

SPECIAL FEATURE-DEBATE THE ISSUES

Performance Based Teacher Education:
The Case Against Its Wholesale Use

L. H. Newcomb
Professor

Agricultural Education
The Ohio State University

The notion of performance-based teacher education has been discussed by professors of agricultural education for more than a decade now. Yet, here we are examining it anew. What we must come to realize, sooner or later, is that PBTE falls short of the once hailed promises and expectations because it contains fundamental flaws.

PBTE Has Fundamental Flaws

The biggest problem with PBTE is that it fails to adequately represent or capture the true essence of all that teaching entails.

Does Not Capture the Complexity of Teaching

Teaching is more complex than the PBTE notion can accommodate. PBTE is minutely specific. It enumerates and dwells on too many minuscule performances such as focusing an overhead projector and present information using the chalkboard while failing to accommodate meaningful performances such as disciplining students, using the principles of learning in teaching or properly integrating the FFA into the instructional program.

PBTE, as usually recommended, is too rigid and lock-step in nature. It identifies isolated abilities and suggests that they be learned and then performed (as evidence of mastery) singularly. Once a learner shows proficiency within ability A, he/she then attempts to master ability B and so on. In actual practice, teaching is not a series of "two steps" but is a continually changing series of thoughts, actions, and reactions.

Teaching is so complex and intertwined that it is virtually impossible to parcel out all the component parts. If one could identify all the parts, the list of parts would be so fragmented that the performance of each of them singularly would not approach the integrated performance of them as is required by practicing teachers.

Furthermore, teaching is highly decision oriented. It requires receiving multiple stimuli, interacting with and often altering the sti-

*Journal of the American Association of
Teacher Educators in Agriculture*
Volume 24, Number 3, pp.3-6
DOI: 10.5032/jaatea.1983.03003

muli and then arriving at the best decision for the specific problem in question. Even though there may be hundreds of times when a teacher will again face a similar problem, neither the problem nor the solution is apt to ever be the same again because of the multiplicity of the variables involved and the fact that the variables change with students and within students day to day and throughout each day.

Good teaching is not the performance of a series of pre-specified behaviors. It demands spontaneity, recycling, and repetition, as well as intuition and personal response to individual needs and group moods.

Given that this is the way teaching is, the demonstration of the ability to perform isolated tasks/skills is of limited value. In even its most elementary and contrived levels of application, teaching is not divided into tiny, singular, stepwise elements as is suggested by most PBTE approaches. Hence, the PBTE model fails to capture or allow for the robustness which makes teaching the art and science that it is.

PBTE is Behavioristic -- Teaching Is More Complex

Moss (1983) does a nice job of pointing out the shortcomings of PBTE because it is based on the behavioristic stimulus/response model rather than the more appropriate cognitive development model. He argues that PBTE relies on the idea of the learner responding to a given stimulus. While this model is very simple, clear, and easy to grasp, that is precisely the problem. Moss argues that teaching with all its complexity does not fit such a simplistic model. Rather, he argues, the more appropriate model is $S \rightarrow O \rightarrow R$ (Moss, p. 2) where . . . the learner (O) interacts with -- mediates -- stimuli to produce responses." He goes on to say, "This model (Wittrock, 1979) presumes that the learner has capacities, such as aptitudes, value systems, and needs structures which determine the specific responses to a given stimulus. . . Unlike behaviorism, the cognitive model anticipates individualized rather than standardized responses" (p. 2).

Lack of a Research Base

PBTE has not established itself on a firm research base. Granted, research has been used to identify competencies and field test modules, but PBTE is not grounded in a sound theoretical framework related to teacher effectiveness nor improving learning.

Furthermore, the more extensive reviews of teacher effectiveness research such as Rosenshine and Furst's (Smith, 1971) lead one to conclude that what really matters in the performance of teachers is far different than the competencies around which most PBTE programs are developed. While ongoing research is further refining the meaning of teacher behaviors such as clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-oriented and business-like behavior, the student opportunity to

learn criterion material, the message is that it is these more significant behaviors that are associated with improved learning and not highly discrete behaviors like "determine student grades." Ongoing research, on clarity for example, would not lead one to conclude that this behavior is likely to result from developing one or two approaches to helping students learn and then have teachers demonstrate their ability to use these approaches.

Teacher educators need to be working hard at being sure the teachers they prepare develop complex approaches to teaching and that they change spontaneously as needed rather than devoting so much time teaching discrete skills/techniques that there is not time to analyze teaching and learning in a wholistic manner and respond accordingly.

Additionally, in the intervening years since the introduction of PBTE, research evidence verifying its superiority has not been forthcoming. In the document, "Does Performance-Based Teacher Education Work?" prepared by The National Center for Research in Vocational Education in 1981, one finds no research evidence of PBTE's demonstrated effectiveness. Rather, most of the document is based on information from case studies of two exemplary sites. After more than a decade of use, one would expect to see clear-cut empirical evidence of superiority or equality if such were available.

Given the seriousness of these basic flaws, viz: (a) PBTE does not capture the complexity of teaching; (b) PBTE is based on too simplistic a model of learning; and (c) PBTE lacks research support, then surely it is clear that teacher educators should not make wholesale use of PBTE.

Having Teachers Who Can Perform Is Not the Issue

No one disagrees with having teachers who can demonstrate excellence in their daily performance. What many dislike or disagree with is using an overly simplistic recipe approach to developing a complex, multifaceted professional. In fact, everything that one wants a teacher to be able to do is not observable. Surely, teachers need to be able to integrate knowledge, to synthesize, to evaluate, and take appropriate action -- yet most such behaviors cannot be demonstrated in the university laboratory nor in field settings during limited or isolated time spans.

Where there are easily observed critical abilities such as giving a demonstration and conducting a field trip, then by all means evaluate such specific performance. But do not develop a catalogue of trivial behaviors and devote student and professor time to being a slave to a system of record keeping. Keep the focus and the energy on developing the total teacher for the total job.

Recognize PBTE for What It Is

It's time we stop scurrying around worrying about whether to adopt PBTE or not. Rather, let's recognize its contributions and use it accordingly.

Contributions of PBTE

In this writer's view, PBTE has given us a useful specification of the more easily measured teaching competencies. It has also provided additional teaching materials (such as modules and their supporting media) and approaches to preparing teachers. It has allowed us to think about the preparation of teachers in discrete terms and to see if the whole system ought to be implemented. All of this has been of value, but the real value comes from us being able to see the shortcomings of PBTE as well as traditional approaches and avoid them while making use of components that are deemed worthwhile.

What Now?

This writer agrees with Moss (1983) when he said:

" . . . for while the requirements of competency-based education (let's not waste time arguing again over CBE vs. PBE) can be satisfied and its benefits realized in many vocational programs, its indiscriminate application, especially . . . to the preparation of vocational teachers and administrators, seems inappropriate and inefficient . . . (p. 1).

Moss (1983) further elaborated:

When CBVE is applied to occupations with predominantly cognitively complex tasks -- such as vocational teaching and administration -- without sufficient, adaptation, the instructional materials which result are inadequate to carry the major instructional load of the program; at best, they make useful support materials, and/or they may substitute for portions of the total program (p. 3).

So why not design teacher education programs to prepare teachers of vocational agriculture who help each student become all he/she can become; to serve as a change agent in a local community; and function as an exemplary classroom and laboratory teacher? If this means insuring that the teacher can demonstrate the ability to perform some singular tasks of sufficient importance to contribute to the goals of the program, so be it. If it means using a module that is more effective or efficient than the current way used to develop the teacher, fine, but let's not fail to teach prospective teachers the total integrated body of knowledge they need nor to model for them how to teach masterfully. Professors of agricultural education have always insisted on performance from their graduates, and they know this performance is not obtained in any one narrow way.