

**INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN PROVIDING OCCUPATIONAL
EXPERIENCES FOR TEACHERS***

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Participation in one or more agricultural occupations is a common requirement for certification of teachers of vocational agriculture. In general, this requirement is expressed in terms of a number of years in farming. With developing programs in non-production agriculture, not to mention an acute shortage of teachers, the character and consequences of this requirement become prime areas of discussion and inquiry. In short, adjustment of this requirement becomes one of many dilemmas with which we are confronted in these days of change and crisis.

On the one hand the traditions of vocational education demand competency of the teacher in specific occupations to be taught and this competency is traditionally associated with skills in performance of tasks in the occupation. On the other side we find a short supply of candidates for teaching who have the experiences desired yet, our tradition calls for a college educated teacher of agriculture.

We may state this dilemma as follows: Shall we reduce experience or educational requirements to meet the demand for teachers of agriculture?

How, then, shall we seek to resolve this dilemma? Does the farm experience requirement remain valid? How may occupational experiences best be obtained by teachers? What changes are indicated in teacher education programs?

In this situation we usually seek a synthesis or adaptation which enables us to relate or incorporate the "old ways" with "new conditions".

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We have to continue living in the old house while building a new one. Research is not especially helpful at this stage partly because there isn't much which is directly related to the problem, and partly because the dilemma is one rooted in traditions and it is difficult to uproot it. In preference to a synthesis we may try for innovation, breakthrough or revolutionary change. Whether viewed as evolutionary or revolutionary it is change and we are concerned with decisions on changes to be made, and the implementation of these changes in the basic pattern of teacher education in agriculture.

The immediate situation is one of short supply. It is most severe in the case of specialized instructors and instructors at the post-secondary level, according to Hensel. In the long run it can be expected that graduates of special courses will be attracted to teaching. An optimist could easily predict a surplus of candidates by 1972. But, in the present period a shortage does exist. The choice in solution implied in the pattern of this conference is adaptive. The solution must satisfy both occupational experience and professional degree criteria. (This may be an impossible problem for the next few years but in the longer run, 3 - 5 years, it seems a reasonable goal).

Given these two conditions to be satisfied three possible approaches to the problem emerge:

1. Recruit candidates who are presently engaged in the occupations to be taught.
2. Provide occupational experiences at pre-service and service level for those who are preparing for, or who have entered, teaching.
3. A combination of the first two.

Since these remarks are designed to be provocative I would like to depart from the specific topic to comment briefly on the first alternative. Some states have had considerable success in recruiting college graduates to prepare for teaching.

There are college graduates in many agricultural fields who may be attracted to a teaching career. It is my belief that immediate results can be obtained if we press hard for this approach. The steps are seen as follows:

1. It involves cooperation among states, if all are to benefit, in financing and planning a cooperative program of teacher education.
2. It requires a concerted effort to identify, recruit and authorize employment of candidates.
3. It needs support to provide salary or major stipends to the men during the training period.

Providing occupational experiences

The second alternative, providing occupational experiences, is our major concern today. In accepting this alternative we are assuming that substantial numbers of candidates are deficient in kind or level of occupational experiences in agriculture. It is not currently possible to obtain an adequate number of candidates if admission requirements are imposed for experience in specific agricultural occupations. Hence, at either or both

the pre-service and in-service level opportunities must be provided for students who are deficient to obtain the desired experiences. The requirement of farm experience certainly has much value in most situations but it is not fully adequate to insure occupational competency of specialized teachers of agriculture. Perhaps we can project from this frail framework some general beliefs and possible lines of action in providing occupational experiences in agriculture.

General Beliefs
(Principles?)

Lines of Action

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| 1. Pre-service experience in an agricultural occupation should be required for most persons admitted to teacher preparation programs in agriculture. | a. Revise admission and certification requirements. |
| | b. Establish procedure for recording and evaluating students' occupational experience in agriculture. |
| 2. Opportunity should be provided for most students to supplement occupational experiences in specific areas which they desire to teach. | a. This experience represents teaching content and should parallel technical preparation insofar as possible. |
| | b. College credit for this experience is a possibility to be explored. |
| | c. The alternatives should be explored on an individual basis with counseling as to use of work-study and summer employment to serve this purpose. |
| | d. The cooperation of other departments can prove helpful. |
| | e. Special emphasis may be given to this need of the student during the student teaching or internship period. |
| 3. Teacher educators should guide their students in determining needs for occupational experiences and in using their experience to interpret practical occupation learning situations. | a. Stress continued first-hand contact as a way to insure success and satisfaction. |
| | b. Provide a general format to use in studying occupational content. |
| | c. Develop opportunities for students to verify their appraisal of personal strengths and weaknesses. This may include practical tests. |

4. New teachers and others in need of added experience in agricultural occupation should be assisted in planning and arranging for the needed opportunities.
 - a. Work with teacher to specify experience desired.
 - b. Obtain approval to have these experiences a part of paid employment.
 - c. Build experiences into course programs as possible.

5. The in-service program should stress meetings of teachers by area of specialization.
 - a. Plan curriculum development projects.
 - b. Schedule field trips, skill workshops, and subject matter presentations.
 - c. Utilize the cooperation of agricultural and business representatives.

Program Changes

As a point of departure for the discussion to follow I would raise some questions. Perhaps they will serve to tie these remarks to possible changes in programs.

1. Do we have adequate cumulative records of the occupational experience of teachers? Do we need to make more use of these records? Should we work to develop a form which teachers would use in recording their experience?
2. Have we worked with departments to get students part-time employment appropriate to their career goal? Is there more opportunity for students to have a combination of course work with occupational experience (a research project involving a greenhouse crop)? Will other departments assist in finding summer employment of the desired types for undergraduate students?
3. Are we capitalizing upon occupational experiences of students in our own teaching? Are we helping students to interpret and generalize from these experiences? Could we use video tapes of "students in occupational experiences"?
4. Are we giving our students enough contact with high school students at work in agricultural occupations? Is this helping our students see value in extending their own occupational experiences?
5. Are we helping school administrators appraise teachers' needs for occupational experience? Have we worked to get new teachers time for this experience with local agricultural firms? Have we tried to build this into our in-service or graduate programs on a selective basis?

6. What is happening to our conventional district teacher organization? Are we trying some meetings for teachers of special areas on a different basis? Are these meetings used to verify, correct, and extend meanings of the teachers' occupational experience? Are we working with agricultural businesses and industries?

Summary

Many factors make it increasingly difficult to impose occupational experience as a general requirement for admission to undergraduate teacher education programs.

1. A solution promising immediate results at relatively high cost is to recruit and train college men who have occupational experience. This solution probably will insure experience at the desired level.
2. A solution which offers intermediate to long-range results is to make provision for teaching candidates and employed teachers to obtain specified occupational experiences. This can be done at relatively low cost but, neither great depth or breadth of experience in the occupation is to be anticipated. Careful planning may help to make the specific experience of value, especially if it supplements experiences in farming or other agricultural occupations.
3. We need to know more about the problem to be very certain in imposing requirements or going too far in throwing out parts of technical and professional education to make room for occupational experiences in the regular schedule.