

ARE TEACHER EDUCATORS IN AGRICULTURE ALSO
LEADERS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION?

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Teacher educators in agriculture have a record of professional accomplishments and service of which they can be justly proud. They can point to a long and productive record of research. It is granted that much of this research was not done by them, but by graduate students under their direction. The problems studied have dealt largely with vocational agriculture. They have varied with respect to significance, nationally. Nonetheless, the record is generally good.

Most of the recent general texts on vocational education have been authored, co-authored, or edited by teacher educators in agriculture. It could be inferred that these authors are relatively knowledgeable in vocational education and as competent to write and speak about the subject as are their counterparts in other fields.

In those institutions where there is an administrator of all vocational teacher education programs this post has been filled frequently, but not always by teacher educators in agriculture. In some, however, there is a department of vocational education entirely separate from a department of agricultural education.

Teacher educators in agriculture have led the way to successful citizen involvement in planning and evaluating programs of vocational education through notable demonstrations in their own field. If space permitted, other citations could be made of leadership exhibited in methodology and the applications of learning to the work situation.

Currently we are witnessing a growth of programs in vocational education that cut across some of the "fields" of vocational education. The preparation of teachers and administrators for these new programs, the conduct of research regarding them, and the administration and evaluation of them seem to call for new leadership in vocational education at the state and national levels.

The current and prospective developments now unfolding have been referred to by some as constituting a "golden age" of vocational education. At the same time we would have to admit that not all agencies or institutions are looking to teacher educators in agriculture to assume responsibilities of leadership in vocational education. A mammoth federal program of funded research has called upon relatively few from our ranks to take positions of leadership in it at the national level. A recent national evaluation of vocational education, well supported by a foundation grant, was operated without the benefit of our leadership.

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(Actually, this project could not truly be said to include evaluation of vocational agriculture.) The new project on the Assessment of the Progress of Education* is to include an assessment of vocational education. At this writing it appears that this, too, will be done without calling on teacher educators in agriculture.

New programs of occupational experience are being developed including on-the-job instruction by employers. Teacher educators in agriculture could take much credit for the development and testing of techniques of supervised practice that have been in use during the past quarter century. Is this experience being utilized? It sometimes appears that it is not, when compared with experience of others under the name of cooperative occupational training. Teachers of agriculture have actually been prepared to conduct cooperative occupational training for years, but not under that name.

Why have not the leaders in agricultural education been placed more frequently in the broader positions of leadership in vocational education to the extent that many might feel justified? This question could be discussed at considerable length. A few of the more obvious facts, however, will be cited here. The traditional image of agriculture as being only farming still persists despite commendable efforts to change the image. Consequently, the image of vocational agriculture and teacher education for vocational agriculture remains relatively unchanged. Vocational agriculture still is associated with secondary education and with youth, in spite of many successful programs for adults. But emphasis on FFA has overshadowed the adult education programs. Industrial educators have always used the term "vocational education" more than have agricultural educators. They have not very often been thinking of vocational education in all fields, however, when they use the term. For example, the excellent magazine, Industrial Arts and Vocational Education, almost never carries articles on any field other than industrial. Many large school systems have a staff position referred to as "director of vocational education," but only a small minority of these directors actually administer programs in all vocational fields, and many only in industrial. Industrial education actually is a large "umbrella" covering a conglomerate of industrial occupations and occupational families. Some of these occupations may not be industrial at all, as for example, health occupations. But because leaders in this field have identified themselves with the name of vocational education, many of them have appeared to be the logical ones to be called.

Let us look at ourselves, however, for a moment. We would have to admit, first, that teacher educators in agriculture have not made themselves especially visible in conducting research in the over-all aspects of vocational education nor have they written or taught very much outside of agricultural education. Their publications, in general

*Ralph W. Tyler, "Assessing the Progress of Education," The Phi Delta Kappan, 48:13-16, September 1965.

educational journals, are not numerous. Many have not taught courses on principles and programs of vocational education.

Perhaps one reason for these facts is the setting of the departments with which teacher educators in agriculture are affiliated. Association with, and being administered in a college of agriculture rather than in a college of education is the rule rather than the exception. This is not to say that one is better than the other. But close contact with other vocational teacher educators is not likely to be possible in a college of agriculture, and absence of such close contacts is not likely to be conducive to development of across-the-board understandings nor of the type of image desired.

Teacher educators in agriculture had not been as alert as those in in other vocational education fields until just recently to the recognition or existence of technicians and the need for training them. They have only begun to study them. The same may be said of research and study of area vocational education programs. Teacher educators have succeeded very well in presenting the image of vocational agriculture as being a program to be based almost entirely on local community needs. Perhaps this has tended to give the impression that they do not have a broad outlook on vocational education.

The general conclusion to be drawn at this point, then, might be: that teacher educators in agriculture as a group have not yet gained recognition as leaders in vocational education; that they, nonetheless, deserve it; but that some may need to change their ways. How, then, might teacher educators in agriculture gain or regain leadership positions on this already fast moving "space ship" we call vocational technical education? A few ideas emerge from the foregoing analysis and a look ahead.

We—teacher educators in agriculture—need to continue to do research in vocational agriculture, but we need to do more in vocational education. And this must be good research. It must be as good as any research done in education. We must let the whole educational profession know about it when it is well done. Then, we need to write more on the subject of vocational education. Nobody will believe we can do this unless we do it. We need to offer and teach more professional courses on vocational education. We ought to supplement these courses with workshops and leadership education programs. Many of these courses and workshops are needed for present and prospective teachers. Some of these programs should be aimed directly at the preparation of local and area directors and administrators of vocational education programs, and in serving as consultants to administrators and teachers engaged in planning and evaluating programs of vocational education. We need to team up with other vocational teacher educators on projects of mutual interest or concern. Finally, we need to become more visible in general professional circles. It is not implied that there be any less emphasis on vocational agriculture. As the need for competent workers in the broad field of agriculture continues to expand we must step up our programs for preparing teachers for the specialties that make up agriculture.

This is one of the many challenges that face teacher educators today. Do we have the ability to meet this challenge? Undoubtedly! Do we have the courage to do it? This writer hopes so. Do we have the willingness to do it? It is up to us.