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The recruitment and retention of vocational teachers is a serious problem which can be alleviated by using a systems approach to vocational teacher education.

Vocational teacher education: a systems approach

by James Albracht



James Albracht is an associate professor of adult and occupational education at Kansas State University where he also serves as coordinator of agricultural education. His bachelor's and master's degrees were from the University of Nebraska, and he earned the Ph.D degree at Michigan State University. He has taught at the secondary and college levels, and has served as national president of Alpha Tau Alpha, honorary fraternity for agricultural education.

The most important ingredient for a successful vocational education program is adequate staffing, especially as it relates to the teaching function. Having been in vocational teacher education for an extended period of time as a teacher, supervising teacher and teacher educator, I have observed that effective teaching is the heart of effective vocational education. Students, instructional materials, administrative and community support complete the ingredients for a successful vocational education program.

Since the key to successful vocational education programs is in the instructional staff, this article will focus on the selection, preparation, placement and retention of vocational teachers.

A 1975 national study¹ found that all but two states had a shortage of vocational agriculture teachers for secondary schools. There are two jobs for each graduate of every vocational teacher education program. Obviously a very competitive situation exists in recruiting an adequate supply of prospective teachers. Having them placed and retained compounds the problem.

Since there is a severe shortage of vocational teachers, what might be done to alleviate this problem? The solution might be illustrated by a Systems Approach to Teacher Education. Figure 1 illustrates a supply and demand situation. The supply side consists of the high school source of students and the college preparation phase. The demand side of the model includes the placement of those qualified to teach and the retention of those teaching.

Efforts should be made to increase both the supply and demand sides of the systems approach model to vocational teacher education. Vocational agriculture teachers have come from the graduates of the four year colleges which have been designated as the sponsoring teacher education institution for certification purposes. Prescribed education courses must be taken and having work experiences verified.

Since in all but two states there is a shortage of vocational agriculture teachers, efforts must be made to bring supply and demand into balance by providing enough teachers to fill the openings which occur each year. The only other avenue open to meet a shortage of vocational teachers is to bring in teachers from one of the surplus states or to lower standards and provisionally certify teachers who are not fully qualified.

The systems approach model gives four points of attack in bringing teacher supply and demand into balance. As illustrated in Figure 1, the High School Source of Supply and the College Preparation are the two most important means of increasing the supply of agricultural education majors. The placement of qualified teachers and the retention of present teachers are points of attack on the demand side of the model.

Similar techniques and activities can be used to increase the supply of high school and college majors in agricultural education. Similar activities can also be used for fortifying the Placement and Retention phases of concern.

What can be done then to increase the numbers of high school age students to enter the agricultural education curriculum? In research by Hung² it was found that high school students needed more career education as well as more and better high school counseling. Hung also suggested stressing the need for advanced study,

varied job opportunities, and the need to have college representatives visit high school students.

Although the vocational teachers are usually skilled in career education and in counseling and guidance as it relates to occupational selection, many students are not enrolled in vocational education curriculae. Not all schools have vocational programs, and not all students who might make good vocational teachers are enrolled in available vocational courses. Although progress is being made, students from the city are in the minority in vocational agriculture education programs. Slightly over half of the agricultural education majors have had vocational agriculture in high school.

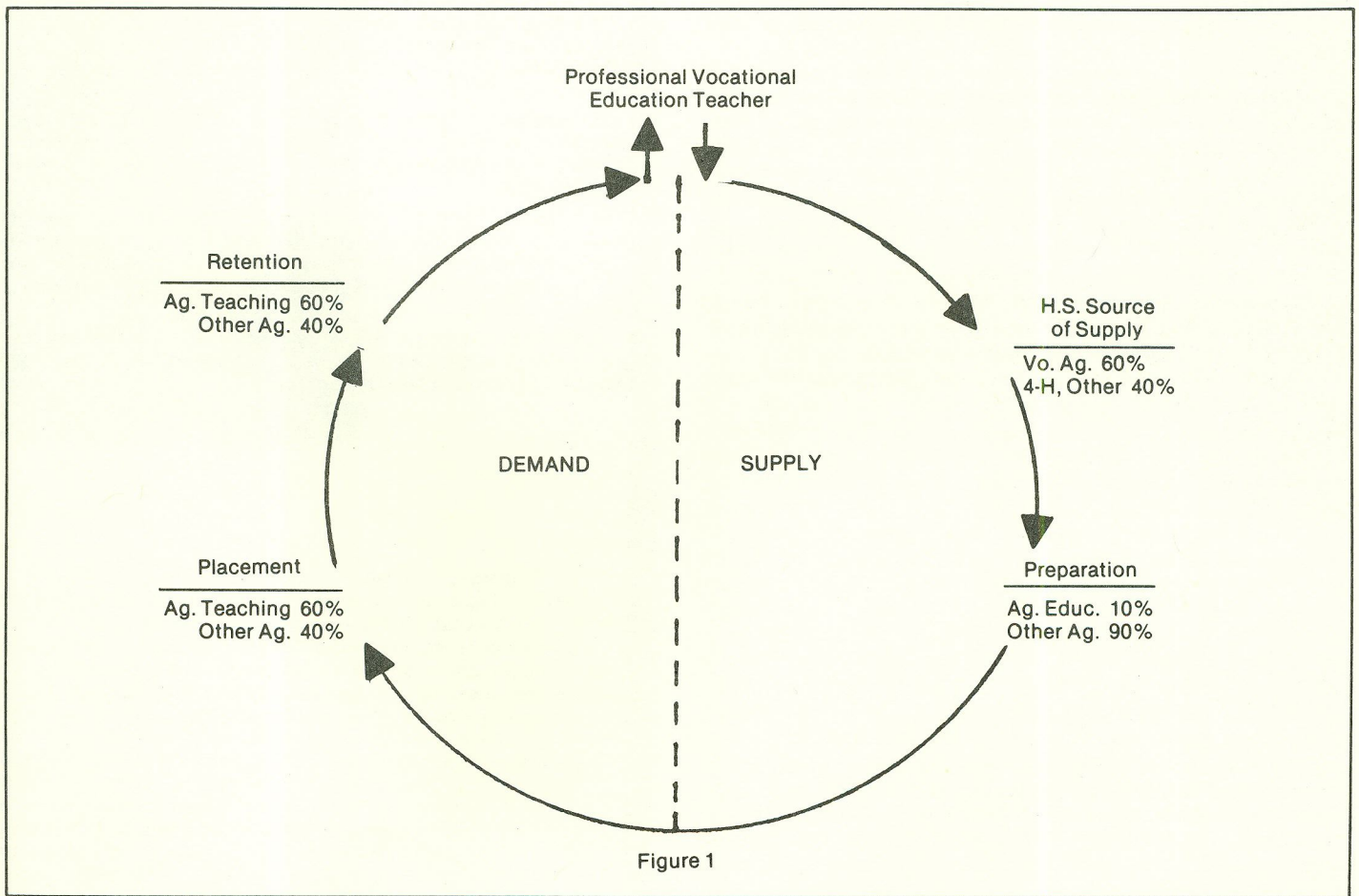
The Professional Personnel Recruitment Committee of the American Vocational Association made these suggestions:

1. Vocational agriculture teachers should recruit their best students each year for teaching vocational agriculture. Each teacher should have as his/her goal that at least one of his/her students graduate in agricultural education every three years.
2. State vocational agriculture teacher associations should exercise leadership in forming and/or maintaining an active recruiting campaign. Emphasis should be placed upon a variety of job opportunities, locations and the advantages of teaching as a profession.

College preparation is a major aspect of teacher education, and is where the certification to teach takes place. Approximately 10 per cent of the total College of Agriculture student body was enrolled in agricultural education curriculae.¹ Although students frequently change their curriculae choices while in college every effort should be made to have all students apprised of the advantages of the agricultural education preparation program. Cassibba³ did research to study the characteristics of students and the selection of an agricultural career at Kansas State University. In comparing the responses of male and female students, males ranked the variable "Farm Background" as their first reason for choosing an agriculture major, and females ranked it as their third reason giving a statistical significance at the .05 level using Chi Square scores. Statistical significance at the .05 level was also recorded for the reason "Capitalize on Previous Agriculture Experiences" which was rated second in importance by the males, and fifth in importance by the females.

There was also statistical significance at the .05 level between the reasons for choosing agriculture by seniors as compared to the responses of juniors, sophomores and freshmen, and between the responses of farm and small town residents compared to the responses of town and city students.

A vocational education recruitment program in teacher education is not complete without reaching the total student body. Boys and girls, city, town and farm



students and all students regardless of grade classifications should be informed of the diversity of teaching as an occupation since there are differences in the value systems of the subgroups in the student population.

On an average 60 per cent of graduating seniors in the agricultural education curriculum go into teaching agriculture. This varies some from institution to institution and from state to state. Placement and Retention are on the demand side of the Systems Approach to Vocational Teacher Education, and approximately 60 per cent of those who entered teaching remained in teaching. The reasons why teachers do not enter or leave teaching are very similar, and the demand for agricultural education majors and teachers in other agricultural occupations remains very strong and constant. Demands for specific occupations vary somewhat from year to year as evidenced by the research of Hoobler⁴ and Wallace.⁵

Hoobler found that in 1976, 50 per cent of the teachers who left the field of teaching agriculture went into full-time farming. The years 1973 through 1975 were favorable for farming and many teachers left to "farm," "be your own boss," and "make more money" in that order.

Wallace found that similar percentage of agriculture teachers left the teaching profession from 1960 to 1965, but that approximately 50 per cent went into education related positions, indicating that this was a good time for education expansion. In both studies the remaining 50 per cent of the teachers who left went into agribusiness occupations.

The study by Hoobler further indicated that salary, educational attainment and administrator attitudes were important factors in the retention of teachers. The findings of the study were significant for salary with those who remained receiving \$11,284 per annum compared to \$8,935 for those who left. Fifty-five per cent of those who remained had the M.S. degree compared to 17.6 per cent of those who left. The teachers who remained indicated an average administrative support of 5.13 on a 1 to 7 scale with 7 strong and 1 weak. Those who left responded they had an administrative support average of 4.0.

The Professional Personnel Recruitment Committee

of the AVA¹ made the following suggestion about teacher turnover:

Teacher turnover should be reduced and maintained at a low percentage level. Local administrators, state supervisors in agricultural education and professional organizations should encourage all teachers of quality programs to remain in the profession.

In summary, it is important to conceptualize the need for more vocational teachers by means of a systems approach to vocational teacher education. The end product of a systems approach is a fully functioning professional vocational teacher.

Two important considerations are included on the supply side of the model namely high school source of supply and college preparation. It is essential that coordinated and on-going recruitment activities be provided at the high school and college levels. Teacher placement and teacher retention are the key factors to consider on the demand side of the model. Although strong and continuing agricultural related opportunities will continue to exist every effort should be made to provide a coordinated and on-going program of activities to enhance the position of the vocational teacher by improving teacher salaries, administrative support, and continued educational opportunities.

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