

* * * *

SOME QUESTIONS CONCERNING SECURING TEACHER EDUCATION CANDIDATES

John F. Thompson
Teacher Education
University of Wisconsin

This article was begun by first undertaking an extensive review of several related areas in our professional literature. These areas included the composition of the teaching force, reasons persons give for selecting teaching as a career, the beginning teacher, occupational role studies and vocational development theories. A conceptual framework associated with each area does not by itself explain career choice and occupational development.

There has not been an integration of these components to build a career model based on psychological, sociological and economic factors. This is not to say that the theories have not been helpful. The mere fact that a theory stimulates research which eventually casts doubt on its derived hypotheses is not grounds to say that the theory was not useful, though it was inaccurate as stated. For this is not one of the roles of a theory--to stimulate research.

We can take another perspective of the review and ask ourselves what are the implications for vocational education and vocational education in agriculture of those isolated career and occupational determinates which are educationally sound. These implications, as seen by the author, are the content of this presentation. Further, they will be viewed by some persons as inappropriate and as sound by others. Each idea is presented with the hope that it might have meaning for the professional setting of at least one reader.

The author has a "bug" about asking questions and this

bias is reflected here. Once an area of concern is identified, a question is raised for your consideration. These are underlined to facilitate quick reading.

It was noted in the review of the many areas of research that boys planning to become secondary teachers specify an interest in teaching a particular subject. Is this fact reflected in our career planning literature? In other words, should we design the literature stressing the importance of teaching vocational agriculture rather than stressing teaching in general. A large segment of boys in teacher education do not decide to become teachers until after college enrollment. Typically, about one-fourth of the vocational agriculture teachers have definitely decided to become a teacher by high school graduation. Many do not decide to enter a teacher education program until near the end of their second year of college. Could we begin a campaign on the college level that would acquaint boys with the possibility of teaching a vocational subject? As agricultural education continues to look more to areas of specialization, it may have a real opportunity here to secure additional teacher education candidates. A campaign on the college level might do such things as (1) advertise in the campus newspaper, (2) run informative stories about opportunities, (3) set up booths at key points on campus to pass out literature, and (4) work closely with the university counseling and advisement centers.

Boys who select secondary teaching as a career choice give as one of their reasons for making this selection the fact that it can be used as a stepping stone to another job or career. Would it be ethical to promote this idea? Here we might counsel with perspective teachers and suggest to them that they prepare for teaching but plan not to teach all of their life, as teaching would be a good experience to have before moving to other occupations.

It has been estimated that if we could get our present teachers who are leaving teaching to teach two years longer, it would solve our teacher shortages. This idea should not be dismissed to quickly. What can we do in this line in vocational education that would result in some teachers staying with us one or two years longer? Interpersonal dimensions of the occupation of teaching appeal to agricultural teachers and are high on the list of reasons that they identify when choosing the profession. They might respond quite favorably to letters during their third or fourth year of teaching which accent their progress and achievements in working with youth. The intrinsic factors--pay, leave, benefits, time demanded in order to accomplish the job, etc.--affect the job satisfaction of men teachers. Can any of these factors be manipulated so as to create better job satisfaction or job security by teachers of vocational subjects? There is a myth that former agriculture teachers were dissatisfied about

their pay. The author will admit that he does not know of a teacher who would turn down a salary increase if it were offered. However, when research is done with former agriculture teachers on the salary component, we find that former agriculture teachers were not dissatisfied with their pay as they left the classroom. They were dissatisfied with the peak salary that they could have attained if they remained in agricultural teaching.

Finances have usually been cited in a negative manner whenever they were mentioned with the teaching profession. Research indicates that it has also operated in a negative manner toward the profession. A rapid increase in teacher salaries has occurred. This rise, it is important to point out, is relative and is not absolute. Could we say that salaries for teachers are adequate and if we do would this have a positive rather than negative result in obtaining teacher education recruits?

A related aspect is commitment to teaching. It has been observed that former agriculture teachers teach nearly two years longer than do former business or home economics teachers. Thus, it is in our favor that they have a stronger commitment to the job as they begin to teach. The peak exit rate for agriculture teachers occurs about three or four years after they begin to teach. Could we, then, obtain results by maximizing our in-service programs during the years of peak exit rates? (The author is aware of the converse relationship. Perhaps, it is because agriculture has a very extensive first year teacher program that our teachers currently teach longer than the business or home economics teachers).

Some studies show that the source of teachers is shifting to the larger metropolitan centers. Are these youngsters aware of the possibilities available to them in teaching vocational subjects? We need programs to insure that they do not overlook the possibility of vocational teaching. It seems reasonable to assume that as we look for teachers in horticulture, small animal care, etc., that many of these youngsters, including girls, should be strong candidates for our teacher education programs. I am really suggesting that we shift even faster than we now are from the concept of farm experience as a prerequisite to teaching agriculture to occupational experience. We need to be aware as we do this that youngsters in urban areas see different kinds of opportunities in teaching than do those youngsters from rural areas. They choose teaching for different reasons. Any recruitment literature and information programs need to reflect this difference.

The reasons given by college teacher education candidates for choosing the profession of teaching were similar to those given by high school students. But a strong shift in values seems to occur during the first year of teaching. Yet there is a paucity of research on the first year as well as the first year agriculture

teacher, and we need to shift some of our research efforts to this area. Though we have led all of education in a commitment to the first year teacher, we have not adequately researched it. Perhaps our teacher education, including student teaching, has too much of an "ivy tower" approach to education. Could the first year of teaching be something like half-time to permit a more gradual "breaking in" process and more help from the university staff? This is the type of teacher preparation that is being developed by the intern teacher education programs which are getting underway at some universities.

We have seen many changes take place in the teaching job of the vocational agriculture teacher. We have added many new aspects to this already existing job. Certainly the possibility of role conflict is great for those teachers of vocational agriculture. What are these conflicts in roles as perceived by the vocational agriculture teacher?

We need also to pay attention to some recent social developments. Congress has passed a new G.I. Bill. Veterans of more than six months of service can now find it easier to attend college. Have we made contact with state and local veterans offices to acquaint them with the opportunities in agricultural teaching? A subjective observation by the author of some colleges of agriculture's undergraduate enrollment bears mentioning here. It was observed that we do get some students in our colleges of agriculture who have had vocational agriculture in high school. They are likely to be less than 50 percent of our undergraduate enrollment (and in some cases less than 10 percent). We seem to be less likely, though, to find a student in our undergraduate program who comes from a high school that taught vocational agriculture that did not take high school agriculture. The "image" may be forcing them not to consider college agriculture. If so, this is most unfortunate. In essence it appears that those high schools where vocational agriculture is taught are likely to offer some of the vocational agriculture boys to agriculture college, but are not likely to offer many of their other students. Can we, then, depend on the agriculture teacher to "recruit" for us in his high school and concentrate our information programs on those high schools which do not teach vocational agriculture? Remember that this question is raised after isolated observation and not from a review of significant research.

In summary, then, we know that recruitment of students to our teacher education programs is something less than an exact science. Consequently, what works in one area may not meet with success when tried under different conditions. This article simply raises some questions which might deserve some consideration as we attempt to increase the candidates in our teacher education programs.

(A bibliography is not included due to its extended length. If one is desired, it may be obtained by writing to the author.)