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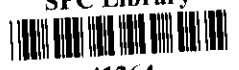
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Agricultural Education Bulletin No. 2

The first bulletin on Agricultural Education in the South Pacific will have been welcomed by all those who participated in the Conference on Agricultural Education held at Nouméa in August 1967. In this first number we undertook to maintain the liaison thus established and so it is with pleasure that we present below some very interesting points made by Mr G. Bamford, Principal of the Navuso Agricultural School at Suva (Fiji) on the subject: "Developing Desirable Attitudes to Physical Work."

It goes without saying that discussion of this article is hereby opened and that your comments or criticisms will be welcomed. You are also invited to send us any article which you consider useful to all those responsible for Agricultural Education in the South Pacific.

"Developing Desirable Attitudes to Physical Work"

G. Bamford

Most Westerners accept as one of the hard facts of life that one must work to survive. To the peoples of the Pacific, in many cases, such a concept is new, for regular, disciplined work has not been a feature of their social and cultural environment. In a region of equable climate and prolific growth, where shifting cultivation has often been the practice, a minimum of work has been necessary for survival - in fact, ceremonies and other social obligations have usually taken precedence over work.

Today, all peoples are seeking higher standards of living, and in many areas population pressure is demanding a more intensive

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use of land and so work is becoming more and more important for survival - and for the farmer this work is largely physical.

While a desire to improve one's standard of living is the main incentive for developing good attitudes to and habits of work - it does not necessarily automatically result in their formation - in fact, this is often a long process. It is, however, a process that anyone involved in agricultural education must deal with - whether he be an extension worker with the farmer and his family, or a teacher in a school or institution giving formal agricultural training.

The following discussion will be focussed on the school situation as it is in this field that the writer's experience lies.

Desirable attitudes and habits of work will be engendered by:-

1. The inclusion of "whole day" periods of practical work.

The proportion of time allocated to practical and class work will vary from school to school, but in all, if desirable attitudes and habits of work are to be fostered, opportunity must be provided for students to do a full day's work of 7-8 hours. Practical periods of 1-2 hours or even half a day may be useful for demonstrating and giving practice in certain skills but they are of too limited a time to help develop good work habits. It is only by working whole days that a student will experience the regular disciplined work so necessary for successful farming in the Region.

Where it is difficult to include whole days in the school timetable, holiday work on approved farms may prove a useful alternative.

2. Making all practical work meaningful.

Work which to the students appears to have little or no purpose, will become sheer drudgery and result in an abhorrence of manual labour.

Meaning and purpose will be given to work if a student has:-

- (a) An understanding of at least the elementary theory behind each activity. For example, the question to be answered when weeding a crop is, "Why weed?" and the answer will be in terms of competition for water, nutrients and light, or possibly, pest control.

- (b) An appreciation of the economics of each operation. Using the above example, a student can be led to see that by weeding, the crop production will be increased by 50% - that this will result in increased profit which in turn will allow the farmer to purchase a water-tank for his house, give a child secondary education, or buy a transistor.

Where practical work has to be done on a school farm, economic considerations may seem remote to the student, but where part of his practical work can be done on his own plot or on a group or class project farm where the monetary returns belong to the students, economics become immediately relevant.

When, on these project farms, decision-making rests with the students, they gain valuable experience in seeing the physical work they plan and do as part of the development of the whole farm into a viable economic unit. In my experience, this has proved to be the most effective way of giving meaning to practical work.

3. The instructor's example.

Too often instructors become "overseers" who tell the students what to do and how to do it but rarely are seen to dirty their hands. Involvement by staff in the work to be done is a valuable means of demonstrating that manual labour is not something too degrading for the "educated" man.

An interesting comment from a student when asked why he preferred working on a certain section of the school farm was ".... because Mr. X works with us."

4. By encouraging a sense of pride in one's work - that is, encouraging the development of an attitude of good craftsmanship - whether it be in pruning a tree, ploughing a furrow or digging a drain. A sense of achievement and pride does result from a job completed - a job well done.

This attitude can be fostered in training by staff recognizing and giving praise for good work. Again, students can be encouraged to make comparisons between their efforts and those of their fellows. This may be further re-inforced by introducing an element of more formal competition. Some skills are eminently suited to this type of competition - such as ploughing, fencing and contour lining.

5. By giving practical work equal status with the academic subjects in the course.

Because academic ability is easier to assess than practical skills and work habits, examinations, even in vocational courses, are frequently weighted towards the academic subjects. Practical work thus tends to be regarded as of less importance, in fact, it may be thought to be intrinsically inferior - requiring less skill and ability than the academic disciplines.

It is however, possible to assess skills and work habits and any vocational course should emphasize these in awarding certificates. Furthermore, the awarding of school prizes for practical subjects of equal or greater value than for the academic will help to raise the status of practical work.

I believe it is impossible to stress too strongly the importance of training in regular disciplined work and the fostering of attitudes of pride in good craftsmanship. Observations of ex-students from Navuso has shown that those who become the successful farmers are not the academically brilliant but those of strong character who work hard.

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Nouméa, May 1969

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| 1. Annual Conference of O.I.E. held in Paris
13-18 May 1968, Report of SPC Observer.
September 1968 | Livestock Production
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| 2. South Pacific Commission Publications' Series -
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| 3. Free Diving Without Breathing Apparatus -
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