

SOME DEVELOPMENTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION*

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If we are to produce a better product to enter the profession of teaching, we may do so only by starting with better raw material or by improving the quality of the pre-service program. These, I submit, should go hand-in-hand.

As a professional group, teacher educators in agriculture agree rather well on the competencies needed by successful teachers. Likewise, but to a lesser extent, we tend to agree on how to develop these competencies. However, empirical data reveal teachers fail most frequently because of inadequacies in areas other than understanding of technical subject matter and how to present it. Your attention is called to the following developments in teacher education.

Selection of Candidates

One of the more frequently used measures for selecting students is the accumulated grade point average. Many departments of agricultural education have established a minimum before consideration is given to candidates' applications for study in professional courses. In the field of secondary education, Kent State University now requires a 2.3 average before candidates are admitted to candidacy in teacher

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education and a 2.5 is earned before they are permitted to enter the student teaching phase of their program. At the University of Maryland, a Teacher Education Committee screens all applications before they are admitted to pre-service professional courses, excluding Human Development and Psychology. To be eligible, students must present an accumulated average of 2.3.

Iowa State University has a two-option program. One option permits students interested in majoring in the Department of Agricultural Education who do not plan to teach. A second option is for prospective teachers of vocational agriculture. Both groups must meet the first option wherein they apply for admission to candidacy. To be accepted, students must present a 2.0 accumulated average or better and take certain tests including the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey. Majors who expect to teach, in addition to the previously mentioned qualification, must (a) achieve a grade point average equal to the last graduating class, (b) present an acceptable statement indicating reasons for preparing for teaching, (c) have a desirable professional attitude as determined by participation in departmental activities, and (d) be recommended for candidacy by a special teacher education committee.

Selection of Student Teaching Centers

Supervising centers are being selected which have facilities, instructional materials and programs providing the professional experiences in agricultural education in each of the areas of competency to be developed. An increasing number of centers have young and/or adult farmer classes, quality supervised farming programs and adequate provision for agricultural mechanics. Many states now conduct workshops to develop competencies in supervising teachers.

The philosophy and professional attitude of supervising teachers and local administration are important considerations in some forward thinking departments. The University of California staff feels that the development of a healthy constructive philosophy of vocational education is the single most important thing that must be accomplished with prospective teachers. Knowing techniques may speed up success, but without a proper philosophy, success is not guaranteed.

Curriculum Revision

Perhaps the greatest contribution to the pre-service preparation of teachers is being made by analyzing present offerings as a basis for developing programs of greater quality. Texas A and M College recently initiated a self-inventory program to identify existing repetition and voids. Experienced teachers, beginning teachers, professional educators and agricultural workers and others were asked to analyze the total pre-service training program. The Ohio State University conducted a self-evaluation program that resulted in certain changes. The University of Maryland is another example of an institution currently in the process of making major revisions and some program changes in what might be termed a "boot-strap" approach to improvement.

Some areas are getting special attention. At North Carolina State University, trainees are provided functional experiences in analyzing communities to identify educational needs and resources available to provide them. Colorado State University includes Farm and Home Planning as a part of their curricula. The biological science program in California has teacher training implications.

Attention is being paid to the identification and provision of technical experiences in areas of anticipated specialization. Indications point toward more programs including increased amounts of horticulture and landscape design. At the University of Connecticut, students are encouraged to consider horticulture and floriculture fields. Prospective teachers wishing to work in suburban Washington, Boston, Philadelphia, or New York may find these areas of study of particular value.

The five-year program is still with us. California has had a five-year program for years, and Oregon is considering one. California is experimenting with a program that will require six years before full certification is granted.

Relating Theory to Practice

The "wedding" of theory and practice is psychologically sound, but is one of our greatest challenges in implementing internal changes within departmental course offerings. Where theory and practice may be experienced together, they can be learned together. A teacher's ability to teach depends heavily on his understandings of theory behind what he teaches and how he teaches it.

Attempts to bring about a closer relationship between theory and practice has tended to increase the number of hours allotted to courses. Professional experiences in agricultural education involving principles and methods used in teaching and conducting programs of vocational agriculture are being included in directed practice as well as in courses conducted at the teacher training institution. Subject matter once taught at the teacher training institution is now being taught in small groups in cooperating or student teaching centers.

Research in Teacher Education

Cornell's participation in the Ford Foundation's Inter-University Project One is an example of an institution's willingness to search for better answers to old problems. This program is designed to select superior students for preparation to become a teacher. Like other institutions, candidates will be screened. Participants must come from the upper one-third of their classes and score successfully on scholastic aptitude tests.

Another Ford Foundation supported program to teacher education was called the Arkansas Experiment in Teacher Education. It proposed to develop a program of teacher education based upon a four-year program of broad liberal education to be followed by a period of combined internship and professional study. Findings held to be most promising were the integration of theory and practicum, and the systematic involvement of public school personnel in the preparation of teachers. It was concluded that the effectiveness of learning both theory and professional skills depended on the degree to which the internship activities were related to those included in seminars presenting the theory.

At the University of Oregon, a five-year, internship program with tutorial relationship to solve professional problems of prospective teachers is in progress. In some respects, the Oregon and Cornell programs have much in common. The Arkansas program differs from these by placing tutorial emphasis on subject matter areas rather than professional areas.