

**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 instructional materials development units for agricultural education: Should they be affiliated with teacher education departments or administered as separate units? The authors are J. David McCracken, The Ohio State University, and James S. McCully, Jr., Mississippi State University. The editor welcomes reactions from readers about this special feature. Suggestions for future debates will be welcomed.

**INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT UNITS  
SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED BY  
TEACHER EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS**

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A rapidly developing agricultural technology and an increasing reliance upon education to develop agricultural competencies causes teachers of vocational agriculture to rely heavily on current instructional and reference materials. Such materials must meet the needs of students, because the teacher is a leader of students in their quest for knowledge (Jacks, 1967).

Recent years have seen increasing emphasis placed upon the development of curriculum materials services. According to Ridenour and Woodin (1966, p. 9), the primary functions of a curriculum materials service are to select, procure, produce, evaluate, and disseminate educational media which will enable teachers to provide meaningful educational experiences. The design of instructional materials to fulfill teaching and student reference purposes is an important function, not to be taken lightly. This author contends that the location and staffing of instructional materials development units is an equally important consideration, and one which also must not be viewed lightly. It is further proposed that these operations be sited in departments of teacher education.

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Instructional materials development units should be located in teacher education departments because of the (1) interrelationships which ought to exist between teacher education and instructional materials development, (2) accessibility and ease of coordination with subject matter specialists, (3) opportunity to interrelate research, development, and evaluation through utilization of a "critical mass" of talent, (4) facilitation of administrative procedures within a university setting, and (5) greater freedom from political or state department pressure.

### *Instructional Materials Development and Teacher Education*

Ridenour and Woodin (1966) propose that effective methods of instruction by teachers must be encouraged by a curriculum materials service through structuring information in a logical sequence for teaching and by suggesting the most appropriate educational experiences that should be provided students. One simply should not attempt to divorce instructional materials from instructional methods. The philosophy followed by teacher education departments in preservice and inservice methods instruction should be built into the materials which are developed. Ridenour (1978) suggests that teachers select materials in keeping with the way they have been prepared.

A close working relationship between the instructional materials development unit and teacher education department is most beneficial to an undergraduate teacher education program. Student teachers need to utilize the most effective resources available in developing lesson plans. Some universities arrange a media center for student teachers, providing the resources they can expect to find in schools (Rahmes, 1973). Instructional materials developed and/or disseminated by the state curriculum materials service have been considered by teachers to be their most important source (Jacks, 1967).

Jacks (1967) concluded that teachers needed assistance to help them more effectively interpret and use new subject-matter materials. Such assistance should be provided through inservice training programs conducted with teachers to acquaint them with new materials and their most effective use. With teacher education departments primarily responsible for inservice education, it would seem wise to coordinate the instructional materials "development to utilization" process as a unified department effort.

### *Subject-Matter Specialists*

Subject-matter specialists should also be involved in the planning and developing of the outline of content to be included

in a reference (Jacks, 1967). Ridenour and Woodin (1966) found that few procedures were evident for checking the technical accuracy and organization of the subject-matter content. They suggested that the assistance of specialists be secured when preparing instructional materials to insure the technical information is accurate and organized in a logical sequence.

Knebel (1977) indicated approximately two-thirds of the teacher education departments are administratively located in colleges of agriculture. This location provides opportunity for an optimum working relationship with the subject-matter departments in agriculture.

A teacher education department in a college of agriculture is more closely allied with subject-matter specialists, who then are more willing to help in the preparation and critique of materials.

### *Research, Development, and Evaluation*

Located within departments of teacher education are professors and graduate students seeking to further develop agricultural education through the functions of teaching, research, and service. Instructional materials development units which are functions of such departments will benefit in several ways. Users of materials may tend to view the technical information and professional approach in the materials as having greater creditability. Graduate students may be an excellent source of technical writers. Teacher educators can assist in field testing and evaluating instructional materials. Early exposure of undergraduates to materials will bring trust and reliance upon departmental-sourced materials leading to later use.

The area of curriculum has been rather heavily researched as compared with other areas of research emphasis. Studies of off-farm agricultural occupations, competencies essential to agricultural occupations, and evaluations of instructional materials have been conducted. Research in the development, design, use, and effectiveness of instructional materials would be facilitated by a close working relationship between developers and teacher educators.

Teacher educators, through curriculum courses and workshops, have assisted teachers in changing the content of vocational agriculture courses of study in local schools. However, little has been done in many states to coordinate the work of the curriculum materials personnel with the development of the vocational agriculture curriculum. This coordination is better facilitated with developers and teacher educators in the same department.

### *Administration*

Any public agency assuming responsibility for developing and disseminating instructional materials in education must comply with a myriad of regulations. These regulations require certification of compliance in such areas as equal opportunity and affirmative action employment, freedom from sex bias in materials development, and proper expenditure of funds in contracting for services. The advantage an instructional materials development unit may gain in affiliating with a university department is that an umbrella of protection is provided by the parent institution. The university has regulations by which business must be conducted. The university takes care of the problems related to equal opportunity and affirmative action. The rules and regulations of the university may seem restrictive to managers of instructional materials development units who wish to "do their own thing." However, the advantages are believed by the author to greatly outweigh the disadvantages.

### *Freedom*

The university location for an instructional materials development unit holds distinct advantages over a location in a state department of education. Universities have a functional history of dissemination of information coupled with academic freedom. In contrast, during recent years many state departments of education have been engaged in political turmoil which has resulted in weakened supervisory staffs and supervision that is "non-specific" to agricultural education. An instructional materials development unit located in a department of teacher education should enjoy a greater degree of freedom from the ebb and flow of state department priorities and changes. The tendency in some state departments to put priority in one area one year and in another the next may be detrimental to continuing development of instructional materials in a programmatic manner. There is an implicit mandate in a democratic society for educational subject matter to be separated from governmental purpose. Instructional materials could be developed to reduce the teaching options of the teacher, increasingly making him or her an agent of another's purpose. Or the materials could increasingly give the teacher a more responsible role (Dale, 1974). The author contends the teacher should have the freer, more responsible role, more in keeping with a university location for materials development.

Regardless of location, there should be a base of continuing support for instructional materials development units. A sound unit cannot be developed when its very existence is dependent

upon the continual submission of proposals for funding. The attention of materials developers should be directed towards meeting the needs of teachers and students, not upon building a publication empire or upon survival. It is conceded that materials developers may need to be shielded from requirements to serve on university committees and perhaps from professional requirements for promotion and tenure.

### *Concluding Statement*

The problems of teachers of vocational agriculture relating to curricular materials can be divided into three main areas: (1) keeping abreast of the vast amounts of technical knowledge, (2) finding time to become informed with technical and professional knowledge, and (3) obtaining or preparing materials that are structured in a logical sequence for teaching (Ridenour and Woodin, 1966). It is apparent to the author that the reduction of these problems can best be accomplished by instructional materials development units which are affiliated with university departments of teacher education. The "critical mass" of talent; the expertise in research, writing, and evaluation; and the opportunity to coordinate research, development, field testing, and evaluation related to instructional materials development are all good reasons for locating an instructional materials development unit in a department of teacher education. The record is clear! Nearly all of the major instructional materials development units marketing materials in vocational agriculture are university-based. Agricultural educators are problem-solvers. It is obvious there is a "best solution" to the problem concerning the location of instructional materials development units. Continue to locate them in university departments of teacher education!

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