

by Larry Case

Thinking About Curriculum!

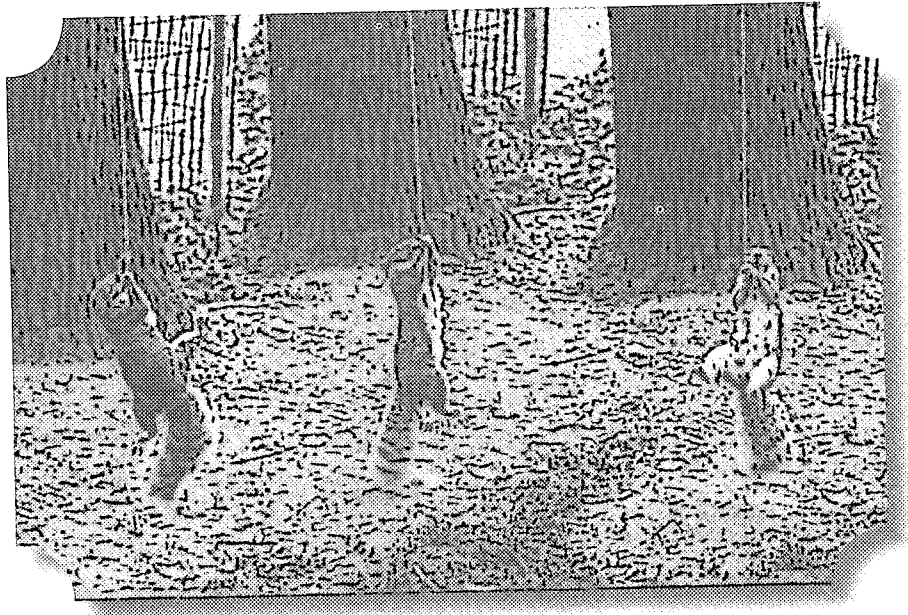
When I heard the theme for this issue, “Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe . . . Pick the Curriculum that best fits Joe,” I wondered who Joe was. Was it Joe Teacher, Joe Student, Joe Businessperson, Joe School Principal, or someone else? I believe all are important in developing or choosing a curriculum for the local agricultural education program. This is an important decision to the success of the program, the students and the agricultural businesses of the community and Nation.

Curriculum

Many times people think of curriculum as lesson plans, teaching materials/units or courses of study. Many times, we want to confine curriculum as what happens inside the formal classroom. Curriculum includes all of these things, and more. Curriculum, to me, includes all student experiences inside and outside the classroom, which provide meaningful learning toward a desired result.

Curriculum defines an instructional program and a profession. What we teach is our discipline and identifies us as unique. It provides indicators as to who we are and what we do. When asked what I do, I say, “I am an agricultural educator.” Well, what do you teach? Answer, “Animal and plant science etc.”

Less often we get the question—“Well, how do you teach?” It is my belief that how you teach is also part of the curriculum. When we relate that supervised experi-



Suffering from the need to always be the leaders, squirrels often suffered breakdowns that affected all their classes.

ence and leadership development through FFA or we use inquiry-based teaching as a way of delivering experiences that lead to a desired end, I believe it is a part of curriculum. When we include our teaching strategies as a part of the curriculum, then we are getting to higher-level thinking/problem solving instruction. I also believe this is the reason we use what is referred to as the “Three Circle Model”—Classroom instruction, Supervised experience, and leadership/personal development.

Over the years, this is what has made agricultural education special. I have heard it said that we teach the “whole person.” Properly used, it also works well with a variety of learning styles. I believe we get beyond the retention of information and strive to challenge students to “think” through application of new information as well

as “discovering” new information while solving problems.

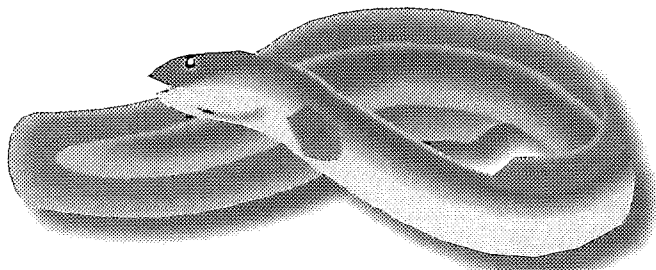
Technical Content

Technical content is important. Technical content provides context for meaningful learning of academics, the “soft” skills of teamwork, leadership, etc. All of this is important for career preparation.

Technical content is a constantly changing area. To keep up-to-date is challenging and is detrimental if not done well. We not only need to be teaching Joe Student the latest information, but Joe Businessperson will support the program when he/she knows relevant information is being taught.

Educational Accountability

Joe School Principal is not only interested in relevant and meaningful instruction, but wants to know if



The curriculum was so disjointed, an abnormal eel was named valedictorian at the end of the year.

students are learning and retaining the information. Student outcome measurement is difficult when used to measure program effectiveness. This really gets to be difficult when you want to measure student outcomes across several programs. Each program is teaching different topics so the input/instruction is not the same.

This begs the question--can we identify the common core of needed knowledge and skills for agricultural education? To address this question for all of Career Technical Education, the US Department of Education, in partnership with the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, completed the development of 16 career clusters.

The 16 clusters represent the total US economy. Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources is one of the cluster areas. The writers of the Career Cluster Knowledge and Skill statements were under the obligation of identifying the common statements for the entire cluster as well as for each of the seven pathways. Joe Businesspersons were also involved to assure relevance. As a result of this work, there is a good start on the common elements of instruction.

One of the intended uses of the career cluster information is a starting point for developing educational courses and related information. It is also a common starting place for

developing plans of study, which include the possible seamless transitions between levels of education such as secondary to community college and on to the university.

The career cluster information is also intended to provide counseling and orientation to students and parents as to the career opportunities. As the career cluster of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources is viewed, one would conclude that there are lots of career opportunities other than production agriculture or farming. See [www.careerclusters.org].

Curriculum Standards and Assessments—Meeting the Challenge of Accountability

Currently, there is a National Task Force that is working on developing curriculum standards, which will be assessment ready. The curriculum standards are based on the Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources Career Cluster's knowledge and skill statements, and will be connected to the National standards for the core academics. This gives the profession common targets of skill levels expected to succeed in the Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources sector.

The curriculum standards will aid in discussions for developing articulation agreements for easing the transition between levels of education. As common assess-

ments are developed, accountability information for student outcomes can be provided. This will help in meeting the challenge of providing common measures for student achievement, which are not available today.

Certification for certain skill levels will become more prevalent in the future. Students of agricultural education intend to be able to secure employment and to enjoy a successful career. What is it that we as educators can do to have a quality assurance of student skills to potential employers? Real accountability.

In conclusion, we are approaching the identification of a common core of information for Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources instruction. Standards and assessments are also coming soon. The choice of curriculum for an instructional program is an important activity. We need to involve as many "Joe's" as we can in this decision and we need to hold ourselves accountable for relevant student outcomes. Our success depends on it!



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