

# The Yang and Yin of Supervision

By Gary Moore



Ancient Chinese writings describe the yang and yin. Yang and yin refer to the opposites that balance nature such as night and day, north and south, and the sun and moon. Yang is the dominant force and yin is the lesser of the forces.

During my 38 years of involvement in agricultural education, I have observed the equivalent of yang and yin in state supervision. I would classify supervision prior to the 1960s as the yang and supervision after the 1960s as the yin. Which was better and which should we strive for today?

## The Yang of Supervision - Pre 1960s

State supervisors operating under the Smith-Hughes Act (as interpreted and implemented by the Federal Board for Vocational Education) wielded enormous power. They were responsible for ensuring that agricultural education activities conducted within the state were in compliance with federal rules and regulations and were of high quality. Following are some examples of their "quality control" efforts (based upon my personal experiences and observations):

1. Regulated teacher responsibilities. While teaching vocational agriculture in Ohio, I was assigned a one hour study hall to supervise on Friday mornings (the modified block schedule I taught on resulted in a light teaching load on Fridays). I contacted my district supervisor and informed him of this. Within 24 hours the decision was reversed. The supervisor had threatened to pull vocational

funding from the school.

2. Audited SAE records. Prior to the 1960s teachers had to complete annual reports listing the scope, yield, and profit or loss for each student's farming program. It was not unusual for a state supervisor to examine student record books and even pick a student at random for a surprise visit. I have SAE reports from the 1930s with red markings showing that the state supervisor checked the math on each column and corrected mathematical errors.

3. Observed teaching. While teaching high school my district supervisor observed me teaching at least twice a year and sent detailed reports of his observations to me and to the high school principal.

4. Verified that students had experience programs that qualified for advanced degrees and proficiency awards. During the later part of the 1960s I applied for the American Farmer degree. One of the state supervisors in Texas, where I lived, came out to my ranch to verify that I did indeed qualify for the degree. In Louisiana a team of state staff and teacher educators spent a week on the road visiting the finalists for state FFA proficiency awards. Winners were selected, not just on the basis of a paper application, but on what was observed.

5. Directed teacher education efforts. While a graduate student at the Ohio State University, I participated in joint meetings of teacher educators and the state supervisory staff. It was not uncommon for the head state supervisor to berate the teacher educators for not performing

in the manner that he expected. Since federal vocational education funds were under his control, and he was providing some financial support for teacher education, he believed he controlled the teacher education program. And in reality, prior to the 1960s, state supervisors approved the hiring of teacher educators.

During the Smith-Hughes era, supervisors were often described as being "the shadow across the door." They had clout, made sure the provisions of the Smith-Hughes Act were being following and worked diligently to assure that teachers and teacher educators were conducting quality programs.

## The Yin of Supervision - Post 1960s

The Vocational Education Act of 1963, subsequent federal vocational education legislation, and a changing society led to a decline in state supervision. In 1957 there were 223 state level supervisors; this number dropped to 130 by 1997; a decline of 40%. Not only did the numbers decline, the responsibilities and mode of operation also changed in state supervision. Some of the changes that I have observed include:

1. Changing the name from supervisor to consultant. Some state staffs no longer supervise; they provide advice if they are asked to do so. In at least one state, the state staff can not go into a school unless they are invited.

2. No state level leadership or greatly diminished leadership. In several states there is no longer a state supervisor for agricultural education. In other states, the number of supervisors have been reduced dramatically.

3. Broader duties. In a number of states the supervisor has been assigned additional responsibilities that have diluted the agricultural education

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## Vocational Student Organizations

Vocational student organizations require an enormous amount of coordination and development at the state level as students test and validate their skills developed in the program. Skill events require students to participate in a performance review of their knowledge through performance based activities. What are those skills and how does one determine those skills required for different schools in the state should be the role of state supervision. Leadership skills and program development are other key components of these programs as well and again the state level provides the most efficient methods of completing these important parts of the programs.

## Ideas from Educators

As professionals when we look across the country, we see many ideas about what role educators would like to see from their state supervision. Terry Nickels from Washington would like to see assistance in "partnership development with industry, vocational funding along with teacher retention along with helping administrators to better develop and conduct quality agricultural education programs." Nearly every teacher contacted in the twenty-state survey indicated the need for assistance with teacher inservice and curriculum development for individual states. Furthermore, the teachers stated that supervisors' roles have changed greatly in recent years to include more responsibilities beside Agricultural Education.

## The Future

It cannot be denied that state supervision can play an important role in the future as we begin another century. Their roles across the states as we know today vary considerably. They are involved from specific Agricultural Education to generic

supervision. What is best is yet to be determined. We do know however that supervisors' roles, just as educators' roles, are changing as education reforms to better meet the needs of students. It seems very cost effective and time effective to allow state supervision to coordinate curriculum development, professional development, and vocational student organizations within a state. The days of on-site personal visitation and support may be a thing of the past as state supervision takes on a more general role of working with larger groups. State supervision will play an important role in the next century as we prepare to meet many new challenges.

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efforts. In several states one person has been assigned the responsibility of supervising and coordinating all vocational student organization activities.

In my opinion, the yin era of state supervision has led to a decline in program quality in agricultural education.

## Restoring Yang and Yin to Supervision in the Future

According to Chinese philosophy, yang and yin are to be in balance or harmony. Neither of the two conditions of supervision described above show this balance or harmony. However, there is hope on the horizon. Leadership in agricultural education is achieving a sense of balance and harmony in some states. The articles in this issue describing events in Illinois, North Carolina, and South Carolina are models that appear to be working. In Maryland, an Agricultural Education Foundation has emerged to provide state level leadership in the absence of a state presence. There are alternatives to what has existed previously. The agricultural education profession must be creative in seeking alternative ways to achieving yang and yin in state level leadership.

State level leadership is needed in agricultural education in the 21st century. But it will need to be different than what we had during much of the 20th century. In the states where change has occurred, teachers have partnered with agricultural organizations and industry to work with the state legislature to bring about change. We shouldn't be sitting on our hands decrying the decline in state level leadership, we need to be proactively developing the new model that will carry us through the 21st century.

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