1971

Continuing Education: Where Do We Begin?

Ronald L. Hullinger

Purdue University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/iowastate_veterinarian

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Veterinary Medicine Commons

Recommended Citation

Hullinger, Ronald L. (1971) "Continuing Education: Where Do We Begin?," Iowa State University Veterinarian: Vol. 33 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/iowastate_veterinarian/vol33/iss2/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Iowa State University Veterinarian by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Where Do We Begin?

by Ronald L. Hullinger, D.V.M., Ph.D*

Those of us in the profession, on the education faculties, and in the student bodies do need to have widespread discussion and understanding of the objectives to which we are committed. Concerned persons in all of these areas apply pressure for change and reform of the educational objectives and the educational methods. Others, equally interested, seemingly resist any change. The purpose of this article is to focus attention upon the objectives of our profession’s educational process and how they relate directly to the continuing education of a veterinarian.

In all of education there is a prime objective: the transmission of the accumulated knowledge and skill to the oncoming generation. In veterinary medicine, as in engineering, pipe-fitting, art, farming, law, or housekeeping, there is a great wealth of experience which has been accumulated and which must, in part, be transmitted to the beginning student. Since the first school of veterinary medicine began in Lyon, France in 1762, this task and this responsibility has been entrusted in major portion to the educator.

In veterinary medicine this transfer of skills and heritage is important not only for the benefit of the student, but also for those whom the profession serves. It affords continuity and insures a standard of competence. This is the conserving function of education. Hopefully this is only a portion of the task. If those who are involved in professional education stop or even slow down at this point, they have not educated those who depend upon them and will have failed the student, the profession, and the society.

Another of the primary objectives of professional education, as for all education, must be the liberation of the mind. If educators teach or transmit the past as though Ultimate Truth were embodied therein, instead of the past as an element of the Truth; if educators act and teach in such a manner as to convey the impression that their previous experiences have been totally valid and all inclusive, then they are deceiving themselves and, possibly, their students. The outcome of such an interaction will surely be a student lacking

*Dr. Hullinger is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Veterinary Anatomy, School of Veterinary Science and Medicine, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

Editors Note: The make up of the title of this article is a contribution of the author.
exposure to the innovative function of an education; a student bound to the past, and in a few cases, a student who is greatly disappointed with the formal education he has received. The majority of students will come to see education as a closed process rather than an open-ended, dynamic sequence. Their education will lack the proper balance between the conservative and the innovative and their teachers will have fallen far short of their goal.

The experiences the student has in school determine in large part his attitude about continuing his education after having left school. If educators can bring forth students who are open-minded and prepared to continue the learning experience into their professional lives, then these students are on the way toward becoming educated persons.

Again, the approach to learning is formative. There is today a rapidly increasing gap between the volume of what is known and the amount of that which is taught. This gap is perhaps wider than the concerned educator can tolerate. There may at this point be a very subtle assumption at work which comes to haunt the professor and the student. It haunts the professor when he articulates directly or indirectly, "The time has gone so rapidly this term that I just haven't had time to present all the material," or "We will have several exams throughout the term so you won't have so much material for which to be responsible." These expressions and others of similar sentiment stem from the assumption, "I have to cover it all" and lead only to frustration and guilt feelings concerning his inadequacy as an instructor and the pending doom of his students.

The student faces a similar problem. This same assumption also haunts him. He may feel the same sense of frustration and guilt as he tries and fails to "learn it all"; that is, until he gives up and stops trying to learn! This loss of a desire to learn may remove the possibility of his continued education. Railsback is surely correct when he suggests that "... everything about veterinary medicine cannot, and need not, be taught before the D.V.M. degree is granted."

The gap between discovery and application of information is being narrowed as the tools of library science and the automation provided in data retrieval systems provide a quantity and quality of service believed impossible a few years previously. Given these and further increases in the efficiency of bringing new materials into the classroom, the student can and should be taught to make better use of these tools for problem-solving purposes. By this approach, the crowding of the curriculum and subsequent increased classroom time can also be avoided.

Following graduation from the professional school, the usable knowledge at the disposition of the practitioner does not cease to proliferate. There is often a critical lag between what is known and the time when it is incorporated into the practice situation. Studies of various professional groups have shown that a large majority of the practitioners consider detailmen their most important source of information. Many of these are slightly biased but someone is in the continuing education business! The AVMA sourcebook for continuing education continues to expand with excellent programs for the graduate. But the percentage of practitioners involved remains small. In June of 1970, 2,367 veterinarians, or only about 11 percent of the U.S. veterinarians, attended the national meeting held in Las Vegas. The directive seems to be that someone provide the detailman with further training in teaching and a broader set of goals or equip the graduate with the will and skill to learn on his own!

Education can be the key to a lock on the doors concealing a wealth of lifetime experiences. If educators are to help students open these doors, the conserving and innovative functions of education must receive equal emphasis in the professional school. The methods and materials of instruction used by the individual staff member should incorporate directly new information from a wealth of sources. These should include the results of his research activities, the research reports of others, and information from regional and national conferences which he has attended and
in which he has participated. Through this sharing he will reveal how he continues his learning. In this manner he will act out the role of one who is continuing to learn.

Kolar has suggested that students should be selected for the curriculum, in part, based upon evidence that they would participate in their postgraduate education. His proposal should be given consideration and further study.

How a student learns from experience, beyond what is "expected of him" in the classroom and later in practice, may be determined by the habits he is able to cultivate in the university setting. An educator charged with the instruction of professional students must be concerned with how students of veterinary medicine continue their education beyond the formal experiences in the anatomy classroom or clinical laboratory. Has the faculty member incorporated the concept of self-instruction in his teaching—encouraging the student to discover for himself rather than being totally dependent upon his teacher? What sort of dialogue, what sort of interchange do they have with other "free minds" at and beyond the university? Does the student make contact with members of the university faculty beyond the professional school? Is he encouraged to take elective work outside of the veterinary curriculum if he desires? This kind of contact could add variety and vitality to the student's program. What a sad comment about our system of professional education, when, after having gone through a minimum of six years of formal education, the student may have lost his interest and enthusiasm which may have once possessed him. Success in stimulating the student to engage in the total university experience may very adequately measure the effectiveness of a teacher.

It would be timely to emphasize a quote from Dryer, "We will fool no one but ourselves if we think we can achieve the objective of lifetime learning simply by exposing more (students) to more teachers at more (post university) meetings, or in more classrooms . . . or solely by coordinating or rearranging time-tables of instruction."

Habits of continuing education are caught, taught, and developed in the classroom.

It has been wisely observed that "an educated man is, in part, one who can be educated further." The opportunities to learn after graduation are unlimited. The biggest educational classroom, largest experimental laboratory, and the greatest opportunity for learning is that which the practitioner finds in his practice. What he chooses to learn from these situations then becomes critical. The degree to which he learns will be related directly to his preparation.

If our educators and students can approach an understanding of the perpetual nature of their task, then both can come to commencement exercises with joy and confidence, knowing that this is not the end but a symbolic expression of the beginning of their interaction as students beyond the university. Continuing education begins in the classroom.

Summary

Learning, especially professional learning, must be a continuing process. To assist the student in developing good habits of continuing education, the professional school must demonstrate both a conserving and an innovative approach to learning. The experiences the student has while he is in the professional school will formulate to a significant degree his attitudes about continuing his education after commencement. The classroom is where continuing education is begun.

REFERENCES