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Systematic Instruction for Out-of-School Groups

The 1939 summer session for teachers of vocational agriculture at the University of Minnesota featured a special series of lectures by Dr. R. W. Gregory, specialist in the U. S. Office of Education. The lectures followed the conclusion of the special courses occupying a period of four weeks, one of which dealt with problems of instruction for part-time and evening classes. The information presented herewith, taken from the notes of the class members and the teachers in attendance, summarizes briefly the major points emphasized in the lectures and the related discussions.

Philosophical Implications

During the past twenty years, we have evolved a reasonably satisfactory technique for the instruction of high school classes in agriculture. If the instruction of out-of-school groups is to be effective, it must be planned just as systematically. This implies the making of studies to determine educational needs, the organizing of long-time courses of study, the use of sound teaching techniques, and the careful supervision of farming programs.

Adults must be students of their own problems. No longer can we expect to capitalize upon the unearned increment in farming. Rather, farmers are confronted with increasing problems due to pests and diseases, soil depletion and erosion, unfavorable markets and competition with highly organized groups. These and other economic problems must be solved to make possible desirable standards of living for rural people.

The era of the individualist is likewise past. The fighting of farm hazards, the establishment of production quotas and the orderly marketing of farm products require group action. Therefore, we must learn to cooperate in our attack upon such problems. Systematic education is an important factor in teaching us how to cooperate in the mutual solution of our difficulties.

Satisfactory farm life is also based upon an understanding of the problems and contributions of other groups. We can-

not exist half-starved and half-fed. Neither can we best serve ourselves without an appreciation for music, art and literature, and for the social and recreational opportunities which are within the reach of all. Adult education in agriculture must, as a result, contribute to the economic success of its clientele in order that these objectives may be realized.

Placement and Establishment

Our success as teachers of vocational agriculture can be measured, vocationally, to the degree that our students become placed and happily established in farming. As teachers, we should take the initiative in developing a program of instruction with all-day and part-time students which will lead to the gradual development of plans for farming on the full-time basis. Establishment, at least on the progressive basis, is applicable even in the case of the adult farmer.

There are definite indications that when the relationships of fathers and sons are favorable, the young men become established in farming more frequently and their success is more certain than otherwise. There also seems to be a definite relationship between the investments in livestock, machinery, and capital of young men in vocational classes and the success of their farming programs in future years.

For the most part placement opportunities in farming will be found in the local community. Therefore, if a teacher is to help students become placed or established in farming, he must be acquainted with the opportunities available in the area. In order to know the opportunities, the teacher must have an up-to-date survey of every farm in his territory. This should be supplemented by data relative to related occupations such as creameries, elevators, feed stores, nurseries, hatcheries and produce plants.

Land holding agencies including banks, insurance companies and government agencies are looking for dependable tenants and prospective purchasers of farm land. They, as well as individual owners of land are interested in the three

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C's—character, capacity, and capital. In some instances but very little capital is required. While there is an oversupply of potential farmers, it is exceedingly difficult to find well qualified prospects. The teacher of vocational agriculture should create a situation whereby employers will look to the department for assistance in matters of placement. The teachers in one state are proposing to organize councils, consisting of key farmers and men in related occupations to assist with placement problems.

There are no valid instruments for determining the individuals who will develop into successful farmers and rural citizens. It would be quite irregular for us to select our more capable students and concentrate our efforts upon them. In fact, a large proportion of this group will find themselves in positions as leaders and directors of agricultural programs rather than on farms. The middle as well as the upper group need our attention. Guidance is demanded. Therefore, we must work with all of our young men in order that they as individuals may choose the occupation in which they are most interested and for which they are best fitted. This means that we must help provide situations which will make it possible for agriculture students to gain a broader understanding of the entire field of productive agriculture and its relationship to the economic and social life of the community, state and nation.

Instructional Planning

Systematic instruction of out-of-school groups requires continuous instruction rather than the teaching of the minimum number of lessons for part-time and evening classes during the year. This necessitates the recognition of instruction for these groups by the school administrators

and careful organization of the teacher's program. All phases of instruction to be effective must be integrated. The work of the high school classes in agriculture are to be related with that for the adult groups. There is to be a definite relationship between farming experiences and classroom instruction. All related activities have a bearing upon the purposes for which the instruction is intended.

Suggestions dealing with instruction :

1. Our service to the community is proportional to the number we reach and effectively serve.

2. We teach when the student is ready to be taught—that is when he becomes interested in his own problems.

3. It is just as difficult to become acquainted with the interests and problems of the student as it is to organize subject matter for presentation.

4. We should teach problems of greatest need and most interest to the class members.

5. Courses made up of miscellaneous topics should be frowned upon. We should even be suspicious of courses made up of current problems involving several enterprises.

6. The agriculture instructor is the recognized leader of the class. He, first and last, is responsible to teach and not the outsider whom he may bring in to assist.

7. Because of the limited periods available for intensive teaching instruction on the class basis involving problems of common interest must predominate. Group meetings have a place in the instructional procedure. Individualized instruction is also possible, especially in part-time classes which meet for extended periods.

8. The instructional content should be designed for all students rather than for key men alone. Everyone needs the instruction, especially those responsible for inferior farming programs.

9. Discussion, properly directed, should be encouraged by all class members. The teacher should present such data and information at the opportune time as is essential to the solution of the problem under consideration. There is a place for the distribution of lesson summaries, provided the employment of the technique does not discourage learning on the part of students.

10. It is logical for certain activities to emanate from the instruction. Project

tours, technical field studies, fairs, exhibits, special meetings dealing with emergency problems, educational trips and various community undertakings can be used advantageously to supplement the formal instruction.

11. Social and recreational activities are to be encouraged but should be administered so as not to interfere with the instructional procedures. Separate and additional meetings should ordinarily be provided for such activities. Their promotion, together with many of the other activities relating to the instructional units can be handled most effectively through organizations of the members.

12. There is a need for coordinating the instruction of part-time and evening classes with the programs of other groups. Frequently the work of the young men can be related to similar courses for young women, to rural youth groups in the community and to civic organizations such as The Junior Chamber of Commerce. Community programs of adult education, sponsored by the school system, with the cooperation of farm organizations and other agencies, are a logical outgrowth of evening school instruction in vocational agriculture.

Farming Program

The best part-time classes are those which start with a study of the opportunities to become established in farming in the local area. A well developed practice program is essential to the establishment of young men in farming, as well as being the basis for instruction. If a young man really wants to farm, it behooves him to initiate a farming program. If an instructor really wants to teach, it behooves him to base his instruction on the farming experiences of the class members. The farming program is the *life blood* of the entire program. If we do not have a farming program upon which to base our work we deal with the problem academically. It may be possible to deal somewhat academically with all-day students, but not with out-of-school groups.

Young men usually become established in farming by building up an equity in the business. This means that we must start with the individual where he is and build upon his opportunities. The accumulation of some livestock, some equipment and of some capital will hasten the time when he can start farming. Fortunately farming is a business into which a young man may grow with little capital.

As teachers, we must recognize that our instruction grows out of farming experiences. Supervised practice programs to which we contribute educationally do not materialize without careful planning. The teacher cannot and should not check upon all activities of his students. It is his obligation to provide desirable learning situations and to encourage the acceptance of responsibilities on the part of the persons with whom he works. This means supervised practice program must be developed to meet the needs of the students and not to satisfy records for the local, the state, and the national office.

It would be well for us as teachers to keep a list of the requirements for farming before us and before our students rather constantly in order that our instruction might be directed toward the meeting of these requirements. But you say this places a premium upon the economic objective. Yes. But if we are smart, we will realize that establishment in farming on the economic basis is fundamental to the opportunity of farm people to live graciously and happily.

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