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THE DIALECTIC OF GUIDANCE IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Recently there has been an abundance of material with attention to guidance in the literature of agricultural education. A recent book entitled *Guidance in Agricultural Education*[1] has appeared and an increasing number of studies and articles are appearing. There have been a number of studies that relate high school vocational agriculture with later collegiate success or performance in a variety of other pursuits. This is a healthy trend, but it is also one that requires a review and a restatement of the problem of guidance.

The wisdom of a school's decision to offer agriculture, language, history, or any other subject is a value judgment that is hardly amenable to research. Perhaps, the most that can be done is to show that the liklihood of success in teaching agriculture may be related to the age of students, their social and economic circumstances, the methods employed in teaching and the degree to which the stated objectives have been achieved. It may also be possible to show whether the teaching of agriculture is compatible or incompatible with other objectives possessed by the school or the individual students.

The agreed purpose of education is to change students in desirable directions. To argue this purpose it is necessary to have three kinds of information. It is necessary, first, to investigate the student and to understand more about him and his intellectual growth. Secondly, it is necessary to investigate the means by which changes can be made to occur and to what degree. Thirdly, it is necessary to understand the desirability of change along with the direction and degree of change expected. This is most difficult and most speculative. There is no formula or general principle that will allow one to determine whether the change is desirable in any moral, social, or philosophical sense. Here, again, it is necessary to assess the validity of a value judgment, hardly an objective or a scientific process.

It should be said, however, that agriculture as a school subject is not unique in this difficulty. No subject in the school has a larger (or smaller) claim on the desirability or degree of educational change it affects. If so, no research has as yet substantiated the conclusion. Since no evidence is available on this point it is necessary to turn to whatever uniqueness attends the subject. Without departing from the tenuous nature of value judgments, it is possible to show the economic desirability of agricultural instruction. Estimates of cost to the student, the school, the state, and to society can be made for investments in agricultural instruction. Returns on this investment can also be estimated with reasonable accuracy. On the basis of very limited studies,[2] it appears that an argument favoring the economic desirability of agricultural instruction would be generously supported.

Within this general framework it is possible to restate the problem of guidance in agricultural education in the following oversimplified

[1]Byram, Harold. *Guidance in Agricultural Education.* Interstate Publishers, 1959. 238 P.

[2]Schultz, Theodore. *Education and Economic Growth.* 60th Yearbook, National Society for the Study of Education. University of Chicago Press. 1961. 252 P.

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way: the upper and lower limits of success are determined largely, but not exclusively, by operational intelligence and academic knowledge. A most important part, and often a major role, is played by the kind of teaching, the exigencies of adolescent experience, the kind and degree of motivation, the individual personality structure, and the emotional climate of maturation.

Through the use of a variety of tests and other measuring instruments, it is possible to determine a student's chances of success in given circumstances within certain limits of probability. Having obtained this prediction it is possible to tentatively abandon certain objectives and to show the meager possibilities of success with others. This exercise permits the establishment of minimum targets. The next step is that of a careful study of the student's personality, interests, and motives as they reveal themselves *cumulatively* together with such other resources that may affect the accessibility of educational objectives. To this is added a skillful application of educational knowledge that will allow the student to, in fact, falsify the prediction, to exceed the minimum target. The guidance function is thus seen as a dialectic between measurement and educational methods accompanied by the ratchet-like process that allows the maximization of educational achievement.

Finally, it should be said that while agriculture teachers have a special guidance role to play, theirs is not an exclusive one. It is shared by all other teachers in whose courses the agriculture students are enrolled. The agriculture teacher has an especially large responsibility to the guidance counselor in supplying cumulatively revealed information. Moreover, the agriculture teacher has a special responsibility to be aware of the full range of minimum and maximum educational targets that may be matched with student ability and opportunity in the field of agriculture. A guidance program is a complex thing, a many-faceted process that requires special knowledge and unusual skill. Most of all it should be understood that the stimulation of aspirations provided by excellence in teaching is crucial to the success of any guidance program.

STUDENT TEACHING

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In the foreword to a new manual for student teachers and supervising teachers in vocational agriculture at the University of Minnesota is the statement that student teaching is not just practice teaching—"it is a genuine experience in teaching under competent supervision which gives the student the opportunity to participate in a functional cross-section of the work of a teacher of vocational agriculture in a well-organized department in a community setting." These experiences help the student teacher develop the attitude, understanding and ability which will lead to proficiency in teaching vocational agriculture.

The supervising teacher is an important individual in the educational process of future teachers. He may be the greatest single force in shaping the student teacher's professional development. His is a guidance role. The student has passed a rigorous screening and selection process imposed by the college. He has received certain technical and professional preparation in his course work. He desires to be successful and create a favorable impression on his supervisor and the pupils. He needs guidance from the supervising teacher in order to gain perspective. The supervising teacher is close to the student and his work. Tell him

about the joys and satisfaction received from teaching. Encourage him to plan his work, to budget his time, to evaluate his progress. Suggest to him techniques that have proved helpful to you. Point out his errors, his weaknesses and handicaps in a friendly manner. At the same time, commend him for his achievements and improvement. Sharing and showing are part of the educational process. If the student realizes he is learning in his profession, the supervising teacher's suggestions may not be so annoying. There can be considerable self satisfaction as a supervising teacher observes the progress of the student teacher. It is a tangible evidence of his contribution to teacher education.

The public school in our society has an obligation to train youth. It also has an obligation—a professional obligation—to train replacement teachers. No other institution can do it for us. The axiom "Learning by Doing" is important in preparation of teachers. The institutions can impart the technical knowledge. Research in methodology may suggest new approaches but actual experiences in the classroom are the most effective way to develop desirable habits for the student teacher. As a member of the teaching profession, individuals must assume the responsibility for working with student teachers to develop a strong, capable classroom teacher of the future.

MEETINGS PRESENT TOP OPPORTUNITY FOR THINKING

MAX AMBERSON*

Are you taking full advantage of the meetings you attend? With school just around the corner consider the opportunities you'll have to think independently and with others. One cannot spend money, time, effort or thought without getting something in return.

If you lose a dollar bill, you receive a lesson on carelessness. If you squander it, you have the pleasure of doing so. If you buy a necktie with it, you have filled a material need. If you pay it out for food, you have met a necessity. If you invest it, it may increase. If you place it in the Church collection plate, you have met a responsibility. So it is with time, effort, and thought!

All action is preceded by thought. The nature of action, therefore, is determined by the kind of thinking that has preceded it. Thinking in a vacuum produces more than no thought at all. But thought stimulated by others produces greater return.

It is impossible to think with others, or to listen to others' thoughts, without getting something out of it. What one gets depends upon: what he wants; how he concentrates on getting it; and the people with whom, and conditions in which he does his thinking. You can't lose!

Even if a person is not paying attention to what is being discussed in his presence, his mind is not blank. It may wander; it may dream, but it is never inactive, even when one sleeps. While the quality of the mental product reflects this, there is a product.

Some are inclined to observe that because an individual leaves a discussion with the same opinions or ideas with which he entered it, the "thinking together" has contributed nothing to him. This cannot be. He at least is further convinced of his own position. He has acquired convictions. He cannot lose!

To have time to think is important in one's activity. To have the opportunity to be exposed to the stimulation of the thinking of other people is precious. To make the most of it, give consideration to what you hope to get out of thought; concentrate on getting it; and give careful attention to the environment in which you seek it.

The next time you are in a meeting, let the following pass through your mind: "How fortunate I am to have this time to think!! How fortunate I am to have other minds available to think with!! How can I make the most of this opportunity?" The result will have an impact upon your action.

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CURRICULUM BUILDING IN AGRICULTURE*

Vocational agriculture in the secondary all-day school has two purposes; one vocational and the other educational. Vocationally, the course must function for the student as preparation to farm. To accomplish this it must do for him three things:

1. Give him a working knowledge of productive farming, particularly as it is practiced in his own community.
2. Give him a working knowledge of how best to dispose of his product to assure to him an equitable return.
3. Give him an understanding of his personal, social, and civic duties as a rural citizen.

Educationally, it must give him a training that will enable him more easily and better to solve the problems of life, and particularly life on the farm, as he confronts them. This means:

1. That the course must give him a certain amount of agricultural information, but the mere giving of information can easily be and usually is, over-emphasized. However, the course should teach the student how to find information when it is needed.
2. Vocational agriculture must train the student to do constructive thinking. It should teach him to collect facts, to tabulate data, to consult authority, and with such information, to form judgment of his own.
3. It must train him for community leadership. It must develop initiative and aggressiveness. It must develop the ability to express himself easily and well.
4. It should train him to attack farm problems intelligently and solve them rationally.

As for the first fundamental principal, we must assume in curriculum building that the vocational agricultural department is provided with adequate school equipment; and furthermore, that the student has access to real farm conditions for practical farm work.

As for the second principle, namely, that both content and instruction must be within reach of the training and experience of the prospective student, it is a matter of common knowledge among educators that in real teaching the new must be presented and interpreted in the light of past experiences. Vocational agriculture is unique in the opportunity which it affords to apply this teaching principle. Most vocational agriculture students are really "Trade-extension" students. They come to the department already serving a kind of apprenticeship in farming, and therefore alive to many of its problems. This fact should be capitalized in outlining the course and in planning the instruction.

In order to realize the vocational aim, the subject matter of the curriculum must be the subject matter of the vocation. It is, therefore, to the vocation that we must go to determine what the subject matter of the curriculum must be. In other words, our problem is to find some method whereby we can be assured that the subject matter which we choose for the curriculum is the subject matter of the vocation.

*The above article was prepared 40 years ago and it appeared in the May, 1921 issue of *The Visitor*. It is part of a paper read by Supervisor C. W. Watson at the meeting of the Vocational Association of the Middle West held in Minneapolis in 1921. Its application to current curriculum building in vocational agriculture seems completely appropriate.