ideas of the more studious members of the class finds it necessary to get down to business on his own hook. The study of useless materials for any member of the class will be a thing of the past. Utopia will not have arrived but an improvement will surely be made.

ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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The following article on Administrative Relationships was presented by Superintendent Hafdal at the American Vocational Association meetings in November 1951 at Minneapolis, Minnesota. THE VISITOR is proud to reprint M. Hafdal's remarks and takes this opportunity of congratulating the administrators and staff of the Alexandria school system for the fine administrative relationships existing there.

I have been asked to develop the general topic, "Administrative Relationships". To do this with reasonable effectiveness, I believe that it will be necessary for me to include a few desirable personnel relationships which must be closely allied with good administrative relationships as established in our schools. I will attempt to approach my topic in a positive manner, as my convictions would lead me to believe that most administrative and personnel problems can be avoided or overcome by a positive approach to such problems. I am of the opinion that many of the teaching program difficulties encountered by teachers with administrators and visa versa are avoidable if a desirable, understandable working relationship is established at the earliest possible moment. Since I am speaking to a group of men whose primary interest is Agricultural Education, I shall develop my story with special emphasis in that field of education although many of the ideas presented could easily

apply to any part of the total education program.

The first item we should examine together is the actual individual teaching program. I would strongly encourage an instructor to develop a definite concrete program of instruction and its many necessary allied activities. This annual plan should be formulated in considerable detail and it should include as many of the local, district, state and national participating activities as possible. The development of such a plan should necessarily include the major aims, objectives and results which you may hope to accomplish in your various courses. I would be especially alert to include the valid reasons for participating in meetings and trips which you feel are essential to a well-rounded agricultural educational program. From my observations, I believe that administrators will generally approve such activities, but at the same time, most of them want to know something definite about such events well in advance of their occurrence. This gives the responsible administrators an opportunity to integrate such activities into the over-all school calendar. Furthermore, this gives other staff members an ample adjustment period, so that they can make their assignments on a revised basis despite an occasional absence by the student enrolled in agricultural education.

At this point, may I add a word of warning. Do not expect that all of your recommendations will be approved. Your program like others must dove-tail into the total school educational objectives, so it becomes crystal clear that administrators must make decisions based on this premise. This means that you must be prepared to accept such decisions graciously and with the full understanding that your superintendent or principal very likely is still supporting you and your department.

Before we proceed, I want to refer to a statement made by Dean Schweickhard, Commissioner of Education for Minnesota, in the November issue of M.V.A. Viewpoints. His statement is pertinent here because it will support what I have already said and will also serve as a good introduction to the second major point which I have included in this discussion. Commissioner Schweickhard's statement follows. I quote: "Education, like a family or a nation, cannot be run in sections or parts independent of one another. Accordingly to make education function effectively in strengthening the cause of human freedom there must be a comprehensive plan toward which each branch makes its contribution. Vocational educators, as well as others, must give full recognition to the fundamental necessary of sound general education—the tools of learning, the facts of science, the lessons of history, the comparative values of work and plan, the inspirational forces of the arts and humanities which lift men to higher levels of liv-

ing, and the ways by which people learn to live agreeably and successfully with other people. Without these things upon which to build, attempts at education in the more material fields become pointless and are ultimately doomed to collapse. With them well established as a part of the whole program there are certain special fields the sound cultivation of which will help to make the nations strong enough to support and protect the cause in which they believe."

I am confident that most educators enthusiastically endorse this statement, so I should like to proceed at once to the next problem to be considered which is vitally pertinent to our theme, Administrative and Personnel Relationships. I choose to label my next point of emphasis the absolute need for every school department to be an integral section of the whole school and the philosophy which the individual school has adopted for its potential goal of achievement. This is a very simple matter to accomplish, but it requires the full cooperation of all members of a faculty staff. Each member of the staff should be active in faculty, professional and social meetings. By so doing, the individual teacher will be better able to interpret and comprehend the entire school offering with the resulting opportunity to know more about the program and problems of other teachers. If you have to discuss your department and the courses with your teachers during one of these professional meetings, you will have a splendid opportunity to sell your product to your fellow teachers. You have an outstanding product to sell, and advertise, not only to your colleagues, but to your entire community—both urban and rural sections. If I were an agriculture instructor, I would for example, encourage our elementary teachers to utilize farms as one source of direct instruction for our younger boys and girls. (Obviously you will do this through the elementary supervisor, staff, and your superintendent.) This statement can be best illustrated by telling a very simple little story which I recently read in my Jay-Cee magazine. "The little six-year old girl was making her first visit to the country. The farmer's wife was taking her around the place. She saw the chickens, the garden, the barn, and ended at the pig pen where an enormous sow was reclining in the sun.

"Big, isn't she?" asked the farmer's wife. "And I know why," replied the little girl, "When I saw her yesterday, she had nine little pigs blowing her up".

Now, I don't suppose that there are too many children who really know that little about farm life, but the point which I wish to make is that I strongly feel that areas outside of the classroom afford teachers a broad range of wonderful educational opportunities not only for high school students, but also for our elementary students. Why shouldn't we who are teachers utilize such

out-of-the-classroom educational resources for the direct benefit and growth of our girls and boys? I would, therefore, encourage you instructors of agriculture to lead your fellow teachers and superintendents into such avenues of educational opportunity. In the past, you may have secluded yourselves in your own little department too much. I believe that you should make a special effort to not only handle the responsibilities of your department but you should also judiciously place yourself in a position to be of advisory and direct assistance to the successful fulfillment of the entire school program.

My third major point of emphasis is the importance of all teachers supporting our local, county, state, and national professional organizations which have been organized for the direct benefit of our entire educational program and the personnel associated with education. Each teacher should be encouraged to also support and be members of department level professional organizations, but such memberships should not serve as an alibi that the primary local, state, and national organizations should be overlooked, avoided and neglected. Do you realize that our 100% membership in our National Education Association, for example, would provide the necessary impetus to public school education to place education in its proper role in our society? I would not for a moment discourage your individual memberships in the A.V.A., but I am confident that each of you will strengthen and improve your administrative and personnel relationships by also supporting your local, state, and national education association.

This statement introduces me to a problem in education which I think should be improved immensely. I refer to the fact that thousands of our school systems do not yet have sufficient number of vocational courses if any at all to offer our students. For instance, in Minnesota we still have less than 200 agriculture departments, when we should have more than 400. Personally, I do not believe this is reasonable in a state which relies so largely on successful farming experience. I realize that this indictment fits too well most states in our United States, but the united efforts of men such as you and our school administrators should overcome this deficiency in our schools. Let's approach this deficiency by a direct, educational approach, not by dangling Federal Aid before the eyes of superintendents and boards of education. I am sure that schools benefit from such aids, but I do feel that an educational approach for stimulating establishment of additional vocational departments is a much sounder approach.

To conclude this discussion, I should like to suggest that the improvement of administrative and personnel relationships within a school system is a two-way proposition—a proposition on both the instructors and the administrators working together.