

PRINCIPLE DRIVEN PROGRAMS: GUIDEPOSTS FOR CHANGE

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As I speak with you this morning, I'm in my 41st year in professional education in agriculture. My experiences include formal and non-formal education for both youth and adults; I speak from an experiential base. For the most part it has been satisfying, for I've had the opportunity to work with people I like, doing the tasks I like. As a teacher, teacher educator, and administrator, my goal has been, and is, to help others succeed.

This is as exciting a time to be involved in agricultural sciences education as any I have known. Now, as we set a course for the next century, change is all about us. The Vision 2000 report calls for a common vision; that requires a collaborative effort among the various organizations and institutions of agriculture.

The agricultural science program of the next century must open doors for opportunity; therefore, our vision must take into account profound changes in the structure of society. Some of the societal changes that will impact our profession include: the "graying" of the U. S. population, the declining numbers of youth, and the frequency that individuals will change jobs, even careers. Consequently, we should not forget that educational opportunities to accommodate the life-long learning needs of adults is also within the scope of our mission.

In the 21st century fewer students in the agricultural sciences will come from farms and even fewer will return. Persons will prepare for work in different ways and at different times in their lives. School populations will be quite different from those of yesterday; a growing proportion will be poor, non-white, of limited English proficiency and from broken homes. These are givens:

1. Jobs are changing.
2. Student population is changing.
3. Agriculture is changing.

We can "hold a finger in the dike" only so long; eventually we will change to accommodate these demographic shifts or they will overwhelm us. Our challenge is to manage this change so as to meet the new reality as effectively as the best practitioners of our profession have always done.

The first principle in the management of change is full participation. Those who will effect change must be involved in designing and implementing that change. Therefore, youth, adults, the agricultural industry, farmers, teachers, politicians, teacher educators, and academicians must become involved in intensive dialog about our mission and the nature of our programs for the years ahead. Vision 2000 offers a starting point for this dialog.

Another basic concept when implementing change is to assure the stakeholders that they are still valuable and important to the organization. One of the objectives of Vision 2000 states: "to affirm the goals and values of agricultural education." The values we hold are predictive of the decisions we will make (Collier, 1962). To choose which road to take is not only a question of value, it is a question of principle (Covey, 1991) As we implement this Vision 2000 document or any strategic document, what are the principles that will guide us? This question, I believe, must be answered or the initiatives for productive change will simply become another noble effort gone sour.

Before moving to the affirmation of our fundamental principles for education in agriculture, it is important to assess the social and political

context surrounding education. Since the publication of the "Nation at Risk" report, education has been in a crisis of public confidence, and public confidence is directly associated with public funding. To ignore this environment is to invite failure.

Let me illustrate how all of this plays out in real life. In the opinion of such noted researchers as David Berliner (1992) and Gerald Bracey (1992, 1994), sinister forces are dedicated to the destruction of public education. Public education, according to its critics, no longer serves the public good. Organized opposition to public education is well financed and driven by an alliance of ideologues, and radical fringe political and religious groups. Too often they are joined by unwitting citizens who believe they are supporting school reform when they add their voices. Any issue that serves the critic's purpose becomes part of the attack arsenal. Sometimes vocational education is the victim. It's called "dumbing down" education. That most schools are performing reasonably well is one of the best kept secrets in the United States (Bracey, 1994). As professional educators, we have the responsibility to influence these debates and steer the decision-making into a rational, open, and honest process.

In the weeks and months ahead, we will discuss the substance of Vision 2000 and wrestle with its implementation. Every generation must do as we are doing. Let me restate an earlier point, this debate cannot be effective if it is conducted in

1. Free public education is the cornerstone of the American experiment. Democracy requires an educated constituency; a free, universal public education system has served the country well. Public education must continually be improved.
2. Schools are for education, not

the cocoon atmosphere of agricultural education alone. The context of agricultural education in the economic and political climate of all of education cannot be ignored. Hamlin (1949) argued eloquently for the community school which took its cues from the needs of the community and its citizens. His concept must be expanded to include the notion that we are now a global community. School district boundaries no longer define our responsibilities or our possibilities.

To influence the future, each of us, individually and collectively, must articulate our principles. Such principles are the rudder. At this point, I enunciate my own set of values and principles based on over 40 years of professional experience, research, and reflection.

You may have a different set. My point is - all of our sets must be placed on the table and debated until we reach consensus; only then will the profession achieve a solid foundation on which to articulate its future. In fact, progressive teachers all across this nation are inventing new approaches to delivering education in agricultural sciences. In the midst of change, it is hard to know what to hold on to, and what to let go. To help in this process, let me discuss with you seven principles. The first two are basic to education in general; the others have made education in agriculture uniquely different and uniquely effective. These are the absolutes to which, I believe, we must hold fast as we mold our profession for the 21st century.

- indocination. Thinking, valuing, and problem solving are imperative for the 21st Century. Theory and practice are the test of rational thought.
3. From the beginning, the student was the focus of the vo-ag program. "Take students from where they are and help them realize their full potential" was sacred to most ag

educators. Competencies, contests, and confusion have sometimes blurred this fundamental principle. Nevertheless, the student is still key - the core of every good program. Those among us who place the student first will manage the change process most effectively. This also means that the teacher is the role model; the significant other in the lives of many students. Education is embedded in the needs of students within the context of community.

4. The core of the secondary agriculture curriculum from its inception has been the practical application of the science of agriculture. Only since 1963, have we adopted the trade and industrial model of job analysis of the incumbent worker for determining program content. But, think about it. When the practical application of agricultural science drives the curriculum, it becomes impossible for the curriculum to be out of date. What the incumbent worker does today will be obsolete tomorrow at an increasingly faster pace. However, when we teach the practical application of agricultural science, we anticipate the jobs and competencies of the new day that is dawning in agriculture. We must hold fast to the principle that curriculum content for agriculture is the practical application of agricultural science. It is this principle that will attract the brightest and best students into the program.
5. Entrepreneurship, not entry level competency, was our goal. Students

carried out projects, later farming programs, now supervised agricultural experience for the purpose of learning how to manage and operate an agricultural business. As we've moved away from production agriculture as our only objective, we seem to have lost our entrepreneurship fire. This economic development model is now even more crucial than before. Decision making and problem solving that are necessary to support the entrepreneurship approach are critical life skills. We should take all students as far as they are capable in this direction. Entrepreneurship, decision making, and problem solving are uniquely ours and make us uniquely effective. As we design the curriculum for the future, it is critical that we not lose sight of entrepreneurship opportunities.

6. Leadership! Throughout our history agricultural education has been as much about leadership as it has been about agriculture. In most instances, the leadership activities associated with FFA have been positive influences on the lives of young people. The personal development objective of the FFA is effective because it allows each individual to develop personal and social skills as well as occupational skills. Norm Brown, Kellogg Foundation, on Saturday morning, provided us with a living, breathing example of FFA importance. This human resource development model is central to our heritage and key to our future. Leadership, accompanied by the grounding in science, decision making, and

problem solving, uniquely qualifies ag science students not only for the world of work, but for life. This combination of occupational and life skills provides the best possible preparation for a rapidly changing environment. It is these personal attributes and leadership competence that makes our graduates attractive to industry. Repeatedly, industry tells us they want persons who can think, solve problems, and adapt to changing environments. And, know the value of work and how to do it.

7. Community-based programs. In the past in rural communities, the teacher of agriculture has been the educational leader. The person others sought for advice. In some places this is still true. In large and more metropolitan areas, it is more difficult for one person to be that influential. Furthermore, the communities served by schools are larger and more diverse. Nevertheless, it is still important that the teacher of agriculture be active in the community served and understand its power structure. This is particularly true as we move into new areas such as food science or biotechnology. For the program to be credible, the teacher must establish his/her role as an educational leader. Support from the industry served is grounded in a program that meets the needs of the community and is articulated by a teacher who has the community's respect.

Let me quickly list the principles I have enunciated: 1) free, quality public education is fundamental to the American

democracy; 2) schools are for education, not indoctrination; 3) the student is central to the program; 4) the practical application of science determines curriculum content; 5) entrepreneurship, decision making, and problem solving are essential; 6) leadership skills are crucial; and 7) programs are community-based. From my point of view, these seven principles must be practiced for the profession to remain viable and to grow. Coupled with effective and dynamic teachers, attention to these seven principles will enable us to effectively make changes that will build for a solid future. Attention to these seven principles will enhance our image as well. Let me share with you my vision for an agricultural education program in the year 2001, or beyond, that has guided its change process along the guidelines I've suggested.

This program could be Ohio or California; Hawaii or Georgia; Chicago or Philadelphia. It could be in your state. Let's dream.

Youth in the 4th and 5th grade begin to think about careers in agriculture. They are already literate about the role of agriculture and environmental science in our society. This is because it is well understood throughout the school that the agricultural science classroom and laboratory is where the action is in that school. Older students now enrolled in agricultural science classes are self-confident because they are in a program really designed to meet their human as well as occupational needs. They know they have the best of both worlds; they can go directly to post secondary school or college, or they are prepared to enter the world of work. They know that their teachers are on the cutting edge of agricultural science. In fact, the science teachers in the junior high often bring their

classes to the ag facility so that they can see and hear the ag students explain the latest applications in agricultural science.

Students also know that they have the opportunity to make money while in the program. Some will grow out animals and compete in fairs. Using the computer they will have budgeted in advance the costs and returns. Others will work in experience situations in the ag industry. They will also be given the opportunity to explain and demonstrate the skills they are learning to their classmates. Still others will focus on cooperatives and market the biotech products of their school greenhouse. Adult education will meet the continuing educational needs of the agricultural industry.

The agricultural science organization will conduct contests in marketing strategies, tissue culture technology, water quality, and computer generated simulations, in addition to some more traditional public speaking and interview type contests. The measure of a supervised agricultural experience program will not be the neatness of the record book - there won't be any books. Records will be kept via computer and contests will hinge on profit and loss, decision and problem solving ability, and use of advanced technology.

Teachers and students will share information and discoveries via computer networks and satellite technology. Nation-wide, even world-wide contests will be held and students in Pennsylvania will be comfortable interacting with students in California and Alaska.

The program will be the showplace for the community. When school superintendents get together they will brag

about their ag science teachers and programs. Some do now, you know. They will do so because the agricultural education program has strong community support. More students will want to enroll than there is room for them. More flexible schedules will make it possible for students to move into and out of the program to meet their needs. The ag teachers are known on a first name basis by the agricultural industry and the farmers.

Is this vision unrealistic? I hope not. It was Jules Verne, I believe, who said, "If one man can dream it, another man can do it."

Guiding our program change by these seven principles will ensure realization of the dream program I've outlined. We must change, but let the change be guided by the fundamental principles that have made agricultural education the most effective program in the history of American education. What is past is only a glimpse of the possibilities of what we can become. All teacher education has to do is lead the way.

Let's go to work!

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