Educational Considerations

Volume 4 | Number 1 Article 7

9-1-1976

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Recommended Citation

Sage, James E. (1976) "Moving from industry into vocational teaching: an insight," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 4: No. 1. https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2057

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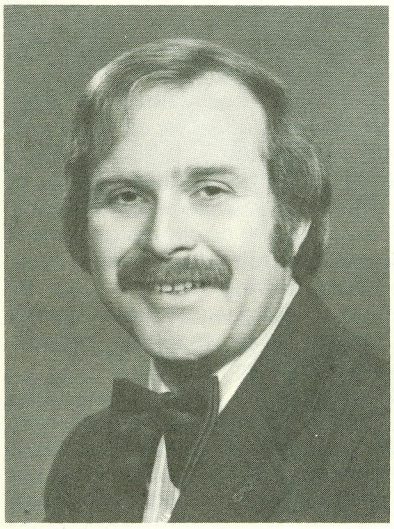
Moving from industry into vocational teaching: an insight

by James E. Sage



Dr. James E. Sage is an assistant professor of vocational-technical education at The Ohio State University. He specializes in teaching across the board vocational education classes and in the development of in-service curricula materials for their nondegreed trade and industrial in-service teacher education program. Dr. Sage also serves as associate director of Ohio State's Education Professions Development Act 552 project. He is currently investigating the trends and characteristics of the nondegreed in-service trade and industrial teacher that is employed in central and southeast Ohio's vocational education programs. His future goal is to become a department chairman at the college or university level.

Ohio's continuous and progressive movement in all phases of vocational education places it second to none for its secondary vocational education facilities and curricula. As of September 1975, vocational education is available to any eleventh or twelfth grader in Ohio; and through State Department Guidelines it must be accessible to, at least, 40 per cent of those students. The problem that Ohio faces, is that the demand for trade and industrial teachers is far greater than the supply of degreed trade and industrial teachers due to the number of vocational schools and their respective trades and industry and health occupations curricula. Thus, nondegreed teachers must be hired and trained to help develop their student's social skill, vocational flexibility and scientific awareness.

People who leave positions in business and industry to become trade and industrial teachers represent a vast cross section of Ohio's dynamic and diverse labor market, such as health, service and paraprofessional occupations and the construction and manufacturing trades. Hill indicates that effective teachers are frequently characterized by their enthusiasm, interest in students and coworkers, positive attitudes, sense of humor—if not zest.[1] These characteristics are similar to the reasons cited by many of the new nondegreed teachers for entering trade and industrial teaching. Ohio State University's teacher educators indicate that the typical new teacher has had approximately 20 years of occupational experience. Usually through the low supervisory levels, their children have been raised, educated and are out on their own. Also, the majority of them have not had any formal eduucation beyond high school, but they have had extensive training through industry/military based programs and courses, apprenticeship, and/or post high school technical courses. Thus, the new teachers are occupationally qualified.

Career change can be initiated by anyone of several forces that act upon each of us daily. These forces may range from anxiety to zest. But, the most common reason(s) cited by the new teacher for leaving industry are: personal desires; to help youth; to leave the pressure(s) of business, industry, or military behind; or an injury or handicap that would make regular job performance difficult. Also, there are those who are looking for an easier job or just shopping around for a new career. Commissioner T.H. Bell states that "Human talent must be in wide variety and progressively developed in unison . . . to translate knowledge into human services through the world of work."[2]

Each year more than 300 individuals enter trade and industrial teaching through inquiries made at universities which train and certify trade and industrial teachers, the State Division of Vocational Education, or a local joint vocational, comprehensive high, or an adult or juvenile corrections school. After verification of their occupational experience, they are employed as a new nondegreed teacher with the understanding that they will enter a two year in-service teacher education program at one of five universities (Cleveland State University, Kent State University, The Ohio State University, Toledo University and University of Cincinnati).The university's in-service teacher education curriculum is developed around an agreed series of objectives, identified in 1975 by the trade and industrial teacher educators from each university and

members of the state's Trade and Industrial Education Services. The objectives were derived from a research base that identified the competencies needed by a trade and industrial teacher. The objectives for the two year in-service teacher education program center around curriculum development, methods of teaching, shop organization and management, safety education, behavior management, youth group activities and early placement practices. Each university then has the flexibility of using their own methods of presenting this curriculum to their respective new teachers. This degree of state level planning reflects Tanner's intellectual system of educational planning, where several activities are combined together to produce an end result.[3]

The organization of Ohio's program views in-service education as a product of pre-service education. The first phase of the in-service teacher education program is an intensive 20 day pre-service workshop that is completed before the new teacher enters his/her classroom in the fall. This pre-service program assists the new teacher in learning the basic yet necessary survival skills (in planning a year's program, lesson planning, teaching methods, evaluation processes, organization and management practices, safety education, behavior management and early placement techniques) to cope with their newly gained responsibilities.

During this 20 day period, several difficulties are overcome and successes accomplished. A few of the frustrations encountered, due to entry into a new career field and the reorientation back into the role of a student, are: learning to learn, managing time, reading skills, written and verbal communication skills, understanding of educational jargon, and exhaustion due to approximately 240 clock hours of classroom activities and assigned outside work. Peer group pressures, application of previously learned skills and knowledge, special counseling and tutoring, plus team work assists the majority in succeeding at speaking before a group of peers, gaining higher self confidence and increasing their abilities of planning and organizing instructional materials.

This type of a pre-service needs to be continued, according to Cochran.[4] But, the definition must be expanded to act as a change agent and have a closed-loop interrelationship between in-service and pre-service programs so that a feedback loop is developed. The second phase of the in-service teacher education program follows the new teacher into his/her classroom. Now, an experienced teacher educator from one of the five mentioned universities visits the new teacher (on site) twice a month during the regular school year. The goal of this phase is to refine and strengthen the new teacher's skills, through tailor made individualized instruction sessions, in curriculum development, methods of presenting information, evaluation of student performance, youth group activities, and classroom, shop or laboratory management.

The 1975-1976 in-service teachers at The Ohio State University identified some problems believed to be nonexistant before the teachers entered the classroom. A short time after being in their classrooms, some of them identified these problem areas: student's lack of interest in learning; facilities not completed for instructional purposes; teaching is a bigger job than first perceived; lack of the necessary tools, equipment, and materials to replicate industrial processes; and the slow reaction of the school boards to their needs.

In addition to the above problems, the new teachers identified areas where they had difficulty adjusting to the new demands of their career. They were: long working hours; extra curricular activities, such as advising a VICA club, occupational area advisory committee meetings, and after school and/or Saturday workshops; availability of money for the purchase of tools and equipment; and the lack of supervisor assistance in controlling discipline problems. Alberta Hill's second assumption of in-service education indicates that for "in-service education, to give . . . insight, it will require face-to-face experiences with a wide variety of persons."[1]

The pre-service workshop and the first year in a classroom has exposed the new trade and industrial teacher to a variety of people that work with and in the local school, community and industries, in addition to the professional teacher educator and other state personnel that should visit this new teacher. An essential objective of an in-service program for new teachers is that they develop an acceptance of all persons in all communities and a commitment to serving all persons in vocational education.[1] At the end of the school year the new teachers again return to their universities for the third phase. This phase is an intensive ten day workshop that focuses on human relations and the further refinement of their curriculum development skills. The fourth and final phase of the in-service teacher education program follows the new teacher back into his/her classroom and involves them in special course work and the development of a course of study for their occupational area to meet State Department Guidelines for a four year provisional teaching certificate.

After two years of study and involvement in their classrooms, the vast majority continue on as fully certified and competent trade and industrial teachers. Their four year provisional teaching certificate allows them to teach in any joint vocational, comprehensive, adult vocational, adult correctional or youth commission school program in Ohio that represents their occupational area. Those that return to industry, during the two year in-service program, typically do so because of their inability to cope with students and/or their teaching responsibilities or for higher pay and/or better benefits.

Approximately 300 craftsmen, technicians and paraprofessionals leave Ohio's industry to become non-degreed trade and industrial teachers. Because of their special skills and the outstanding in-service teacher education program, they successfully maintain their teaching positions and become qualified competent professionals.

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https://newprairiepress.org/edconsiderations/vol4/iss1/7
DOI: 10.4148/0146-9282.2057