

SPECIAL FEATURE - DEBATE THE ISSUES

This issue of *The Journal* presents another in the series of "debate the issues" articles authored by leaders in agricultural teacher education. The focus is on the location of programs of agricultural teacher education: Should they be affiliated with colleges of agriculture or colleges of education? The authors are Harold R. Binkley, University of Kentucky, and Earl H. Knebel, Texas A & M University. The editor welcomes reactions from readers about this special feature. Suggestions for future debates will be welcomed.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN AGRICULTURAL
EDUCATION SHOULD BE LOCATED IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

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Teacher education programs in agriculture are located in 76 institutions throughout the United States, divided approximately two-thirds in colleges of agriculture; one-third in colleges of education. Those programs administratively located in colleges of agriculture have an average of slightly over six full-time faculty members while those located in colleges of education average four and a half faculty members. Along with this fact, it is a good guess that the average number of graduate assistants in those departments located in colleges of agriculture may be double those in colleges of education. These facts lead one to believe that departments of agricultural education which reside in colleges of agriculture have stronger support and fare better than those administratively located in colleges of education.

It follows that this may lead us to conclude that the teacher preparation programs in agricultural education should be administratively located in colleges of agriculture. To be quite honest, this feeling creeps upon me from time to time.

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Teaching is, or ought to be, a profession. The fragmentation of preparation programs for teaching among many departments and colleges is likely to result in a fragmented or weak profession neglectful of the many common responsibilities and competencies.

The profession of agricultural education needs to look at itself in a larger context. The above facts tend to indicate that teacher education in agriculture ought to be tied to subject matter, i.e., agricultural education ought to be in agriculture. Then we would logically assume that teacher education in business education should be tied to a college of business, and so on.

This has two big flaws in it. First, it perpetuates the fragmentation of vocational-technical education which almost everybody now agrees is undesirable. Secondly, by and large the other colleges are not concerned with vocational and technical education. But, I must stop and hasten to say that I am sure that the majority of the colleges of agriculture are vitally interested in agricultural education. The statistics prove it.

Realistically, teacher education is not a major focus or high priority in most university departments outside the college of education. Locating agricultural education along with the other vocational teacher preparation programs in colleges of education rather than in agriculture or other colleges is likely to generate a higher priority than if the reverse were true.

There needs to be continuous joint involvement of both the college of agriculture and the college of education in the preparation program for teachers of agriculture. In fact, effective teacher preparation demands substantial involvement parallel to that expected of departments of academic discipline for teachers of history, English, math, etc.

Here is where I insert my bias. I am interested in vocational education as a whole. I cannot discuss agricultural education being in a specific college without dealing with all of vocational teacher education. Agricultural education is a strong part of the total program of vocational education. As a profession, agricultural education is a part of the American Vocational Association and the National Education Association. Agricultural education is represented in the national associations, societies, and organizations tied to education, not the animal sciences and plant sciences. The best solution for vocational education is to tie all the programs of vocational-technical education into one department located in the college of education. Locating it in the college of education would remind us and all other educators that vocational education is a part of education and not a part of something else.

The historic separation of general academic and vocational education at both high school and college levels has been detrimental to each. An administrative structure for teacher education that brings teachers from both broad areas together is more likely to bridge the serious gaps between the two that have developed over the years. The experience in other special fields supports this conclusion. In areas like art and music, for example, the preparation of teachers for these fields is in many institutions located outside of the college of education. This unfortunate separation of teachers in these fields from those in other areas of the school curriculum has generated serious communication and curricular articulation problems in many schools and school systems.

If we have one big danger facing us in American education, it is the establishment of a separate system of vocational education parallel to public education. If this occurs, it will happen because educators did not think enough of vocational-technical education and did not recognize and feel that it was rooted in general education.

The current emphasis on the whole rather than the part of vocational education places on the administrator the most severe burden of management, that of coordination. Beyond the points of fragmentation and the lack of a strong coherent, coordinated field in vocational teacher education (where teacher education programs are located in several colleges), there are several crucial and significant issues I would like to touch upon. These include: 1) curriculum flexibility and innovation, 2) coordinated research emphasis, 3) coordinated service emphasis, 4) staff recruitment and selection, and 5) funding support of vocational teacher education and ancillary services.

Curriculum flexibility and innovation can become more of a reality when all of the teacher preparation programs for vocational teachers are administratively located in a single department. It becomes much easier to offer pre-service core courses in vocational education. Where additional core courses are not feasible, there is the possibility in a department of a series of modules that could be included in the different methods courses in the program areas.

At the graduate level, there are excellent possibilities for across-program areas courses, such as: 1) Advanced Methods in Vocational Education, 2) Research in Vocational Education, 3) Career Education, 4) Selecting Teaching Materials, and 5) Seminar in Vocational Education. Such courses at the graduate level develop understanding by all vocational personnel of the unique differences in the vocational program and build unity, continuity, cooperation, and mutual support for all of vocational education.

Increasingly, school systems are looking for staff persons with a comprehensive view of vocational education rather than a narrow limited view of a single field. Location of agricultural education in a comprehensive department of vocational education within a college of education is far more likely to generate such broad based persons than if the preparation relating to the several vocational fields must be secured in separate colleges and departments.

A research effort with a total emphasis in and for vocational education can be mustered in a department of vocational education as a part of the whole of education. We in vocational education must know more about programs, the people we serve, and ways of reaching these people. Here we are talking about research in education, not agriculture. Research and experimentation are the ways of finding new directions in which to move programs in vocational education. Where is the research focus likely to get its emphasis when agricultural education is located in a college of agriculture?

Increasingly, teacher education is assuming an inservice or continuing education emphasis with close collaboration between school systems and collegiate institutions. An administrative structure providing a single contact point rather than multiple university contacts is more supportive of effective collaboration. The school system which must deal with five or more different college administrative units is likely to keep those contacts at a perfunctory rather than a meaningful level of collaboration.

Recruitment and staffing efforts in agricultural and vocational education can seek out a broader base of expertise in vocational, occupational, and career education in a department of vocational education located in a college of education than where agricultural education is located in a college of agriculture. Such expertise might very well be appropriate for other departments in a college of education, making for a stronger bond between vocational and general education.

I hasten to say that in such staffing care must be exercised to preserve the autonomy and strength of the program areas of vocational education. Autonomy of the program areas is a must for agricultural education and the other service areas to maintain their strength and prevent a move toward "general" vocational education.

Staff members of the department of vocational education should serve on the appropriate committees in the college of agriculture, the college of home economics, and so on.

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