

# The Visitor

Devoted to the Interests of Agricultural Education in Minnesota Schools

Vo. LXV

January 1978

No. 1

## AN IMPORTANT YET "FUNNY THING" HAPPENED TO US ON THE WAY HOME FROM A.V.A.

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After attending the 1977 American Vocational Association Convention and participating in the various sessions of the Agriculture Division, one is impressed with the activities undertaken by colleagues across the country. There have been and still are unique and significant efforts occurring in many parts of the country. It is professionally stimulating to have an opportunity to exchange thoughts and ideas about agricultural education. But, during a particularly rough flight home, we were shook up and stirred deeply enough to do some critical thinking about what we had seen and heard at A.V.A.

The "funny" part that became evident to us was not in the stories (though there were an abundance of good ones) nor in the lack of substance or quality of programming. But, there was a "funny feeling" that what was frequently stated may have been out of step with what ought to be considered reality, what was reported in the research sessions. Agricultural educators have always been pragmatic and proud that they were in touch with reality. However, today we may be tenaciously holding on to some ideals that put us adrift from reality.

One may ask, what are these differences and why do we have a "funny feeling" that we are not paying very close attention to the results of what our research efforts are revealing? We have a "funny feeling" that too often we base our values and beliefs on the basis of "this is the way it is, has been, and should be" despite the fact that some evidence may reveal changes have occurred.

To express our "funny feelings" we will present the dicotomy that we heard. First, we will present the viewpoint of "yes" these are the concerns of the leadership as they see our situation. Secondly, we will present the viewpoint of "no" this is what some research suggests is so.

## CONCERNS

We heard Oklahoma State Supervisor Ralph Dreesen state that some of the concerns of supervisors were . . .

1. States are failing to provide staff for leadership.
2. Every student should have a supervised occupational experience program.
3. Each teacher should not have more than 60 students.
4. Teachers should be employed on a 12 month basis to provide year-round supervision of occupational experience program.
5. Young farmer programs should be developed by every teacher.
6. Teacher shortages are severely handicapping the development and expansion of vocational agriculture programs and some means must be devised for increasing the supply of teachers.
7. Teachers do not get enough students involved in their vocational agriculture programs.

We heard Dr. Ralph Bender, Head of Agricultural Education at The Ohio State University suggest that some of the concerns of a teacher educator were . . .

1. Since 1961 the average age of the vocational agriculture teacher has declined from 41 to 33 years. The average number of years of experience has dropped from 21 to 14.
2. Teachers should be prepared by taxonomy areas and should possess occupational experience in each area.
3. Prospective teachers should have an early experience in a school.
4. Student teaching should last at least one quarter (10 weeks).
5. Prospective teachers should be provided a greater amount of hands-on experience.
6. Teachers spend too much time teaching from an academic perspective rather than solving problems.
7. Too many teachers are involved in farming or other enterprises.

He also stated that teaching is not getting the full attention of the vocational agriculture teacher in many situations. Bender further stated that he felt 60 high school students per teacher represented an ideal teaching situation.

We can appreciate these concerns and ideals. But, we would like to compare these viewpoints with some research reports that were presented. In these points we may be revealing the "no" side of the dicotomy.

### RESEARCH

Jim Knight of Ohio reported on his study of why vocational agricultural teachers leave teaching. The five major reasons for leaving in order of their importance were:

1. Teachers' long range occupational goals were to do something other than teach vocational agriculture.
2. Students in their classes who should not have been in vocational agriculture.
3. The field of vocational agriculture offered inadequate advancement opportunities.
4. The long hours required teaching classes.
5. The salary was not adequate.

Time was involved in five of the 15 most common teacher reasons for leaving teaching. These factors included such items as long hours, too many required extra-curricula activities, too many meetings to attend as a teacher, too many evening responsibilities, and too much preparation time required for classroom teaching. As a result of Knight's investigation, it was evident that the time requirements demanded of the Vo-Ag teacher, the lack of interest or a positive attitude toward agriculture by students, plus inadequate advancement and salary are reasons teachers leave the field of vocational agriculture teaching.

Joseph Clary of North Carolina reported on an interview based study of the status of vocational agriculture and the changing roles of the teachers of vocational agriculture in his state. He suggested that a rapid turnover of teachers will occur because more than 50 percent do not intend to teach longer than 10 years. He reported that most teachers were generally satisfied with the vocational agriculture program even in a period of change which included a perceived decrease in teacher morale. He discovered that the prestige of the position of vocational agriculture has stabilized

from its downward trend and may be increasing very slightly. Clary also pointed out that the vocational agriculture teacher is no longer the interpreter of agricultural change in the local community. He also stated that the characteristics of enrollees have changed dramatically. He found that a relatively high percentage of the instructional time of teachers is being given to relatively few courses and nearly equal portions of time are devoted to introductory classes and skill development (vocational) classes.

Clary also found that crop and livestock production are no longer the focal points of emphasis in the North Carolina vocational agriculture instructional program. Horticulture was the most frequently offered course. Supervised occupational experience programs were not strong. The FFA program appeared strong — however, it is enrolling a smaller percentage of vocational agriculture students than five years ago. Adult education is decreasing, only one-third of the teachers have a regularly organized program despite the fact that nearly all teachers feel it should have greater emphasis. Finally, Clary noted that more than half of the programs were operated without the benefits of an advisory council. It is interesting to compare the similarities of the Knight and Clary studies particularly those statements which reveal that a majority of the teachers do not intend to stay in the profession.

The writers reported on a 1976-77 time utilization study conducted with high school vocational agriculture teachers in Minnesota. They reported that the average high school vocational agriculture teacher spends 49 hours and 34 minutes per week on the job. First year teachers spent an average of 52 hours and 6 minutes per week on the job, second year teachers 51 hours and 21 minutes, third year teachers 50 hours and 53 minutes, teachers with four plus years experience and teaching in two-teacher departments (one High School and one adult farm management) 48 hours and 26 minutes, teachers with four plus years experience and teaching in three or more teacher departments 48 hours and 23 minutes, and teachers with four plus years experience and teaching in single teacher departments 46 hours and 48 minutes. The workload varied from

week to week with January being a high demand time as compared to May. The amount of time spent in preparing and evaluating was affected by the experience a teacher possesses. Beginning teachers spent 772 minutes per week in preparing and evaluating activities whereas experienced teachers (4 plus years) spent 470 minutes. Approximately 43 percent of the average vocational agriculture teacher's time was spent teaching regularly scheduled classes. Teachers with four or more years of experience teaching in single teacher departments spent significantly less time advising FFA activities each week than teachers with similar experience in multiple teacher departments (339 minutes compared to 490). This difference in FFA time constituted the differential in total time experienced single teacher department teachers spent on the job. Finally, the authors found no correlation between enrollment and the average total time spent on the job per week in preparing evaluating, supervising S.O.E.P. and advising the FFA. There was a weak correlation between enrollment and average time teaching vocational agriculture classes.

#### ONE MAY ASK

What does this really mean? A review of the studies reveals some interesting similarities. Time demands required by the job are often stated as reasons for leaving the teaching profession. Yet some experienced professional employees in other fields might not complain about a 50 hour week whereas an equal number might indicate that anything beyond 40 hours is an excessive demand. It would seem that the eight hour day spelled out explicitly in many master agreements (contracts) begins to convey to the teacher that a 40 hour work week is a standard time demand — anything demanded beyond 40 hours is excessive and should reflect additional pay. This motivation may seem revolting, but it's "funny" how quickly we forget that few teacher education or state department supervisory offices remain open from 8-5 weekdays plus 8-12 on Saturdays, or any evenings! It's "funny," but maybe we have all cut back on our hourly commitment.

It seems "funny" that more and expanded S.O.E.P. may be in a declining posture. "The S.O.E.P. has been the heart and backbone of a Vo Ag program" is stated as fact. But is it? Apparently S.O.E.P. accountability was given up without much struggle in many places. It may be difficult in an era of declining

enrollment and tight finances to restore supervised occupational experience programs to their significant status, particularly with teachers presently spending from 3.4 to 6.1 percent of their time supervising occupational experience programs.

It seems "funny" that we talk so strongly about an FFA experience for everyone but membership continues to include about 70 percent of students enrolled. FFA advising demands from 333 to 490 minutes of the teachers time per week or approximately 14 percent of the teachers time which suggests it is still a very important activity. When will we make it and operate as though FFA is an inseparable part of Vo Ag — FFA?

It seems "funny" that we continually want more time for teachers to spend exclusively on vocational agriculture, yet, non-teaching activities such as study hall, lunch duty, class sponsorship, ticket selling, sports events, plays, community civic and service responsibilities occupied nearly twice as much time as the supervised occupational experience program activities. Standards and supervision without a means of supporting the local teacher are paper tigers.

It seems "funny" that we want more young and adult farmer programs and yet only one-third of the high school teachers appeared to be involved in adult work. High school teachers, who reported working with adults, spent about one hour and 17 minutes to 3 hours and 54 minutes per week on these activities. A good administrator supports the programs desired. Do we do this?

Why do our wants and wishes seem to be contrary to reality? Why? Could it be that our clientele has undergone significant change? Are we unaware of a "generation gap?" How do we develop long range vocational programs with teachers who stay in the profession for about three years and do not intend to stay beyond 10 years? We may be receiving messages that we are not accepting or reacting to? Teachers may have changed in terms of attitudes, values, commitment, dedication . . . ?

How do we respond to the fact that there is no correlation between enrollment and average total time spent on the job per week in preparing and evaluating teaching materials and in supervising S.O.E.P., and in advising the FFA? Does it really mean that enrollment does not affect the amount of time spent on the job? Teachers may state that large enrollments prevent them from spending time in these vital areas; unfortunately, their contentions are not supported by the evidence available.

We seem to expect the Vo Ag teachers to be well organized, well prepared, obviously supplied with many students (local school budgets cannot afford anything less *and* large numbers look good in statewide data) fully participating in FFA activities, every student with an S.O.E. program (requiring 3-4 home or on-the-job visits per year), five or six different class preparations each day (in areas where there are no resource materials), an adult course or two, plus significant participation in professional organizations and attendance at school and civic functions. When Vo Ag teachers look at other types of employment we become displeased because we fear we have lost another good teacher.

On the other hand, how do Vo Ag teachers respond to their fellow teachers who leave school after eight hours or receive extra compensation for extra hours spent on the job in coaching, advising or supervising.

The dilemma continues. Teacher educators and supervisors can be accused of spoon-feeding teachers or dictating curriculum if they espouse to provide a core curriculum complete with daily lessons. On the other hand, teachers, may complain they have been "short-changed" if they do not have an entire program worked out for them in great detail. Who is right?

It is doubtful that Vo Ag teachers today are less ambitious than they were two or three decades ago. Obviously student loads have increased dramatically, the number of preparations have also increased. The organization of teachers has placed the teacher in a different environment. What are we doing at the leadership level to improve teacher effectiveness?? We submit very little! We still demand the same response from the Vo Ag teacher that was expected 25 years ago.

It would seem that teachers, teacher educators, state agency supervisors, and school administrators must re-examine the job of vocational agriculture teaching. We may discover the reason for a chronic shortage of teachers is (1) the size, scope and features of the job or (2) the selection of persons who are overqualified for the rewards provided by the job.

Before you write us, think about the problems the profession faces and their solutions. The "funny thing" may be we do not have any problems.

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## VOL LXV THE VISITOR No. 1

Published quarterly during the calendar year in January, April, July and October by the Division of Agricultural Education University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minn. 55108

Second class postage paid at St. Paul, MN.

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