

## SPECIAL FEATURE - DEBATE THE ISSUES

This issue of *The Journal* continues the series of "debate the issues" articles authored by leaders in agricultural education. The focus in this debate is whether or not to use non-degree teachers of vocational agriculture/agribusiness. The authors are Gary E. Moore, Purdue University and James Knight, The Ohio State University.

Comments, responses, or questions concerning the issues being debated are welcomed by the editor.

### VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS SHOULD BE CLOSED RATHER THAN BE TAUGHT BY NON-DEGREE TEACHERS

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A much publicized fact in our profession is that there is a teacher shortage. In an effort to alleviate the shortage, at least 34 states have started using non-degree or emergency certified vocational agriculture teachers (Doering, 1975). Even though this practice may appear beneficial to the profession on a short term basis, the long term implications are cause for alarm.

In this article, the author will briefly review the rationale for using non-degree teachers, summarize the research concerning the teaching ability of non-degree teachers, and examine the long range implications of using non-degree teachers.

#### *The Rationale for Using Non-Degree Teachers*

Kindschy (1974, p. 173), writing in *The Agricultural Education Magazine* states, "Perhaps we should listen to our colleagues in trade and industrial education who use many non-degree teachers to conduct high school, post-secondary, and adult classes." This is the basic rationale our profession has used in employing non-degree teachers - other vocational programs do it.

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It might, therefore, be interesting to examine the rationale used by other vocational programs (mainly trade and industrial education) in using non-degree teachers. A review of the T & I literature reveals that *the philosophy of the early leaders* was the rationale used to employ non-degree teachers. For example, Prosser and Quigley (1949) took a very firm philosophical stance that teachers who came out of industry were superior to college trained teachers. They, along with many early vocational educators, believed that occupational experience was the prime requisite for success as a vocational teacher.

A major problem with this philosophical rationale is that there is little research to support it. Evans (1971, p. 193) writes, "Trade and industrial education leaders tend particularly to favor persons who acquire their competencies on the job . . . Though there is little evidence to support the assumptions that these people make better teachers, it is held so widely that it may have validity." A very salient point is made in this statement - *there is little evidence.*

#### *What Research Says About Non-Degree Teachers*

Several research studies (Impellitteri, 1965; Jones, 1967; Vezzani, 1953) have revealed that the years of occupational experience possessed by vocational teachers is not correlated with student learning or the teachers' knowledge of the subject. It can be concluded from the research that numerous years of occupational experience is not necessary to be a good vocational teacher.

Seven studies (Fagen, 1970; Gross, 1974; Moore, 1976; Musgrove, 1968; New York, 1978; Pfahl, 1971; Popham, 1968) have been conducted in which the teaching ability of college prepared teachers and non-degree teachers is compared. In two of the studies, vocational agriculture teachers were examined. Moore (1976) found regularly prepared teachers outperformed the non-traditional teachers on teaching performance tests and were rated more effective by teacher educators. In New York (1978, p. 9) it was found that, "There was a statistically significant difference between non-traditionally prepared agriculture teachers of other than conservation and horse handling courses and all other agriculture teachers" on twenty-five items labeled "teacher performance." However, the researcher gave no indication of what this difference was.

In three of the remaining studies non-degree teachers were found to be less effective than degree teachers in two studies (Fagen, 1970; Gross, 1974) but more effective in one study (Pfahl,

1971). In the other two studies, one researcher (Musgrove, 1968) concluded his rating scale was questionable while the other researcher (Popham, 1968) had mixed results.

Even though the evidence is not overwhelming, the research tends to support the notion that non-degree teachers are not as effective as those teachers who possess a degree.

### *Long Range Implications of Using Non-Degree Teachers*

While the use of non-degree teachers may appear to be a solution to the teacher shortage, the long range problems created by using non-degree teachers can be very damaging to the profession. Following are several long range implications of using non-degree teachers.

1. *Decline in FFA Membership.* As the number of non-degree teachers in vocational agriculture has increased, the percent of vocational agriculture students in the FFA has declined. Non-degree teachers often do not understand the importance of or rationale for the FFA. In the limited preparation program that non-degree teachers take, emphasis is placed on the "more important" aspects of teaching such as lesson planning and curriculum development while the FFA may be ignored. As long as we recruit teachers from industry, we can expect to see a decline in FFA membership.
2. *Decrease in Professionalism.* The increase in the total number of vocational agriculture teachers has not been accompanied by a concurrent increase in NVATA membership. This writer has observed that non-degree teachers do not participate in NVATA or state association activities to the extent their counterparts with degrees do.

The image presented by teachers from industry is often that of a tradesman instead of a professional educator. This image does not enhance our profession. This image has helped maintain the wall of separation between vocational education and general education. Leighbody (1972) believes this separation could be greatly reduced if our vocational teachers had college degrees. If we continue recruiting non-degree teachers, our professional image will decline.

3. *Decrease in Supply of Degree Teachers.* While it appears the use of non-degree teachers will increase the supply of teachers, the opposite may be true. The president of the NVATA (1978, p. 1) wrote, "In some states, the

individual receiving emergency certification need only pay a nominal fee annually and remain as a teacher indefinitely, which makes a farce of a young man or woman working for four years at a college to become fully qualified as a vocational agriculture teacher." A young person who is considering a vocational agriculture teaching career may decide working in agricultural industry is a much more profitable route to prepare for a teaching job than going to college. This could easily result in a decrease of teachers with degrees.

4. *Reduction in the Pool of Potential Leaders in Agricultural Education.* Our profession needs educated leaders to conduct research, supervise teachers, and prepare future teachers. If we continue recruiting non-degree teachers, the pool from which to recruit people for advanced graduate work will shrink. The implications of this are far reaching and could be detrimental to our profession.
5. *Overall Decrease in Program Quality.* The preparation programs for non-degree teachers vary widely in the United States. In a national survey of certification requirements (Brantner, 1974), it was found that only twelve states required any formal teacher preparation on the part of non-degree teachers prior to entering the classroom. In these twelve states, this preparation program ranged from four weeks in one state to only fifteen clock hours in other states. It should be evident from these data that non-degree teachers could not prepare to conduct quality programs. With little or no preparation, how can we expect non-degree teachers to conduct supervised occupational experience programs, develop public relations programs, advise the FFA, operate advisory committees, teach adults, and perform other activities that are found in quality programs. The use of non-degree teachers will result in an overall decline in program quality.

Therefore . . .

The continued use of non-degree teachers will hurt vocational agriculture on a long-term basis. Programs will decrease in quality, professionalism will decline, fewer students will be in the FFA, and the image of vocational agriculture will suffer. After evaluating the vocational agriculture program in Florida, where a number of non-traditionally prepared teachers are employed, Knebel (1978) was opposed to the idea of using this type of teacher.

After a thorough discussion of the vocational agriculture teacher shortage during the 1975 AVA convention, it was made clear (Cross, 1976, p. 35) that the solution to the teacher shortage "does not lie in relaxing teacher qualification standards." The NVATA passed a resolution at this convention recommending the curtailment of employing non-degree teachers. In summarizing the actions of the agricultural education division of the AVA, Cross (1976, p. 36) writes, "The message from agricultural educators at Anaheim was clear: The quality of agricultural education at all levels must be kept high, even if this means fewer such programs because of the vocational agriculture teacher shortage." I agree. It is in the long term interest of vocational agriculture that programs be closed instead of using non-degree teachers.

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Gary E. Moore

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### NON-DEGREE TEACHERS CAN BE USED EFFECTIVELY IN VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS

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At one time or another most states in the nation have had a shortage of certified teachers of vocational agriculture (Craig, 1978). Several approaches have been developed to respond to this long standing need. However, the shortage of teachers continues year after year. One approach to filling vacant teaching positions when regularly prepared and certified teachers (teachers with at least a Bachelor's Degree in agriculture and who have completed a preservice teacher education program) are not available is to recruit people from agricultural business and industry who are determined to have a high degree of technical competence. This competence has been acquired through actual on-the-job experience.

This particular approach to providing teachers of vocational agriculture is meeting with varying degrees of success. In Ohio, where this approach has been used for some ten years, it appears that the success or failure of an individual recruited from industry is a highly individual matter. Some of these teachers have failed; some are highly successful and have become cooperating

teachers for the student teacher program. The large group remaining is scattered between these extremes. However, similar statements could be made about college prepared, regularly certified teachers. Currently a significant percentage of the teachers of vocational agriculture have come to teaching by way of being recruited from industry (Morgan, 1979). Technically competent persons can succeed as teachers of vocational agriculture without having a degree, and it is just as apparent that having a degree will not necessarily guarantee success.

### *Technical Agriculture Competence*

A teacher recruited from industry with many years of experience brings relevance and a multitude of practical experiences from the work place to the educational setting (Miller, 1980). The primary objective of vocational agriculture is to prepare students for entry into agricultural industry. A major tenet in that preparation process has been "*learning by doing*." Supervised occupational experience programs of one sort or another have been a driving force in the instruction offered. Mark Twain wrote, "You can't go back to where you ain't never been." Vocational educators in agriculture have generally agreed that a teacher's experience is essential in providing quality instruction in agriculture. If vocational agriculture programs are to prepare people for employment, teachers who have "*been there*" can aid in the accomplishment of this major objective.

With the expansion of vocational agriculture programs into instructional areas other than production agriculture, the need for teachers has been intensified because teacher education programs have simply been unable to prepare enough teachers. In specialized instructional areas such as agricultural mechanics, horticulture and resource conservation, often the only viable supply of teachers has been the business or industry involved. "Teacher training institutions are neither equipped nor staffed to prepare such specialty teachers in the quantities that are needed." (Parks, 1980). Further, persons recruited from industry often bring contacts which offer tremendous assistance in the development of supervised occupational experience programs and in the placement of graduates into the industry. In Ohio, for example, several thousand students would be denied training for occupations in agriculture in which they have an occupational objective if teachers were not recruited from industry.

### *Pedagogical Competence*

The ability of a teacher to teach effectively is the major concern when discussing the utilization of teachers recruited from

industry. However, there are some myths that have become associated with non-degree teachers. As already indicated, some teachers who are among the very best have come into the profession directly from industry. Experience in Ohio leads to several conclusions:

1. The idea that all teachers recruited from industry are past learning or unwilling to learn how to teach and to deal with students in a professional manner has not proved to be true.
2. Teachers recruited from industry are not necessarily failures in the industrial realm of their experience.
3. Teachers recruited from industry are not necessarily less committed to adult education, supervised occupational experience programs, FFA, professional organizations and their own professional and technical improvement; they are only unacquainted for the most part.

As one reviews the literature of agricultural education, these concerns are common to teachers of vocational agriculture in general. For some time, articles in publications which deal with agricultural education have been directed at needs such as better instruction in FFA or supervised occupational experience programs. A concern for active involvement of teachers in the profession has included both degree and non-degree teachers. Overgeneralizing these concerns as being only connected with the teachers recruited from industry is not an accurate view of the situation as it currently exists.

### *The Real Issue*

A real issue is not the source of teachers but the methods of selection and preparation which are used to identify and prepare teachers recruited from industry.

In Ohio, administrators have gradually become more discriminating in their selection processes. They are becoming more careful in checking the technical background of the individuals being considered. Also, they are taking a harder look at the personal and professional attitudes of potential teachers. Just as important, the administrators are being somewhat more descriptive about expectations with regard to FFA, supervised occupational experience programs, adult education, and professional and technical improvement.

If departments of agricultural education, in concert with state departments of education, develop emergency certification

programs which mandate the necessary pedagogical preparation for the industry-recruited teacher, many of the problems currently associated with these teachers can be reduced or eliminated.

Several programs have been developed that have directly addressed the pedagogical preparation of teachers recruited from industry. Many productive and capable teachers have come through such programs and yes, some not so productive or capable. This can also be said of a regular undergraduate teacher preparation program. Perhaps the greatest challenge faced by a department of agricultural education in the "industry teacher education program" is the amount of intensive and individual in-service work required to prepare the teachers professionally. This makes it necessary for faculty members to commit large amounts of time to be away from campus in schools providing individual instruction and supervision. That time-consuming activity, however, has its positive benefits since it provides a direct mechanism for keeping teacher educators current on what is going on in the schools. The same approach is strongly recommended for working with supervised occupational experience programs and is being used successfully in working with teachers recruited from industry.

### *A Major Concern*

Traditionalists in teacher education programs may see the recruitment of teachers from the agricultural industry as an unattractive, if not unacceptable, answer to the teacher shortage. It may be that such a view biases an objective consideration of this approach to solving the continuing and serious teacher shortage problem. Most teacher education departments have been primarily involved in the preparation of undergraduates in a degree program for teaching. The profession should consider alternatives to the current undergraduate program. By objectively considering the merits and concerns of the recruitment and preparation of teachers from industry, a productive solution to the teacher shortage problem faced by the profession may be achieved.

### *Summary*

The recruitment of teachers from industry is one way of filling teaching positions which otherwise would be left vacant. This approach to meeting the long standing teacher shortage is not without problems. People have entered teaching who were not committed to the profession. Some have lacked the professional attitude so important to really making educational programs successful. Others have simply not performed well. However, some have become such good teachers that they are now used as cooperating teachers.

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- h. The Core is important for first-year teachers.
- i. Local schools may have a problem budgeting enough money for the student cores each year.
- j. Switching to a new curriculum needs in-service work.
- k. Selling the Core concept to the school administration is necessary.

### Summary

Teacher materials were used by a majority of the respondents during the past year. The planned use of teacher and student materials for 50 percent or more of the instructional time was from one and one-half to two times the actual use in 1977-78. These data indicate that vocational agriculture teachers in Nebraska support the Core concept to the extent of making a significant attempt to incorporate the Core concept into local programs.

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Generalizations about the less adequate competence of teachers recruited from industry are at best questionable. The major concern is not the source of teachers, but the selection and preparation processes. Recruiting teachers from industry can serve as a valuable supplement to the current method of teacher preparation. This can be especially true if defensible selection criteria and a preparation program in the pedagogical skills are developed.

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