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Reflection

*If you could do it all over
again--what would
you change?*

Time Turners and Other Interesting Concepts

By Billye Foster

Being the original *Harry Potter* fan, when I think about things I would do differently, I inevitably think of Hermione Granger and her “time-turner.” What a wonderful idea!

In the third book of the series, *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione Granger is taking such a huge load of coursework at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, she is issued a controlled time-turning device. This magical instrument allows the operator to live through a window of time in one location, then simply by turning the instrument return to the initial starting point and move to a new location and complete the expectations there.

Those of us who have time-management issues can only dream of such a tool. When I think back five years, ten years--even 20, there are many things I would like the opportunity to “re-live,” I suppose almost every-

one would feel the same way. Just to have the chance to repair a harsh comment or hasty reaction. Better yet, to bask in the occasional moment when a student shared his/her success with you and made your entire week shine!

As you read through the following articles, I believe you will identify with the stories and the wisdom gained. We can always learn from experience. At the same time, your reading will point to the fact that the past is only a product of the present. And tomorrow is only possible because of the human ability to project the needs of the future.

As educators we need past, present and future. We live in the “now,” and reach our students when their “teachable moments” occur. Sometimes that is done by sharing stories of the past, sometimes it is done by creating stories of the moment. Ultimately, our educational process opens the door to the future for both our students and the students of tomorrow.

If we had a time-turner like Hermione, no doubt we could solve many immediate and small problems. However, if we could solve those problems, what opportunities would we lose? After all, life is a learning experience and even the more challenging moments leave us with new-found knowledge.

Reflection is always a worthwhile activity. It helps us understand our mistakes and our successes. Each of the authors in this issue has chosen to share a piece of their own experience with all of the profession. What could we learn from each other is time allowed such reflection on a routine basis?

As 2008 comes to a close, I suggest you take a few moments and reflect on the road that has brought you to your current professional position. Read the articles held within this issue and take a few moments to project your future stories and experiences in Agricultural Education.

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What does the Rear View Mirror Say?

By Julie Harlin

Looking back on your professional past is similar to looking in the rear view mirror while driving—you get a different perspective than what you just saw flashing through the windshield in front of you.

Kolb's model for experiential learning would suggest that important parts of learning are both experience and reflection. Obviously, we experience a great deal: we teach, we compete, we travel, we practice, we advise, we write, and the list continues. So, we experience a great deal. Do we necessarily learn from that experience? Think about that for a second—do you “learn” from mere experience?



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It seems that the more I “experience” the more I have come to believe that in order to learn, we must stop, take a breath and really reflect on what just happened in the rear view mirror. I see it in myself, in preservice teachers, in inservice teachers, and in other faculty with whom I work. We are sometimes so busy working and achieving that we forget to stop, take a breath, and think, really THINK about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we can do it better.

That is what this issue is about. Not regretting the past or redoing the past, but learning from the past. In this issue you will find a diverse set of articles. I wish I could say that I carefully planned each one, inviting each author months in advance while discussing the topics with each, but that is not the case. Thankfully, the plan has come together without much meddling from me.

In this issue, you will find several articles on “lessons learned” from teachers with varying backgrounds and experience. You will also find articles on managing the change process as well as technology use in the classroom. Lastly, you will find a historical article from April 1937 entitled, “If I were again a teacher of Vocational Agriculture.” Thanks goes to Bill Weeks for locating and submitting this piece that I am sure you will still find relevant in today's fast paced, technologically enhanced world.

So, *what do you see* when you look in your rear view mirror? Hopefully you too can take the time to look back, reflect, and learn from your experiences. After all, experience, without reflection, probably isn't worth having.

Looking Back, I should have let go more!

By Don Edgar

As a new assistant professor and reflecting back on personal experiences through teaching agricultural sciences for 14 years in secondary programs, there are many aspects which I would like to call for a “do over.” Being a young, energetic teacher, I wanted my students to succeed, and I would go the extra mile so they could. You did hear the word “I,” didn’t you? Agreeably, that statement sounds so full of promise and expectation. But like so many things, the wrong road to travel may be paved with very good intentions!

We all try new ideas and different approaches in an effort to encourage our students to get more involved in learning. Some ideas work well and others need to be “tweaked” before trying again. The life of a new teacher, and sometimes a seasoned veteran, is full of new experiences and decisions about techniques and leadership.

Through the transformation of being a secondary teacher to becoming a post secondary instructor, I have reflected on many of these situations in order to transfer the knowledge I gained through personal experience to the incoming groups of preservice teachers. My hope is that they will not make some of the same mistakes that I did. I hope they seek to excel for their students and although we don’t always get it right the first time, it is the act of continual perseverance which aids most in some instances towards student success.

The agricultural teacher “mother bird” syndrome

One of the major concerns, which experienced teachers have voiced throughout the years, has been managing workloads and family life. I was not oblivious to that facet of being an agricultural science teacher. The frequent evenings, nights, and weekend work associated with being an agricultural science teacher can be greatly rewarding but also can cause turmoil in the life of any teacher since their time is spread so thin. As a young educator, I (as most) wanted my students to be successful and gain experiences, giving them a head start on their professional career choices and those life experiences which would mold them into the person they wished to become. That desire consumed much of my time during an average day.

In a day molded by bell schedules, thirty minute lunches, a short planning period, and student projects, a personal life, including sleep, took a distant second versus my duty as an agricultural science teacher. I needed to learn how to release control and allow students to gain experiences resulting in a greater education for themselves. This took some time (actually years) to evolve, but the rewards garnished through this process were significant.

In reflection of my growth as a teacher, I allowed my students

to gain more roles in leadership positions because I needed to let go of my control. Their education was more personal because they had buy-in, due to more self-direction and assuming leadership roles in the program not controlled, but advised by the teacher. In my desire to control their success through my advisory capacity, I had not allowed them to engage in the experiences they needed in order to mature, grow educationally, and find self-confidence through hands-on experience. I controlled their success but I did not let them succeed.

Letting your students “test” their wings

Students are in our programs to learn and gain experiences; subsequently when they enter the market place of professional life, they are more able to compete and be successful. As instructors of agriculture and advisors to FFA organizations, we must allow them to have the most positive and educational experiences we can elicit and manage. We should be their advisors and not just the demonstrators of techniques and leaders. Practical experience never comes in second place unless it is the only way students are able to be taught because of limited resources and with the realization that this may cause them to not be as well educated because of the lack of purposeful and personal experiences.

When I understood how much I was keeping from my students (experiences) and what they were able to do with some guidance, their abilities increased and my work time **decreased**. The net investment positively affected the return (ROI). Isn't that what we are supposed to be doing all along? I understood that thought more as I matured, but it is a lesson that is hard to grasp by many new teachers.

As agricultural science teachers we have much invested in "our" programs and it behooves us to make them better. The answer is not always for us to control the programs but implement best management practices (BMP) that affect our ROI, which should be student learning and growth. If we set our students up for success, they can and will attain more knowledge and improved performance. How many agricultural science teachers are guilty of making sure everything gets done by doing it ourselves instead of transferring learning experiences into complete experiences for our students?

When it's time to let go and allow students to perform, we need to take a seat and allow them to perform. We should then advise them instead of just being demonstrators of proper performance or self-directed leaders. But we must also remember that "Doing to Learn" comes after "Learning to Do." Education is our profession. Pragmatic application of learning ideas is a hallmark

of agricultural education. We should never circumvent the need for success above practical use and experiences our students gain through our classroom and laboratory learning activities.

Be proud as they "fly on their own"

There are many ways for students

"As agricultural science teachers we have much invested in "our" programs and it behooves us to make them better. The answer is not always for us to control the programs, but implement best management practices (MBP)..."

to perform or "doing to learn." Allow your students to have the best authentic assessment of skills necessary to be successful in life. By educating in this fashion, agricultural science teachers will have more time for themselves and their families. Students want to learn and we must allow them to not only listen to us but also put into practice what we preach to them. Being able to showcase the multitude of talents students

possess will not only make them proud of their abilities but show administration and local communities the value of our programs. We strive to implant in our students the qualities that will impact their lives and make them better citizens.

Agricultural educators should allow students to learn those skills through ownership, and demonstrate performance and authentic assessment of the skills they obtain. The agricultural educator has the skills and knowledge to guide and assess students. Additionally, agriculture teachers best understand the needs of his/her students and can advise them on career exploration, skills, and proficiencies needed for future career paths. Agriculture teachers hold the keys to positive student achievement and growth through their advisement methods and the role they play in the educational growth of their students. Allow them to be self-directed learners and explorers of information, ideas, and all of the other roles they can be associated with in your program. Be there to help when needed and be able to sit back and applaud and yell accolades when they exceed everyone's expectations.

Provide your students with the best experience you can, not by dividing up experiences so they are more easily doable, but challenging enough and holistic in their part of the experiences so learning occurs in a greater context. Breaking up large plans at first allows students to learn initially, but soon in their lives they will be asked to take on large projects without much help or guidance, and they can gain those skills in your classroom. Although letting go of our control of a situation may be very hard at times, like the first time we tried to teach a child to cross the

monkey bars, we must let go of the child when he/she feels comfortable. This is a necessary step, if we ever desire for him/her to get to the other side by him/herself and experience a great sense of accomplishment and triumph in succeeding in a challenge thought impossible.



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The acorn...simply knows that it is an oak tree and trusts the wisdom of its life process.



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*Agricultural Education Program Model
Designs--What Are You
Doing to Meet YOUR Community's Needs?*

Oh the Places You'll Go...and the Questions You'll Ask!

by Ryan Foor, Rebekah Epps, Jeremy Faulk, Daniel Foster and Jon Simonsen

Congratulations! Today is your day. You're off to Great Places! You're off and away! (Seuss, 1990).

Many of us have used Dr. Seuss' book "*Oh, the Places You'll Go!*" as a teaching tool in leadership classes, to inspire a chapter officer team, and as a graduation gift. There's something about Seuss' ability to rhyme that brings us back to this book time after time. More importantly, the advice offered in this little book goes a long way whether you're a high school graduate or a brand new teacher. The five authors of this article have a combined 30 years teaching experience in secondary Agricultural Education and are currently graduate students in teacher education. As we thought about what we would change if we went back to the secondary classroom, we remembered the exciting journey of beginning a new teaching position and the questions we would ask today based on our previous experiences. Our advice comes in the form of "Enduring Values" for new and aspiring agriculture teachers. The values are framed around the burning questions we would ask if we were to "do it all over again."

Why should we teach?

Fame! You'll be famous as famous can be, with the whole wide world watching you win on TV. (Seuss, 1990).

When addressing this question, the most basic answer is because: It is **fun!** If the possibility existed to go back again, our focus would be on acknowledging just how incredibly fun the job of teaching high school agriculture is. As agriculture teachers, we look fondly back on the times when homes and businesses readily welcomed us in their doors because we cared enough to ask, to visit, to check on student projects, and to show appreciation and excitement. Agriculture was truly learned best by serving as agricultural education ambassadors to the communities in which we taught where there were so many individuals and businesses who wanted to find out how they could help our students. Contemplating that now, as we work tirelessly behind a computer doing a variety of new duties, we can only smile and shake our heads. We were getting paid to canvass the community and talk to students about exciting opportunities in an industry we are passionate about. There were times when it was reminiscent of the TV show *Cheers*: always going where everyone knows your name. We were famous in our own little way; famous for caring about student success. We were members of an exclusive club called Ag Teachers and enjoyed the collegiality of being part of that group. We enjoyed the role of being the agriculture teacher with all the duties and responsibilities that come with the title.

Looking back, there are so many individuals who volunteered for or

had hobbies related to areas that were just part of the agriculture teacher's job. For example, people who would help with welding projects in the shop, livestock shows on the weekend, and farm shows during the year. Usually the resources to carry out these activities are subsidized by our schools, whereas community members have to ask for time off work, buy their own equipment, or pay their own travel funds to do the same things. Take a moment to look around your county fair, see how many people are there on their own dime and are using vacation days to do things that you are being paid to do! Our job is fun. We get to work with so many outstanding people! *Except when they don't. Because, sometimes, they won't.* (Seuss, 1990).

While the previously mentioned memories were fun, they were not the best things. No, the best memories occurred without recognition and had nothing to do with "fame." Just as true character is revealed by what you do and how you act when no one else is watching, great agriculture teachers are affirmed by the lives they change and the small things that they do that no one else will ever know about. These are the actions that are not measured by plaques, trophies, or ribbons; they are the actions that usually only the teacher and the student ever know about. The moments where we see the opportunity to point a student in the right direction for success and take action in making positive

change occur! As we all know, the victories and moments that we hold with us for years to come are rarely commemorated with awards, but rather by lives inspired. People cannot touch the life of another without being touched and changed themselves. Those lives changed will be intertwined with ours for the rest of time and for that, we are thankful. Why teach? Teach because you will have a great time, make a positive difference, and create memories that will last a lifetime.

Enduring Value: Appreciation

Do I have to know it all?

*And when you're in a Slump,
you're not in for much fun.
Un-slumping yourself is not
easily done. You will come to
a place where the streets are
not marked. Some windows
are lighted. But mostly they're
darked. (Seuss, 1990).*

A challenge faced by agriculture teachers is keeping up with and understanding a vast amount of content. At times this can be overwhelming and one may doubt his/her ability to be successful.

As educators in a classroom, we understand the importance of students asking questions and asking for help. When students become comfortable and are not afraid to ask questions, the classroom becomes richer for all students and the instructor. So why as teachers are we often afraid to ask questions and for help? It may be because we see asking for help as a weakness or are afraid of what others will think. We wear a "badge" that says we can survive on our own, yet education is about collaboration and discovery.

One of the authors remembers

when he was invited to a veteran teacher's school one evening for a meeting. Upon completion of the meeting, after everyone had left, the veteran teacher asked if there was anything he could do to help this novice teacher who expressed the frustrated feeling of being a little overwhelmed and not knowing where to look for resources. Knowing how he could help, the veteran teacher pointed to the file



cabinets in his room. In the cabinets were all of his notes, handouts, resources, and contest preparation materials. The veteran teacher was willing to share any of the materials and even offered to photocopy them. The materials he shared that evening were tremendously beneficial, but his willingness to share was the most valuable lesson.

Many have heard the analogy that teaching can feel like being on an island, but in agricultural education we are not alone on that island. Agriculture teachers are willing to share. They believe in developing students and fostering an appreciation for agriculture. This belief does not stop with our secondary students but also includes our colleagues in the profession.

Asking for assistance and help from

other educators, administrators, and community members is not a sign of weakness but an awareness that a teacher is not alone on an island. There may be a few who are unwilling to help, but many more exist who will. In reflection, not being afraid to ask for help will not only enhance the learning experience for the students in the classroom but will enhance the teaching experience.

A teacher does not **need** to know it all, but rather be willing to ask our tremendous network of colleagues to help in the teaching and learning process. Whether early in your career or toward the final stages, always remember the best lessons are the ones that are shared.

Enduring Value: Assistance

Is there life beyond school?

*Step with care and great tact and
remember that Life's a Great
Balancing Act. (Seuss, 1990).*

We balance our checkbooks, our diets, and even our tires. Life is truly a great balancing act. For many beginning agriculture teachers, balancing their personal, professional, and spiritual lives is always a major concern. These feelings of being overwhelmed exist since beginning teachers feel pulled in several directions. We know the importance of being prepared with daily lesson plans, CDE practices, SAE visits, along with the general duties of a teacher including faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and the dreaded lunchroom duty. There is also the pull to be at home when your spouse needs you, dinner needs to be made, the children have to be picked up from school for the

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doctor's appointment, and you just remembered that your daughter's dance recital is tomorrow night! We feel pulled to go to our houses of worship and establish routines for meditation, fellowship with kindred spirits, and reflection on purpose in life. With all of this pulling, it is easy for a beginning teacher to become distracted, anxious, and even discouraged. It is one author's observation and experience that agriculture teachers have a tendency to focus on one of the areas—professional, personal, or spiritual; being able to effectively balance all three is another story. Unfortunately, there is no mathematical equation that can balance your life. Some agriculture teachers choose to combine both their professional and personal lives. For example, countless children of agriculture teachers have spent many an hour at county fairs and livestock shows long before they were old enough to enter projects. Similarly, there are teachers who rely on FFA members to help babysit when Career Development Events run longer than normal. Balance is not something that is easily achieved but with a little practice and work, it can make all three areas of your life more enjoyable. Yes, it is possible to have a life outside of school; you just have to work at balancing it all to make it happen.

Enduring Value: Balance

Should I let them see me smile?

Oh, the places you'll go! There is fun to be done! There are points to be scored. There are games to be won. And the magical things you can do with that ball will make you the

winning-est winner of all. (Seuss, 1990).

As a new high school agriculture teacher, there are a lot of jobs to get done: curriculum to plan, lesson plans to write, labs to clean, supplies to order, and classrooms to organize. Of course teachers also need to get acclimated to the community, the school administration, and develop their own social life. Where does building rapport with the students fit? Beginning teachers have all heard the advice: "Don't let the students see you smile within the first 6 months."

New teachers have a lot of pressures whether they are starting a new program, taking over for another teacher, or joining a multiple teacher program. A common problem for beginning teachers is to be seen as professionals and not lead students to believe the class is an "easy A." Rigorous classroom activities are important for student success, but professionalism should not be a replacement for having fun.

We have realized the benefits of having fun as a teacher. "Fun" can and must be fun for the teacher, as well as the students. Opportunities for teachers to have fun might include attending FFA activities with students, particularly with a small group of students. One of the authors shared the following personal story:

"I distinctly remember my first National FFA Convention trip. I had six students who traveled to the convention with me and we got to know each other as we toured sites along the way and experienced the convention. All professional expectations were upheld and the students were models for official dress. Certainly they

were very professional, but we also found time to have fun. We went to a go-cart track one evening which seemed more like going with friends or family instead of students. When we returned to school, those students from the trip were retelling stories to their friends and explaining how much fun they had. As a direct result, the students were more engaged in the classroom, making me a better teacher."

Make a strong effort to include fun activities into the agriculture program during the first year. Maintaining standards of professionalism is important, but should not completely overshadow the fun aspects in an agricultural education program. It is surprising how the first few fun interactions with students will help with classroom management and interaction, as well as keep everyone's spirit high.

It can be easy for a teacher to only focus on the professional aspect of the job. Try to let your guard down a little and make class fun! Tell a farm joke as an interest approach, help plan FFA activities that are fun, and don't be afraid to let the students see you smile.

Enduring Value: Enthusiasm

When will they get it?

Somehow you'll escape all that waiting and staying. You'll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing. (Seuss, 1990).

Things don't always happen the way we want them to. Students don't always respond the way we want them to, assessment scores aren't as good as we think they should be, and CDE teams don't place the way we

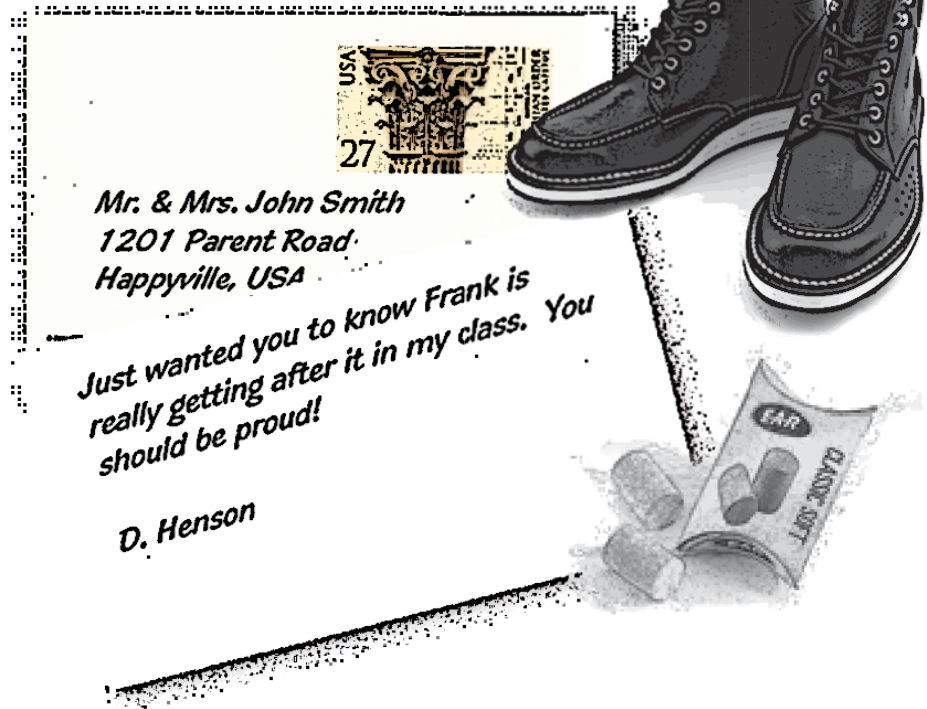
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Good Shoes, Ear Plugs, And Postcards...

by Don Hensen

Last Saturday I came in the house hot and tired. Thought I'd rest a minute, drink a glass of sweet tea, and catch a little college football on the "Great Box of Knowledge." My wife had gone to town for groceries. I must have sat there close to an hour. Good chair, fan blowing cool air on me, had my shoes off. I was really enjoying the telecast of the game when Laura came in from the store, covered her ears with her hands, and politely screamed, "DO YOU THINK WE COULD TURN THAT DOWN A LITTLE?" I thought the volume was just about right.

The experienced operator knows that whether it's a band saw or a hay baler, the first sign of equipment failure is the pitch of the tool subtly changing from a B natural to a B sharp. Because I'm luckier than I am smart, I have not yet had a student seriously injured in a shop accident, but fear of injury has kept me from wearing hearing protection. It was my fear that ear plugs would cost me the split second it took to hear the change in the tone of a tool. I was afraid I might need that split second to get a kid out of a saw or grinder. It's a poor excuse for not wearing ear plugs and I've lost some of my hearing as a result. Likewise, being a tight wad had me wearing cheap shoes on those concrete shop floors all these years. Now I walk around like I remember my Dad doing. Feels like I need sealed bearings in my knees and ankles. I should have bought good shoes.



What would I do differently if I could start all over again?

When I started teaching in Weatherford, Texas in 1975 I could not have known all that lay in store. The clarity of vision provided by 50 years in the school house, 33 of them behind the teacher's desk, sheds the light of experience on a few things I might sure modify.

I cannot remember a single year when I finished in the spring satisfied with the amount of real teaching I got done. Developing the skill of knocking out mundane paper pushing chores quickly enough to preserve some of the day for school teaching would be my new goal. The inability to say "no" to free jobs for school and community

also robbed a lot of teaching time from my kids. Community service is important and I wanted to teach my kids to do their share, but I now fear that always saying "yes" led some administrators and community folks to think we were just setting up at the ag shop, waiting for them to come up with something for us to do. A small sign under the shed of a local tractor mechanic said it all: "We've done so much with so little for so long, now they think we can do anything with nothing at all in no time flat!" In my next life I might just say "no, thanks" occasionally, if only to familiarize folks with the concept.

In that same vein, it is likely that as the son of depression era parents, I prided myself a little too much in my ability to "make do." Too late

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think they should. We tend to forget that “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” In terms of classroom teaching, it is difficult when we feel like we aren’t getting our message across to our students. Even after trying a couple of different methods there are times when students just don’t get it. When this happens, we must step back and think, “Am I getting it?” There were times when the best planned lessons were a flop. Was it because of the students or was it because of the teacher? As teachers, we have an important task of taking a positive leadership role in the classroom to make sure the daily objectives are met. We must assess the situation and consider what is happening in the classroom, in the school, and in the community and adjust our methods to fit the situation. These adjustments can take time.

When teachers start new positions, sometimes they find that the students’ ideas about how things should happen differ from how they, the teacher, think things should happen. This can particularly be a problem with classroom discipline. We hear about how Mr. or Mrs. So-and-So did it. Again, it takes time for students to adjust to a new teacher. We have to remember that “*Because I said so*” isn’t always the best answer or the best approach. Patience, persistence, and consistency go a long way in setting the tone for how matters of classroom management will play out. Like any life change, whether it is starting a new job or a new exercise regime, visible change takes time. New agriculture teachers must remember that invisible change is always taking place – every little thing we do has an impact on our students. Over time, some of those early challenges begin to disappear. Early on many teachers ask, “When will they get it?” However, the answer to that question lies

within us and that answer is, “I got it!” What did we get? Patience – the realization that making little changes over time will have a great impact in the end. The time comes soon enough when we find the “bright places” in teaching and can focus on more of the rewarding aspects of teaching students.

Enduring Value: Patience

We know there are times when teaching agriculture seems tough, but we also know that it is a great job. Beyond the valuable content we teach our students, we are able to build lasting relationships with those students. The places you’ll go as an agriculture teacher might include

Indianapolis

and Washington, DC, but are those the “places” that will make a lasting difference? Certainly some of the experiences that take place on those trips will be memorable; however, the “places you’ll go” are beyond any geographic location. The places you’ll go will be the experiences you’ll create for your students and holding the Enduring Values of ***Appreciation, Assistance, Balance, Enthusiasm,*** and ***Patience*** will help get you there.

Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So...get on your way! (Seuss, 1990).

References

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Front row (l-r): Ryan Foor, Daniel Foster; Back row (l-r): Jon Simonsen, Rebekah Epps, Jeremy Falk

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Would-Have, Should-Have: Dialogue on Teaching

by Nancy Grudens-Schuck, Michael S. Retallick, Thomas Paulson, Michael Pate, Awoke Dollisso, and Moreetsi Thobega

What would a teacher do differently if she or he had the chance? Six colleagues with ties to Iowa State University (ISU) convened a dialogue on “What we might do differently.” We present our dialogue in conversational format, interview-style.

Dialogue with Michael S. Retallick, ISU assistant professor and former high school ag teacher

Nancy: Mike R., it was seven years ago in rural Iowa in January 2001 when you last taught as a high school agricultural instructor at Maquoketa Community Schools. Before 2001, like Tom and Mike P. who join the dialogue later, you taught high school freshmen to seniors and were engaged in a myriad of FFA, SAE, and other core student experiences. You developed a well-respected Maquoketa program - arguably saving the program from being discontinued. What elements led to stabilizing the program as “Mr. R.,” as you were affectionately called by students?

Mike R.: In brief: Ownership, dedication, and communication. I made everyone feel like they were an important part of the program. Parents and community members were involved through an alumni organization. They knew what was going on in the program. We did “things” in class – students were learning and engaged. Students told their friends positive stories, which led their friends to sign up for ag classes in greater numbers. Their families in

turn provided support when called upon. I was committed to providing students with opportunities and I dedicated whatever time was necessary to make sure they were successful. Success bred more success.

Nancy: Building and then solidifying a program is tough work. Anything you would have done differently that might have made the process easier –perhaps easier on yourself and your family – the “work/life balance” factor as we now call it?

Mike R.: Yes, I would do some things differently. At that point in my career, my philosophy was to expose students to all of the opportunities that agricultural education had to offer (e.g., leadership activities, judging events, career development events, community service learning projects, etc.). This action on my part certainly sparked interest and increased participation among students and the community; however, it did in fact create a personal “monster” that was difficult for one person to manage. I knew that my life was out of balance when, during an October convention season, I left on a Monday morning for National FFA Convention. It took until Thursday evening that same week for it to occur to my four-year-old daughter to ask my wife “where Dad was.” She hadn’t seen me in a while, but had apparently become accustomed to my absence. I realized that my family had become used to Dad being gone. If I had to do it over, I would select a

few key experiences for students. I would better evaluate what I could offer as the sole teacher/coach and determine, with the assistance of an advisory council, which activities would benefit students the most. I would resist the “do-it-all” mentality. Okay – and another other thing I would do differently would be to say “No!” a little more often.

Nancy: Is there something from within the educational intellectual canon - “the literature”—that supports the idea that focusing on a few key experiences for students might be wiser from an educational perspective as well as being more family-friendly?

Mike R.: At this point in my career, I am fortunate that I am at an institution that has taken Boyer’s (1990) work to heart by taking a broader view of scholars and scholarship. ISU’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching espouses that scholarship of teaching goes beyond scholarly teaching (i.e., teaching extremely well), because scholarship also involves inquiry into the teaching and learning process, and encourages dissemination of the findings. This philosophy enables faculty members to maintain foci on learning, discovery, and engagement under an umbrella of their expertise. Things have also changed for me because I am no longer focusing on six or seven preps each night. University club advisement also isn’t as heavy of a commitment in terms of coverage as needed at most high school-level programs.

Nancy: Now armed with the PhD and an understanding of the lexicon from the likes of Boyer, do you possess have the secret to saying “No” more often? Because a lot of us would like to know.

Mike R.: If it were only that easy. I am a service-oriented individual by nature, which makes it very difficult to say no. However, my experiences in higher education have helped me to understand and value the importance of focus. Although it may only be an ideal, today I strive to make my responsibilities blend in a manageable manner. As a faculty member at a land-grant institution, I strive to weave research, teaching, and service in a manner that creates synergy rather than conflict and stress. It also helps to be part of a faculty with members with their own areas of specialization, which assists staying focused.

Dialogue with Thomas Paulson, instructor at ISU and PhD candidate, after 21 years teaching ag.

Nancy: Tom, you moved in 2008 from classroom ag teaching to a university instructor and PhD candidate dual position. You taught at Carroll Public High School and Kuemper Catholic School in Iowa – a public-private position. You engaged in the full range of activities for 21 years, and received local, state, regional, association, and national awards (whew!). Where to begin when reflecting on “would-have, should-have?”

Tom: After 21 years of teaching, I have tried many things. Some strategies worked well with certain audiences and some did not. I feel that my teacher tool box is actually overloaded; yet at the same time I know that the correct specialty tool is there somewhere: I just need to dig it out and review the operator’s manual. So application -- the right time, right

place, and right students – is key.

Nancy: Can you give us a programmatic perspective?

Tom: You are right that a program should be looked at differently from the point of view of classroom instruction – the day-to-day stuff. After participating in the National Quality Program Standards pilot project for Iowa, I discovered that my own program was not proficient in several areas. It was not balanced. I became convinced through the national work that I needed a better balance among instruction/laboratory, experiential learning, and leadership development. Some background: My program had been a two-teacher program until about five years ago. After the second teaching position was staff-reduced, I discovered that my inability to say “No” had overburdened me with FFA activities. Don’t get me wrong, I truly enjoyed the FFA activities, but they had started to compromise my ability to evaluate all students Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs, for example. My Individualized Professional Development Plan goal, had I stayed at the high school level, would have been to concentrate on balancing SAE and FFA.

Nancy: It sounds like you needed the national opportunity to gain a bird’s eye view of program balance, even after twenty-some years of teaching. What led you to work state-wide and nationally? Sounds like a lot of work, which Mike R. noted dampens family relationships.

Tom: Good point. But I have always believed that to improve professionally, I needed to take a critical look at what I was doing in my practice from several angles. I believe that individuals engaged in the agriculture industry – espe-

cially those in agriculture education – have the opportunity and the responsibility to tell the story of the nation’s food, fiber and natural resources systems. To do this effectively, we must be respected for our endeavors in our classrooms, schools and communities. I believe that agriculture teachers should provide critical professional insight as well as local leadership.

Dialogue with Awoke Dollisso, Assistant Professor, and Iowa community college ag instructor for 6 years.

Nancy: Awoke, you recently changed in 2008 from a community college agricultural education position in Sioux City, Iowa – teaching both face-to-face and online distance education – to a university-based teaching position at Iowa State University. You had the privilege of teaching content in which you are strong: animal sciences. I was surprised when you told me that one of the most satisfying elements of that teaching experience was online instruction, especially when students became highly engaged in “threaded discussions” via the internet on animal health issues. What elements of the way you organized the threaded discussions led to high engagement?

Awoke: The content topic was cell structure and mitosis. I set up a threaded discussion on mitosis and cancer. Cancer is caused by uncontrolled cell division or failure of mitotic cell division control mechanisms. Students read in their text books. I also posted a video clip on cell biology and cancer. I asked students not to re-state what they read and watched, but to reflect, to make real life connections, and to share their views with others. I required a minimum of two posts from each student. The first reflection post had to be based on what they read and watched (but still an original

and personalized response). A few days later, students were required to review all original posts of their classmates, and to write reflection on his or her experiences learning about others' points of view. Many shared their own, or a family member's experience, with cancer. The topic was relevant to their life experience and the knowledge they gained was insightful. Many expressed emotions – such as hope and encouragement gained from the advances in scientific research in the fight against cancer. The other aspect of their engagement was that they felt safe and confident enough to share their thoughts with their peers. The students were engaged, thinking, and articulate. I believe that is active learning. As an instructor and faculty member, it was exciting for me to see.

Nancy: From our prior discussions, a face-to-face animal nutrition course, a highly challenging subject area, seemed to require a fair bit of instructional experimentation on the way to success. How might you change the way you taught the in-class animal nutrition course now that you have had time to reflect?

Awoke: Students needed to master the content in this case before they started applying their knowledge. I would still spend time on the lecture side explaining and giving examples on foundation content. I would then move to assignments that involved real life situations where students could begin to apply the concepts. One assignment could be students visiting a farm where livestock are being raised, interview the owner and manager of the operation, and analyze the feeding system. Then the students could organize and share that information with the entire class. I would organize a visit to a couple more livestock farms where there were different species. I

would expect students to write their reflections on that experience. The point here is that I would do more to make what students were learning in the class relevant to them or help them to see the real life application.

Dialogue with Michael Pate, MS, doctoral student, instructor

Nancy: Mike P., even though I have known you as a doctoral student in our department, I admit that I was astounded to learn through our recent discussions that you serviced three schools' aged programs, including two junior high schools and one high school, all situated in Springdale, Arkansas. Your final teaching term was spring 2006. I understand, as well, that in addition to multiple schools, your classes featured a student population high in ethnic, language, nationality, and racial diversity different from your own ethnicity and upbringing. With relief, I learned that you had a co-teacher with you focusing on mechanics and technology, and a colleague focusing on horticulture and animal science. What helped you to juggle the several school sites, FFA and SAE, as well as the riches of diversity?

Mike P.: It was difficult at the start. I began the job just as fuel prices had increased, and my big 'o truck was really hitting the wallet. The school district reimbursed for mileage, but it did not cover all of my costs. Also, I found myself physically exhausted at the end of the day. I had to eat lunch and complete my class prep on the go. It took a toll on me. Traffic during my commute was congestive, and I was afraid on a daily basis that I would have an accident and be late for classes. I had five minutes to switch between the junior highs, which were across town from each other. I had 30 minutes to travel to the high school, complete my

prep, and eat lunch. It took lots of patience and dedication. At each school we had an English as a Second Language (ESL) specialist that really took the time to help us with our curriculum, so I was supported there. The school district provided lots of professional development to assist teachers in managing our classrooms well, and took the time to educate us on the cultures of our students. That helped a lot. The schools each promoted a climate rich in communication and collaboration between teachers, administrators, students, and parents. I was grateful for that and have learned that this does not happen everywhere.

Nancy: What an upbeat story. Upon reflection Mike P., what skills or habits did you wish you had possessed before taking that first complex school position? What would perhaps have eased your way as a new teacher?

Mike P.: Things that I wish I had at the ready would be fluency in a second language, a fuel efficient vehicle, and lots more patience. I also now see that I would have benefited from a study abroad program when I was an undergraduate, as well as the opportunity to student teach in a school with students from different countries or cultures from my own.

And now: Moreetsi Thobega, PhD and lecturer, back teaching at Botswana College of Agriculture after a several year hiatus during an ISU-based doctoral program

Nancy: I now turn now to Moreetsi, who twice left his home continent of Africa to gain higher education degrees in the Agricultural Education major at ISU. Moreetsi, before you left Botswana, you taught agricultural education courses, including instruction and measurement; and

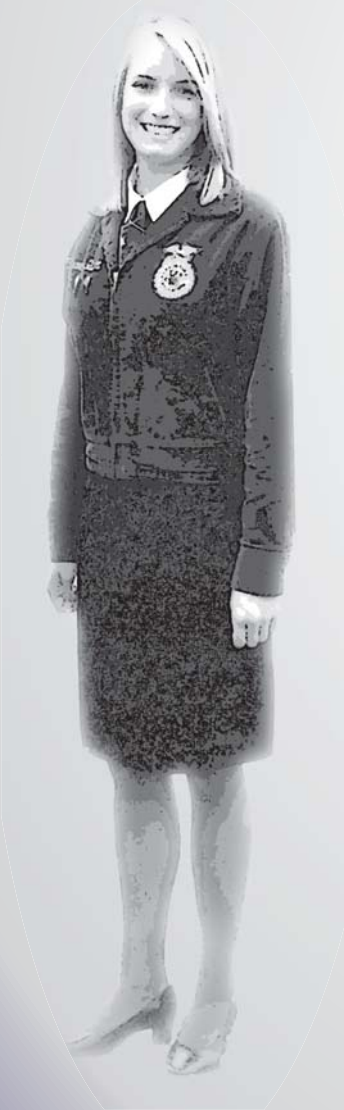
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Change is possible--sometimes it is just hard to do!



Ever notice that some topics resurface every now-and-then? In Arizona I think the prize has to go to “What is an acceptable SAE?” We talk about it every summer, just as if it has never been mentioned before. In fact, I think if we did not talk about it, people would probably leave the teachers’ conference believing they were at the wrong activity!

Another one of those topics is appropriate official dress for female FFA members. This topic has been discussed and voted on and discussed many times over the years. Recently a friend of mine attended the National FFA Convention for the first time. In fact, her experience with anything to do with FFA has been limited--so much so I decided she qualified as an “objective observer.” Following the Convention, she shared a few thoughts. I felt they were worth considering and allowing us to look at this topic one more time!



“I know I should just get over it, but my trip to the National FFA Convention last week got me thinking about skirts. Maybe that’s because I saw thousands and thousands of teenage girls wearing them, along with the requisite hosiery and dress shoes, last week as they attempted to stay on their feet through four long days at the convention.

You see, skirts are a part of FFA official dress. Official dress for women was created back in 1973 in order to ensure uniformity and dignity within the organization. I get that. I’m told that it is supposed to teach kids how to dress professionally and that’s what really gets me.

Women don’t have to wear a skirt in order to be dressed up. In fact, I attended the four day conference in what I consider to be “professional dress” without ever sporting a skirt or nylons. I don’t even own a pair of nylons. Does that make me unprofessional? Is this the message we want to send to teenage girls who are already oversensitive about their bodies and clothes?

Walking long distances in dress shoes (even sensible ones) is never comfortable. I saw one smart girl sporting black crocs, and I actually stopped to applaud her sensibility. Now that I read the official rules of FFA dress, I see that crocs are not acceptable footwear, although I still think she was smart for wearing them. She was probably one of the only girls I saw who was actually still wearing her shoes by the end of convention - most girls had given up and were walking around barefoot or with tennis shoes on, or worse, they were still teetering around in their dress shoes in obvious pain. And I ask you, how professional is that?”

*Think about it!
Billye*

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in my career I realized that if not for me a lot of my kids would not have an advocate at school. Perhaps I was too afraid of being told “no” and just didn’t ask for that new welding machine or a little travel money for that CDE team headed for the state or national contest. I now think I could have been the squeaky wheel a little more often and gotten my kids a little extra grease.

For sure I could have kept a log of some of the grand stories that have sprouted in my experiences all these years. Had I done so, the situations, the characters, and the events of thirty-three school years, thirty-three FFA banquets, and thirty-three county stock shows would be a real fun document to have, if for no one else but me. The only worthy use I have found for a computer so far is storage of digital photos. Were I a rookie teacher today I would hope I’d keep a few kid pictures each year. On tough days it might help remind us of what this ag teaching gig is all about.

We’ve all said it. “If I knew then what I know now.” I’ll use stupidity as an excuse. Had I been a little less trusting of both kids and adults in those early years I think I could have gotten along better. No, I’m not saying that you should start out assuming everyone is out to get you. But neither do I think I should have assumed that all school administrators, parents, and kids had wholesome motives. I hope I have taken the high road and expected honest behavior from those with whom I have worked, but on several occasions exercising appropriate oversight would have resulted in a more appropriate outcome.

Even as I pen these lines, I wonder if I would have been a more effective

teacher had I been more straightforward in explanations. I wanted to “do unto others” and treat them like I wanted to be treated. My hypersensitivity to criticism makes me not want to be hit over the head with the correction stick when I make a mistake, despite the fact that I have made plenty. Too often I may have beaten around the bush when pointing out things I wanted fixed. An advantage of this approach has been the effectiveness of butt chewings when, on rare occasion, they were used.

Were I able to start over today, I would like to focus more on an indirect lesson plan that would lead my kids and the adults over whom I might have some influence, to be less judgmental of each other. When I was in the first grade there was a box on one side of the report card about “works and plays well with others.” I would like to have done my teaching business in such a way that would make those around me more focused on their business while wasting less time evaluating others. Kids can be mean to each other. Likely, they learned it from us adults. Perhaps they could learn tolerance in the same manner.

A neighbor spent several years in the state legislature and seemed quite the philosopher. He was fond of saying, “He who tooteth not his own horn, the same is tooted not.” Said it was in the Bible. Book of Layton. He might sure be right. If I could turn back the hands of time, I might pass on a few of those free repair jobs for the boss, and take a few more pictures of good ag kids doing good things and send them to the local paper. Chances are I could have inspired an extra kid or two.

Way too late in my career I struck upon an idea that worked. I sent one postcard each week home to parents of some youngster who had worked hard in my class. The results were stunning. “Just wanted you to know Frank is really getting after it in my class. You

should be proud. D. Henson.” Two weeks after the first one, a parent conference was scheduled and I naturally expected the worst. I walked into the parent conference and found a dad with tears in his eyes. “We’ve had letters from school, but never good ones,” he said. For the next two years I could not chase this kid out of my shop at the end of the day, and his parents were the best helpers I had. The same thing happened with a host of other postcard recipients. Bragging on good kids who have worked hard is always a worthy use of our time.

Few things about a wonderful teaching career surpass the joy of working with student teachers, eager young men and women who want to take up our profession. ***My parting advice to them would likely have something to do with ear plugs, good shoes, and postcards.***



Don Henson is an Agricultural Science teacher at James Madison High School in San Antonio, Texas. He has taught agricultural science for over 33 years.

also management and agricultural business courses, to both AS and BS students at the Botswana College of Agriculture. Can you tell us at least one idea gained from your doctoral program at ISU that impacted the way you teach currently?

Moreetsi: As may be apparent from my job title (lecturer), providing instruction through lecture was prominent in African institutions in the past. One major idea gained from my PhD program was to assist my classes to be participatory and student-friendly. Even though I teach relatively large classes, sometimes as many as sixty in one course, I still try by all means possible to let students take the lead in some of the teaching and learning activities. I learned at ISU how to create a more relaxed teaching and learning atmosphere by designing class activities that allow and encourage creativity. In a recent Measurement and Evaluation course, I encouraged students, in groups, to design a group test. They started by framing items from the syllabus, took the test through validation and reliability testing processes, then administered and graded the test, and finally, analyzed their own grades. The students were fascinated with the exercise; at the very least, they had now tasted the lecturer's side of things.

Nancy: What theory or instructional experience led you to try the new approach?

Moreetsi: It was so not much instructional theories that led me to reflect and change my instructional approach, but what I had learned about the range of teaching styles at ISU. I experienced student-centered and participatory learning approaches from ISU courses that left positive impressions on me such that sometimes,

when I engage in a teaching style, I am aware that I learned it from a specific professor while at ISU.

Nancy: Moreetsi, your explanation parallels what educators know about the role of mirroring and emotions in learning and transformative change. Also, while you were in Iowa, you worked on non formal adult and extension education projects and were popular with farmers. Have there been opportunities to weave non formal learning?

Moreetsi: Yes, I use group dynamics theory a lot. Believe me, I am teaching 54 students in my Research Methods class and there is no way I can engage them without resorting to group work. One thing I learned about groups is that groups can be effective as long as there is something of common interest that binds the members together. I am just now experimenting with another technique in this vein. A few weeks back, I issued topics for students to work on in groups. I did not physically assign the student to a group but I asked them to locate other students who were assigned the same topic (the students did not at this point in the course know each other). Just by having to look for each other outside of class, they will strike acquaintances, and their topic should bind them as a group. The assignment is ongoing. I don't yet know how it will work out.

Nancy: Have you reflected on practices used in Botswana or other countries in Africa that might be used effectively in the US aged context – if Americans were aware of them?

Moreetsi: Maybe. I'm not sure whether this would work in the US. It is a practice that starts at high school, called "subject groups." We stream students according to subject groups. Agriculture is grouped with the sciences – math, physics,

biology, and chemistry. So here in the College all students, in any agricultural field, must have science credits. During their first year in college, they are basically studying sciences before they branch off into various agricultural disciplines. But like I said, the streaming would have started at high school. Even college admissions are based on the subject groups.

Nancy: Sounds interesting. Perhaps we need a field trip, Moreetsi.

Moreetsi: A field trip would be a good idea. We would be glad to host you and students and other visitors. In fact, Dr. Greg Miller, ISU, will visit next year.

And finally: Nancy Grudens-Schuck, PhD and Associate Professor, who last taught undergraduates directly in 2006.

Nancy: Hey, isn't anyone going to ask me a question?

Mike R.: Okay, Nancy, here goes. I understand that a leadership course is required of some majors. You taught our department's leadership course for about 8 years, twice per year. What trials and tribulations presented themselves for a required course? Our students often say that they don't see the value of the course or say that they believe they already know everything there is to know about leadership.

Nancy: There were both successes and challenges. But lately, I have been thinking that maybe we are going about it the wrong way. I have been wishing that the "stuff" of leadership — group facilitation and speaking repertoire – could be taught effectively in the context of a subject matter course, such as machinery management or animal science. But the teaching of such topics typically favors the science content. We also do not appear to

do a reliably good job of “cross-teaching” interpersonal and group leadership skills in the integrated (modular, usually) courses that I have seen taught in many places. If I had an opportunity to do it over again, I would team teach a 4 credit course that fully integrates the interpersonal and emotional intelligence skills and group dynamics theory with a single key technical agricultural topic. I am strong in plant biology and pest management – so maybe a course like that could be used. I also think back to Richard Bawden and his colleagues’ work at Hawkesbury Agricultural College in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. Students served real clients. As the students saw the need for higher-level knowledge or interpersonal skills, the faculty would offer short courses to meet the need on the spot, sort of like the industrial and engineering concept of “just-in-time” production.

Mike R.: What intrigued you to accept a faculty position at ISU?

Nancy: Are you asking that because I was raised my whole life in New York? Fair enough. “Intrigued” is the right word. Iowa has relatively brief but powerful agricultural history, incredible soils, plenty of conflict, and current agricultural issues unlike anything I had experienced. Agriculture changes at a breathtaking pace in Iowa. Students and faculty are palpably interdependent with agriculture. I also felt right at home with the faculty from the start, during the interview process. It was a good choice for me to honor the warm-and-fuzzy intuition about potential future co-workers. Also, ISU already had a Sustainable Agriculture graduate program approved by the Board of Regents, which no one else had at the time. That also made ISU an extra special place to work. I have

been active in both programs since.

Mike R.: What prepared you to become a faculty member at a land-grant institution?

Nancy: Probably living and breathing land-grants since I was nine years old (e.g., extension) and then getting four degrees from a land-grant university. Is there any other kind of college? (Just kidding). If I had to do it over, I would attend at least one different type of college in a different state to broaden my experiences. But I was the first to go to a university in my family and I didn’t know any better.

Mike R.: What would you have done differently as you prepared for a career as a faculty member in higher education?

Nancy: I did not prepare to be a faculty member. It did not occur to me to that I could become a faculty member until I was 31-years-old, was married, had two babies; and had worked in extension, at an experiment station, and for a private pest management firm. It wasn’t until the 3rd year of my doctoral program – during my preliminary exams – that I first vocalized the job aspiration of “faculty member.” This is not an unusual history for a female of my generation.



Photo not available for Michael Pate

Nancy Grudens-Schuck, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Iowa State University.

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Finding the Merit in Every “If Only”

By Dwayne Pavelock & Doug Ullrich

Perhaps Vernon Law said it best: “Experience is the worst teacher; it gives the test before presenting the lesson.” Every teacher likely recognizes this concept as an alternative view to the traditional belief that experience is the best teacher. It could simply be a matter of semantics as we think about what “good” and “bad” really mean. Having asked a leadership class whether Hitler was a good leader, immediate responses focused on the inhumane acts that he directed, and many students readily agreed that Hitler was a horrible leader. A period of silence followed and students then began posing questions... what do you mean by good? Do you mean effective? Eventually, the difference between good and effective was discerned, yet the initial question created some cautious responses as the class progressed and students attempted to ascertain whether any hidden meaning was to be found in future efforts to have them define and describe various leadership traits. Reflecting on various experiences one has encountered as a teacher can create vacillating results. Sometimes the focus is on the “if only” aspect of the experience:

- If only I had done a better job of preparing for that lesson...
- If only I had paid more attention to the reluctant student...
- If only we had spent more time practicing...
- If only we had begun the supplemental feeding process sooner...

However, teachers have the opportunity to engage in reflective prac-

tice to provide a more meaningful outcome for experiences that may have gone awry or produced less than desirable results. Instead of spending time mentally beating ourselves up over not doing things differently, we can instead focus on the opportunity for improvement, enhancement, and enrichment prior to the next encounter; thus, experience becomes an effective teacher even if it is not a good teacher.

Planning

Many discussions that follow the conclusion of an event will eventually center on a breakdown in the planning process. Speaking as agricultural educators about what would be done differently if we had the chance to do it all over again, proper planning rises to the top. Beginning teachers normally have various options as they establish themselves at a school. Should they have a teaching partner, entry year teachers can continue to conduct the agriscience program from a historical standpoint – maintaining the status quo and doing the same thing that was done in previous years. They could also bring new and fresh ideas that are often based on their experience as a former agriscience student/FFA member as well as learning outcomes from their student teaching experience; essentially, a trial-and-error approach. Regardless, planning is necessary for the students to gain the maximum benefit.

The Value of Experience – Yours, and Those of

Others

A second thought about what we would do differently encompasses the practice of utilizing a mentor and learning from those who have multiple years of experience in the profession. We often try to impress upon student teachers the importance of the field experience as a learning opportunity from varying perspectives. The 12-week period spent at a student teaching center is not always about finding out how to do things right. Oftentimes, the experience enables one to recognize how things should not be done. Some student teachers conclude their field experience with a much different attitude about a career in education than what they had three months earlier. Unfortunately, it is occasionally a negative attitude. But is that not a meaningful learning opportunity as well? We can provide, within the walls of a classroom, an abundance of philosophical and theoretical approaches to teaching agricultural science, but listening to experienced educators can be invaluable.

The Kid in the Corner

Let’s face it... most everyone likes to win, earn good grades, receive an award, etc. We are often amazed by how much college students like to receive a positive, personal, handwritten accolade or gold star sticker on the front of their exam. It seems that how we were rewarded in Kindergarten or the third grade is still appreciated some 12-15 years later. And it’s easy to recognize someone for their above-average effort. But what about the kid in the corner, the

one who is not the most advanced student, who exerts a level of effort of which they are proud because they did their best? How about the student who is not the most gifted speaker, the best judging team member, or the most artistic? We wish that we would have done more to help all of those students. True, there are occasional occurrences in which we assist the student who has a lower ability than others. Was it just once? Were there others that never received special attention? Traveling back in time, we would like to have done more for the “kid in the corner” who found a “home” in the agricultural science program.

Smelling the Roses

We miss contest day, the arrival of the day in which all the hours of practice and extra time spent at the school finally came to fruition. The same is true of graduation night or the annual FFA banquet. Seeing a student’s face light up when his/her name is called as a winner or high individual certainly creates a sense of pride and accomplishment for the teacher as well. But agricultural educators seldom rest on their laurels and past accomplishments, and instead begin looking forward to the next activity. As educators at an institution of higher education, we seldom have the same opportunities to see kids succeed at a contest. Recalling our days as high school agriscience teachers, we should have taken more time to stop and smell the roses. How often do we retell those stories of success to our college students? For us, it may not be everyday, but it is frequent because those are times we cherish. We still appreciate them many years later. But did we take much time to enjoy them when they occurred? Perhaps we can compare it to our own sons and daughters as

they grow up. How often do we wish we would have worked less and played more with them, or went to more of their ballgames or recitals? It is strange to realize how much we care about the children of others, and to also find ourselves wishing we had taken the time to enjoy our moments with them. So don’t live a world of “if only” in terms of regretting what we did and didn’t do as an early-career teacher. Indeed, take the time to learn from those experiences. And along the way, help someone else realize the opportunities they have to benefit from experience.



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If Only I Knew Then What I Know Now!

By Britina Robinson

I came into this profession much like many of you: I enjoyed my own experience in Agriculture Education as a student and wanted to ensure that future generations of students would have that same opportunity. I knew in high school that I wanted to become an agriculture science teacher and never wavered from that desire throughout college. I entered the teaching program at Texas A&M University and four years later was applying for my first teaching job. I was ready to train national champion public speakers, take every student to National FFA Convention, and direct leadership workshops for FFA members far and wide. I have been teaching for six years now and am proud that my students appreciate agriculture and the FFA just as I did, and still do. However, somewhere along the way my priorities changed and in my opinion, they changed for the better. I am quite certain that FFA and the leadership development that I gained from my participation in FFA have been a fundamental part of my success as a teacher. I know this is where I learned how to plan events, organize activities and prioritize actions, which were all required of me even in my first year of teaching. But what I did not truly learn until I was surrounded by it was where my emphasis needed to lie. I can spend countless hours planning a trip to National Convention, preparing a member for competition, and organizing a leadership workshop, but if I am not spending twice that much time on curriculum development, then I feel it is all in vain. It might have been when I applied

to be a participant in the National FFA Delta Conference that this revelation became apparent. I had just finished my first year of teaching and was selected to attend this conference where I spent a week working on more effective lessons through better teaching strategies. I gathered with teachers from around the nation to work on lesson plans! We were not working to determine new rules for the livestock judging event, or comparing National Chapter applications. We were working on the most important part of our jobs—the curriculum! I started the school year inspired by what I had learned from my mentors at the conference and for the first six weeks I committed myself to writing lesson plans every day for each class that would meet the expectations I had been taught. Not surprisingly, the care I was putting into lesson plans each night improved the technical lessons I was teaching by 300%. My interest approaches were focusing students and the contextual sets were framing previous knowledge to bridge to the new objective. I was using student-centered language that was specific and action-oriented and of course, I was using student-engaging strategies to facilitate learning. The implementation of these tools made a tremendous difference in my classroom. I noticed it most in my non-traditional agriculture students who had previously been difficult to engage. Through constant interaction, engaging strategies, and active directions, I found a way to facilitate learning for all students in my classroom. I was excited about my teaching and my students' learn-

ing. Not only was I creating my own new lessons, but I was armed with a collection of highly critiqued lessons, a battery of effective teaching strategies, and a brand new outlook on teaching. No wonder my classroom instruction improved so much! If I had known about how to really design a lesson to be effective, my first-year students might have had a better experience. Hopefully, they forgive me for my all of my errors. As I became more focused on my curriculum, lots of things changed in my classroom. Behavior was better because I was teaching bell to bell, time on task was better because they had an assignment to work on the minute they walked in my classroom, and the students were happier, because I was making a noticeable effort at making learning worth their time. Before this, certainly my FFA members and standouts were happy because they were getting the bulk of my attention, but others were not receiving the instruction they deserved. I credit a lot of this change to my participation in the Delta Conference, but I took charge of my own learning soon after. When it became apparent to me that I had a lot to learn about lesson plans, curriculum maps, and curriculum development, I had to make some discoveries of my own. Although I have always known that someday I would pursue higher education, I did not think it would be in anything besides agriculture education. That is what I do and who I am...or so I thought. As it turns out, I am largely interested in the curriculum and instruction that is behind good teaching. I began my Master's program this past summer and have

been in awe of what I did not know. I began asking myself why I had not learned about concepts of multiculturalism and the history behind the development of curriculum before now. It was unnerving to finally understand how ignorant I really was about some aspects of my students' lives; though I would have said I was as knowledgeable as anyone. Turns out, I was wrong. For a while, I was angry that I had been "thrown to the wolves" so to speak, in my first year. However, I realize that I gained a significant amount of experience during my undergraduate years as well. So while I do think that some of the topics I am now discussing in graduate school should most certainly be a part of any undergraduate teaching program, I do see the value in having experience before becoming knowledgeable in these areas. Without the experience, I might not have anything to relate the new knowledge to. So as I look back on what I wish I had known then what I know now, I have a rather lengthy list. Here

it goes—I wish I had known that:

1. My number one priority needs to be building relationships with ALL students.
2. My second priority should be designing lessons that are effective for ALL students.
3. Each student's experience is what shapes their learning, and NO one has the same experience.
4. Worksheets and activities DO NOT equal engaged students.
5. There is no time for BUSY WORK.
6. Who I am and how I am perceived as a person carries as much weight as the words that come out of my mouth.
7. Trying to teach like anyone else is pointless; teaching to the best of my ability is necessary.
8. Knowing why we do things a certain way is really important to understanding our purpose.
9. Experience is the best teacher.
10. I have the best job in the world,

and no matter how the day has gone, I am influencing people. Perhaps twenty years from now I will have a much longer list, but then I have to think—where's the fun in that?



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THEME ARTICLE

Breaking the Technology Barrier: Using Technology in Education

By Patrick Wellert

Technology and education have always seemed to go together. In order to prepare students for the workplace or college, they need to be exposed to it. Teachers in the classroom use technology believing that the students are gaining valuable information and retaining the concepts taught, but in reality the students need to be involved in the lesson and actively participating in activities

that include technology. Student engagement is critical to student motivation during the learning process. The more students are motivated to learn, the more likely it is that they will be successful in their efforts. (Beeland, 2002).

Uses of Technology

There are numerous uses of technologies that are available to teach-

ers to include students into the classroom's lesson. These include Interactive Whiteboards, Proximas, PowerPoint games, interactive DVDs, Ventrilo chat software, Myspace, Blackboard, and scavenger hunts. To put the uses of technology into an effective practice, teachers need to help students set achievable goals, encourage students to assess themselves and their peers, help them to work co-

operatively in groups, and ensure that they know how to exploit all the available resources for learning (Hall, 2006). The following are how some technology is used to help students learn:

Interactive Whiteboards

There are two different types of whiteboards. The first is a virtual version of a dry erase board. It allows students to see what the instructor or other students write or draw using a special pen. The second functions similar to a normal whiteboard, but also contains a projector screen, an electronic copy board, or as a computer projector screen on which the computer image can be controlled by touching or writing on the surface of the panel instead of using a mouse or keyboard. They function by connecting a projector to the whiteboard panel with the use of a computer and software. It is important to know the different functions in order to determine which whiteboard is right for the educator. By knowing the difference you can also learn the terminology and understand the basic functions of each.

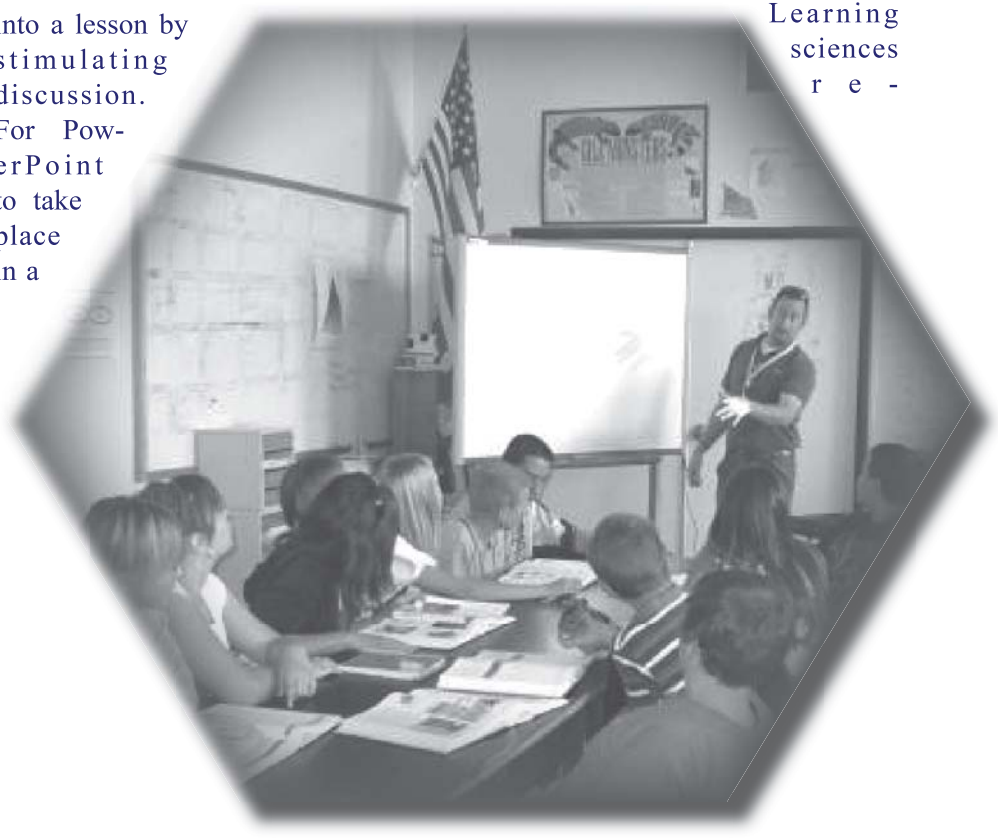
Proximas and PowerPoint

PowerPoint is a software program that is being used in the classroom as a tool to incorporate learning activities into the curriculum. PowerPoint enables teachers and students to actively create presentations with graphics, charts, diagrams, and pictures in their slideshows to help make often complicated ideas and lessons more manageable and understandable. It is a way for students to engage in research, and present information to their peers. When students are actively learning, taking an active role in the

learning process, they seem to understand the information better, and enjoy the lesson. The use of a game also allowed Jones and Mungai (2003) to directly address the learning style needs of the visual (58%) and tactile learner (22%), which represents eighty-percent of those involved in the content related courses. When constructed with different learning styles in mind, games can often accelerate the learning process (Jones & Mungai, 2003). By itself, PowerPoint is not a cure-all remedy, but rather a tool that needs to be understood and used properly for it to be effective as an active learning tool. Research also has shown that students who used PowerPoint as a learning tool were more engaged in the discussions (Rowcliffe, 2003). This will encourage teachers to use PowerPoint as a way to involve students into a lesson by stimulating discussion. For PowerPoint to take place in a

classroom, an Interactive Whiteboard or a Proxima is needed. A Proxima displays a computer screen onto a screen much like a projector at a movie theater. The user is able to display items such as websites, PowerPoint, and interactive games. A way for students to interact using this technology is through games created by teachers and used in the PowerPoint lesson. Games such as "Hollywood Squares," "Jeopardy," and "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" are created using slides and links to answer the questions. Teachers may use a blank template and fill them with different answers for the students to use as a review. Teachers may even let the students create their own review using the blank templates. This activity can also be used in a small group or team setting.

Advantages to the Students



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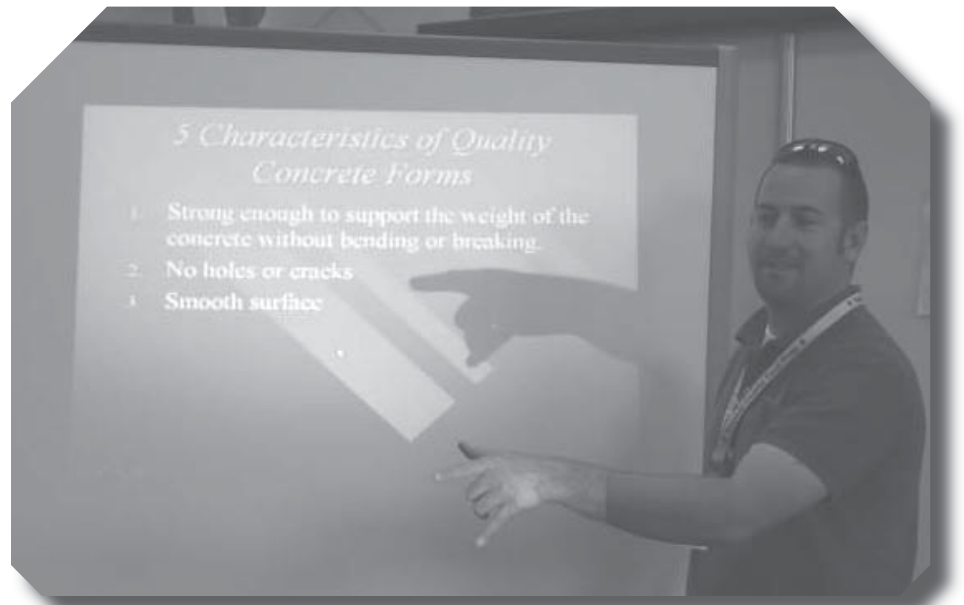
Wellert presents to students using a Smart Board as part of his classroom technology.

search tells us that students learn much better “by doing” rather than “by listening.” This means that passive learning – the traditional lecture – is being replaced in our classrooms by more active learning activities that emphasize student problem solving, discussion, presentation and other “authentic” learning-by-doing-activities (Day, 2004). By including students into the lesson it opens up a realm of possibilities because students can retain roughly only 10% of what they write down.

Teacher Apprehension

So why are teachers not using technology that engages and interacts more frequently with students? There are many reasons why teachers feel apprehensive or uncomfortable using an interactive whiteboard, proxima and PowerPoint. The first of which could be the length of time from their college prep program until now. Teachers often get exposed to and learn new technologies in their teacher prep courses. Some might not have been prepared for these technologies upon entering the workforce. Although the availability of technology in American schools has increased (US Department of Education, 2000), information released by The National Education Association (2004) indicates that less than 35% of public school teachers feel they are “well prepared” or “very well prepared” to use this technology effectively.

The second reason is blockage from the school’s control or security system. Teachers claim that the firewalls and filtering systems create blockage in their attempts to educate and communicate with technology (Murray, 2004). The teachers and other users can become frustrated when they do not understand why a certain item like a website used for a scavenger hunt or a hyperlink in



PowerPoints provide clear, concise notes on the subjects.

a PowerPoint are not available.

Inconsistencies from school to school is another reason. At one site there may be access to all different types of technology while at another the absence is very evident. The general public perception is that our schools are using technology and managing our resources in that area well. In several surveys done some schools do show nearly 100 percent use of technology while in others the use of technology is nonexistent (Starr, 2003).

Summary

The research has shown that there are proven benefits to using technology in the classroom. The ability to integrate technology into the classroom can add valuable information and ideas to our students. By facilitating the use of Proximas, PowerPoint, and interactive whiteboards our teachers will be able to reach a broader audience of learners.

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from the cedar chest...

IF I WERE AGAIN A TEACHER OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE

By J. H. Starrak, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa (April 1937)

Discovered & resubmitted by Bill Weeks

It is recorded that some wise man has said or written that “of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these – it might have been.” I am sure we can all couch for the truth of this observation; for there is no one of us who has not had the ghost of the things we might have done rise up to haunt us. It is now nearly 15 years since the pace in high school vocational agriculture became too fast for me, causing me to seek refuge in the sheltered halls of a college there to spend my time telling budding teachers of vocational agriculture how to do what I myself did so poorly. This requires courage of a sort but not nearly so much as it takes to approach full-blown teachers on the same mission. However, caution was never one of my distinguishing characteristics and I am emboldened to make the attempt in the hope that it may serve to bring to your minds some ideas about teaching of agriculture which may not be new to you at all. In fact you may be putting every one of them into practice. If you are, checking thru them again may renew your faith in them and encourage you in your good work. If you have failed in the practice of them it is not too late to begin now. At any rate, I hope you may read what I am about to set down even if only to disagree with it.

1. If I were again a teacher of Vocational agriculture I would spend more time and make a more systematic effort getting acquainted with the human and material resources of my community. Of course, I used to go out and run down some prospective students in order that my regular classes would fill, just as you have done, but that, I see

now, was hardly enough. I would become well acquainted with the progressive man and women of the community who are now its leaders. I would attempt to discover their interest, noteworthy achievements, and personal attitudes in order that I might be better able to enlist their co-operation and support in my program. I would locate the best herds of livestock and get to know their owners, the best farmsteads as well as the poorest, and the people who inhabit them. I would make close observations of the type of soil, the efficiency of the methods of cultivation commonly employed, and the defects or shortcomings in the agricultural practices of the community.

In addition to these last named economic recourses, I would make a canvas of the cultural or recreation activities and resource of the community, noting their strength and weakness and the opportunities for improvement and expansion.

2. I would cooperate more generously and cordially with other workers in agricultural education, and more particularly with those in charge of the local farm organization's program. I would try to regard myself as a co-worker with the county agent and the club-leader in the great task of raising the level of the agricultural industry and of rural life, instead of a competitor with whom I must compete for clientele and credit. I would make a most serious attempt so to lose myself in the course of a better agriculture that all petty jealousies and personal differences would no longer operate to render ineffective so much of the energy and time we spend I blush to confess that this ideal is quite far removed from the condition which existed in my time between the teachers

of vocational agriculture and other workers in the field of agricultural education. Too often we were jealous of each other, losing no opportunity to minimize the contribution of one another and refusing to assist in the other's program even when invited. I realize now how silly, even criminal, was our behavior, for not only were we attracting adverse criticism of our clientele to our prospective programs, but we were dragging our heels and retarding the wheels of progress. For progressing human affairs must come thru co-operation. There is no other way which offers a shadow of hope. Competition has been over-worked and has brought disaster in its train. The history both of natural evolution and social progress clearly demonstrates that co-operation has the greater survival value than competition, and from it man may learn this lesson – “Learn to co-operate or perish.” What made our antagonistic attitude the more deplorable was the size of the task we each had in hand. Had our vision been at all adequate we should have seen clearly that there was plenty of work for us all to do, for truly “the harvest was plentiful but the laborers were few.”

3. I would co-operate more fully with the administrative officers and the faculty of the school system. In those early days, we teachers of agriculture were wont to regard ourselves as specially privileged folks and not to be burdened with any of the routine duties in which all the other teachers shared. Since part of our salary and that of our supervisors came from the federal gov-

ernment we had the idea that we were federal employees sent into the community to do a specialized task. We were not always willing to accept orders or suggestions of the superintendent and principal and did not wish to make any effort to integrate our work with the whole school program, or to take responsibility for extracurricular activities. It is very plain to me now that such an attitude on our part was very petty, unprofessional, and greatly to be deplored. It is plain to me that the task of educating youth must be a so-operative one; that the regular curriculum is only part of the program, but a very important part, and one in which all teachers should make their respective contributions in an unselfish, intelligent fashion; that our responsibilities do not cease with the effective presentation of our respective subjects but extend to the other parts of the program, i.e. the extracurricular activities of the teachers, and the co-operative enterprises of the school with the community; and that for these reasons a teacher who refuses to become an integral part of the faculty of a school in all its varied activities and responsibilities has no right to hold a position in it. I regret that reports from different sources indicate that all teachers of vocational agriculture have not yet rid themselves of this very unprofessional attitude.

4. I would teach less and teach better. I would follow Alfred North Whitehead's admonition as literally as possible: "Let the main ideas which enter into a child's education be few and important." I would be as discriminating and ruthless, as my judgment and courage would permit me to be, in my selection of the relatively few important principles and techniques that my students should make a permanent part of their mental equipment. Now I know full well that this is no easy task, for agriculture is a tremendously large field of human activity, drawing as it does on so many different sciences. Moreover, knowledge in it is increasing rapidly with each passing year as the findings of the numerous experiment stations and research laboratories, public and private, are formulated and made available. The school curriculum has always been very active in accumulating subject matter but very sluggish in

eliminating the obsolete and less important. The net result is that school subjects have become, in all but rare cases, the masters of teachers rather than their servants, and that in their attempts to satisfy the demands of their masters (the subjects that they teach) teachers pervert the real purpose of education, which is the development of those individual powers and attitudes requisite to intelligent living in the modern world. There are other factors responsible for the well-known inefficiency of school education, but certainly the attempt to teach too much is one of the most widespread and devastating. And because agriculture is such a broad field and because of the large amount of research being done in it, teachers of vocational agriculture are particularly in need of the admonition to cull out carefully and ruthlessly all but the most significant items of subject matter in the various phases of their subject.

5. I would try to teach these important principles and techniques more effectively. I would endeavor to secure a thorough understanding of these principles and techniques on the part of my students. Far better is it for them to understand a few basic principles than to have a hazy superficial knowledge of many. I would lead them into the habit of inferring or implying other knowledge, when needed, from those principles they have so mastered. This ability of inferring new truth from old is of inestimable value in meeting new problems in a changing world. I would teach them to apply these principles and techniques to the solution of practical, life situations. This would result in the attainment of the ability and habit of reasoning, judging, and planning on the part of the students, and thru these, give them power over life's problems. And I would not stop here. I am acquainted with too many people who know a great deal, and who are able to apply the knowledge and techniques they process, but whose behavior has not been changed on whit thereby. Very obviously such an education

is very ineffective. Something more is needed, too, and this something must not be neglected or all our efforts will have been in vain. So I would teach my students to appreciate, intellectually and emotionally, the great need which exists for the application of these essential principles and techniques to the everyday affairs of life and the daily needed contributions to individual and social welfare which would follow their wholehearted, intelligent application to the more pressing, crucial problems of agriculture and rural life.

Further, I would try to light and fan the flame of desire for the individual and social progress to the end that my students would not go out into the world satisfied with both it and themselves, to carry on their lives much as they would have done had I never taught them; but rather be individuals with a clear vision of what ought to be done, with the ability to do it and the insistent desire to do their share toward its consummation. In other words, I would try to be a real teacher and make permanent, beneficial changes in my students' behavior rather than to lad upon them a mass of undigested knowledge, which like a bag of salt upon their backs melts in the first storms they encounter after they leave school.

6. I would pay more attention than I formerly did to what was taking place in the character or personality of my students as it was being shaped and crystallized by the experiences of school, home, and community. I would try to keep ever uppermost in my mind the idea that the real purpose of education is the proper development of the character or personality of the individual. I am using these terms synonymously and I am attributing to them a very broad meaning. "Personality" as I use it has much the same meaning as the word "soul" as used in the Bible. And in that Book we are asked, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" I would paraphrase this and say "What doth it profit a boy to gain the whole field of knowledge and ruin his personality?"

I am not quite ready to accuse the average school of doing more harm than

good to the growing personality of its students, but I do insist that many of the experiences which it provides do have very far –reaching and deleterious effects upon personality of the students. This may not be clear to some of you, and space does not permit much elucidation at this time, but my main arguments, if I had time to give them, would center around the effect which many of the ordinary experiences of the school have upon the emotional reactions of the child. I shall have to assume that you appreciate the close relation which exists between personality and mental health. It may not be so apparent to you but I believe that it may be said, without injury to the truth, that the average school does more harm than good to the mental health of the individual students. It accomplishes this damage in various ways. One is thru the use of fear – not so much the fear of physical punishment as it was in the 19th century – but rather fear of failure, of the ridicule of fellow students, and of the thinly veiled or open sarcasm of teachers, and the fear of demotion. Another way is thru the establishment of inferiority feelings or various types, ranging all the way from the realization of one's lack of good looks and good clothes, thru physical deficiencies to lack of mental ability and social graces. For the creation of all these inferiority feelings the school is not wholly responsible but by insisting upon a single common standard of academic and cultural achievement for all and sundry, without regard for the great differences in mental equipment, and cultural background; by the prominence given to class lists, honors, awards, and other satanic academic instruments of torture for the great majority who never get prizes and honorable mentions; and by dubbing as failures all those who fail to meet the standard requirements, regardless of the amount of effort and seriousness of purpose they have shown, school administrators and teachers have created an environment which reacts in divergent ways, but equally disastrously upon both bright and dull. Need I belabor this point? How many of you, supposing you had only one good leg, would day after day enter a race against people with two good legs apiece, who

had demonstrated over and over again that they could run much faster than you? Would you come to such a hopeless race each and every day cheerfully and hopefully and run your best with the certainty of failure riding on your back? Would you maintain your sweetness of disposition and the proper social attitude under this insistent pressure to do the impossible? If you would you might be justly regarded as either an angel or a fool. Yet that is about what we expect of our duller students, and still we are surprised when they develop traits of discouragement, carelessness, lack of interest, and deliberate dishonesty as the result of the experience we force upon them.

Someday when I get old and bold enough I am going to write a book on "the crimes of teachers." The obviously great size which such a book would attain has so far operated against the attempt. If and when it is written, among the most heinous of the crimes enumerated will be the one just described.

It should be noted that the particular damage to which I refer not only results in the production of maladjusted and unhappy personalities of individuals, but in addition has serious and far-reaching social consequences. By our emphasis in schools upon completion, upon the strong defeating the weak, upon striving for monetary rewards or empty honors we have stimulated and fostered the growth of the greedy, selfish, and individualistic impulses of man. Then in our stupidity we stand back and view with dismay the disaster which competition, the greed for gain, and selfish individualism have brought upon the human race, without however appreciating or admitting our own responsibility as educators for the present plight of mankind. Doubtless H. G. Wells was right when he said civilization is a race between education and catastrophe, but he might well have added that education at times seems to be running with and not against catastrophe, for we have been encouraging the development in our young people of those personal traits and

attitudes which place a great strain on civilization and which will lead inevitably, if not checked, to its collapse. Believing firmly in what I have just expressed, I would eliminate from my teaching all appeals to my students to gain recognition, awards or prizes by defeating their fellows, and I would use all my powers of initiative and creativeness in devising teaching situations which would call forth and exercise the student's capacity to fight and overcome his own weakness and to co-operate with and assist his fellow students in a common, socially useful undertaking. I am convinced that this is the direction we teachers must travel if education is to achieve, what I firmly believe it can achieve, namely: the alleviation of human misery and distress; the deposition of greed, selfishness, and competition from their present high places of power in human affairs; and the enthronement of service, co-operation, and love in their places. I am also convinced that those of us who are cynical unbelievers in the possibility of the consummation of these ideals are too dangerous to society to be permitted to teach its youth. In closing I will admit that all these things I have suggested are extremely difficult to accomplish, but that is not surprising, for ours is no easy task. Indeed to teach youth how to live abundantly and sensibly in our modern age is the most difficult as well as the most important task which devolves upon adult man. How effectively are you doing it?

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