

# **Responsibilities of Teacher Education for Vocational Teacher Professional Development Programs**

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According to Goodlad (1983), the teacher is the single most important variable in school effectiveness. Maintaining an effective teaching force requires that qualified teachers regularly enter the ranks and that practicing teachers are kept abreast of changes in the profession. Teachers develop and improve their skills, pedagogically and technically, through high quality professional development programs. Because of increased public demand for teacher accountability and technical advancements in the occupational areas of vocational programs, vocational teacher professional development has never been more important.

Teacher professional development activities include preservice programs which are generally taken prior to entry into teaching or issuance of a teacher certificate and inservice programs which are generally taken after entry into teaching (Anderson, 1988). A National Center for Research in Vocational Education study identified eight components of comprehensive professional development programs for vocational teachers (Hamilton, 1985). These eight components were: preservice programs for individuals entering teaching without an undergraduate education degree; supervision of first and second year vocational teachers; pedagogy update; technology update; professional information update; teacher technical skills testing; curriculum updating programs; and research practices update. Anderson (1988) identified a ninth component, preservice (degree-granting) programs, as part of a comprehensive program.

Vocational teacher education has an important role in the professional development of vocational teachers. Shinn and Bail (1982) stated that "to maximize the outcomes of inservice and professional development activities, teacher educators must be actively involved" (p. 193). The Holmes Group emphasized the importance of teacher education's involvement in professional development activities and called for more cooperation between universities and local schools in this area (The Holmes Group, 1986).

Despite playing a significant role, the specific responsibilities that vocational teacher education has for providing professional development activities are not clear (Anderson, 1988). A possible factor contributing to this lack of clarity is that state-level policies affecting teacher education appear to reflect the current educational climate in each state (Jarrett, 1988). Fiscal constraints and increased demands for accountability have required many state departments of education to reexamine the process of vocational teacher professional development (Hamilton, 1985).

Current trends indicate that teacher education will have a reduced role in future preservice teacher preparation activities (Schussler and Testa, 1984). School districts are becoming more involved in teacher preparation, especially through alternative certification programs (Schussler and Testa, 1984; Parramore, 1986). Emphasis on teacher empowerment and the actions of strong professional organizations have also

reduced the influence of teacher education's influence over teacher preservice programs and reduced state control over the licensure of beginning teachers (Crunkilton and Hemp, 1982; Kimbrough and Nunnery, 1988).

If high quality professional development activities are to be provided, cooperation and a clear understanding of responsibilities among groups involved in providing the activities are essential (Wolpert, 1984; The Holmes Group, 1986). However, Schussler and Testa (1984) stated that "unfortunately there appears to be little collaborative planning among state department, school district, and university officials relative to needed changes, division of responsibility, and timing" (p. 8).

The need to clarify responsibilities of teacher education for providing vocational teacher professional development activities became evident when the Idaho State Board of Education established new policies in 1985 and approved a strategic plan for vocational-technical education in 1987. As a result of those actions, several goals and policies related to a comprehensive statewide vocational teacher professional development program were identified (Idaho State Board of Education, 1985 and State Division of Vocational Education and The State Council on Vocational Education, 1987). However, agency data bases did not contain adequate information to implement the stated goals and policies.

Among the information needed to implement the goals and policies were the perceptions of individuals in six vocational education groups regarding the levels of responsibilities that each group has for coordinating, delivering, and funding components of a state-wide **comprehensive** professional development program. The six groups were the "partners" in professional development programs and were identified by Miller (1975) as having responsibilities (either from a participant or administrative standpoint) in a comprehensive professional development program. The program partners included: State Division of Vocational Education (SDVE) staff, vocational teacher educators, secondary school administrators, postsecondary school administrators, secondary vocational teachers, and postsecondary vocational teachers.

### **Research Question**

What level of responsibility is vocational teacher education perceived to have for coordinating, delivering, and funding nine components of a state-wide comprehensive professional development program.

Using the National Center for Research in Vocational Education study as a basis, the researcher identified nine components of professional development programs in Idaho. Those components were judged to be of importance and in need of clarification in terms of program partners' coordination, delivery, and funding responsibilities. The nine components were: preservice (degree) programs, preservice (nondegree) programs, supervision of new vocational teachers, teacher basic academic skills and knowledge testing, pedagogy update, technical skills update, professional information update, program curriculum update practices, and research practices update.

### **Procedures**

The data were collected by a consensus of the program partners. This descriptive survey research process allowed the researcher to generalize to the target population which was the sample. Existing survey instruments appropriate for meeting the objectives of the study were not found in the review of literature. In developing the instrument used,

considerable reliance was placed upon experience and contact with individuals who had an intimate understanding of professional development programs.

Section one of the five-section instrument asked the respondents to assign rating scores indicating their perceptions of the responsibility levels each partner group (one of which is vocational teacher education) has for the coordination, delivery, and funding of nine professional development program components. The rating scores were equated to either a zero, one, or two by the researcher. Zero indicated no to minor responsibility (less than 30%) shared with other program partners in a particular component. Ratings of one and two indicated shared major (30% to 50%) or primary (more than 50%) responsibilities respectively. The mean rating scores of vocational teacher education indicated perceived levels of responsibility are reported in Table One. Data from the remaining four sections of the instrument are not reported .

Content validity of the survey instrument was obtained through a review and refinement process involving knowledgeable individuals. These individuals included the doctoral committee, a national panel, an Idaho panel, vocational teacher educators, and former vocational teachers. Instrument reliability was determined to be .85 as established by Cronbach's Alpha.

### **Population and Data Collection**

The data were obtained through a mailed questionnaire to the following populations of Idaho vocational-technical educators and administrators:

SDVE professional program staff (N=13)

Vocational teacher educators at the University of Idaho and Idaho State University (N= 18)

Secondary school principals and administrative unit coordinators (N=132)

Postsecondary vocational-technical deans/directors and persons identified by the deans/directors as having institutional responsibility for professional development programs (N=42)

Teachers of vocational education programs in the 105 public secondary schools offering vocational education programs (N=532)

Teachers at postsecondary vocational-technical institutions (N=204)

Each member of the population received a pre-letter, coded instrument with a cover letter, and two follow-up contacts; one by mail and the other by telephone. The total return rate was 78.4% and ranged among respondent groups from 70.5% for secondary administrators to 92.3% for the SDVE staff. The responses of early and late respondents were compared, and no statistically significant differences were found. The answers of the respondents were generalized to the samples which are the populations (Miller and Smith, 1983).

## **Results**

The results indicated that the professional development program partners perceived vocational teacher education as having more coordination and delivery than funding responsibilities for the professional development program components. Specific

components in which all respondent groups perceived vocational teacher education to have primary or share major coordination and delivery responsibilities with the other partners were preservice (degree) programs, teacher basic academic skills and knowledge testing, and pedagogy update. The component in which vocational teacher education was perceived to have the least responsibility was professional information update.

Vocational teacher education received its highest responsibility ratings in the preservice (degree) program component. All program partner groups' perceived vocational teacher education as having primary or shared major responsibilities in the coordination, delivery, and funding of this component. This was the only component in which vocational teacher education did not receive at least two mean ratings below .50 (indicating only shared minor responsibilities).

Of the partner groups, vocational teacher educators generally assigned vocational teacher education the highest responsibility rating scores. SDVE staff respondents' were in general agreement with teacher educators except in the area of funding the supervision of first-year teachers. The SDVE staff respondents perceived vocational teacher education shared a major responsibility for funding the first-year vocational teachers while teacher educators perceived the responsibility to be minor.

Responding teachers and administrators from postsecondary vocational schools gave vocational teacher education the lowest responsibility rating scores among the partner groups in all nine components. Only once did a postsecondary group assign a rating score indicating primary responsibility. In two-thirds of the coordination, delivery, and funding responsibility areas of the nine program components, one or both of the postsecondary groups assigned vocational teacher education scores indicating a shared minor level of responsibility.

Secondary administrators and vocational teachers rated vocational teacher education as having either major or primary coordination responsibilities in all components. The overall ratings of vocational teacher education by secondary groups were not as high as those of the SDVE staff and vocational teacher educators nor as low as those of the postsecondary respondents.

A summary of these findings is presented in Table One. This table illustrates the perceptions of the program partners' by presenting the responsibility rating score assigned to vocational teacher education by individuals in each partner group. The mean scores are reported in the three responsibility areas (coordination, delivery, and funding) of the nine professional development program components.

## **Conclusions**

The following conclusions were made based on the results of this study.

The Idaho partners perceive the professional development responsibilities of vocational teacher education to be greatest for providing preservice teacher preparation.

The responsibilities that vocational teacher education has for coordinating and delivering professional development program components are perceived to be greater than the responsibilities for funding the components.

Secondary school administrators, secondary vocational teachers, vocational teacher educators, and SDVE professional program perceive that vocational teacher education to have major or primary coordination and delivery responsibilities for all components of a state-wide comprehensive professional development program.

Table 1. Mean Perceived Ratings for Vocational Teacher Education Coordinating, Delivering, and Funding Responsibilities Associated with a Professional Development Program

Program	Partner:	Responsibility Categories <sup>a</sup>					
		Coor	Del.	Fund	Coor	Del.	Fund
		<u>Preservice (Degree)</u>			<u>Preservice (Nondegree)</u>		
SDVE Staff		1.75	2.00	1.75	1.33	1.75	1.33
Teacher Educators		1.87	2.00	1.73	1.27	1.73	.73
Secondary Administrators		1.29	1.67	.56	.93	1.47	.39
Postsec. Administrators		.84	1.61	.61	.41	1.11	.30
Secondary Teachers		1.34	1.76	.72	1.03	1.41	.50
Postsecondary Teachers		.81	1.48	.62	.56	1.06	.48
		<u>Supervision of First Year Teachers</u>			<u>Basic Academic Skills and Knowledge Testing</u>		
SDVE Staff		1.58	1.58	1.17	1.17	1.42	1.25
Teacher Educators		1.20	1.33	.20	1.20	1.40	.93
Secondary Administrators		.68	.74	.88	1.35	1.39	.78
Postsec. Administrators		.30	.30	.32	.56	.73	.38
Secondary Teachers		.83	.96	.57	1.21	1.27	.69
Postsecondary Teachers		.38	.48	.34	.53	.56	.36
		<u>Pedagogy Update</u>			<u>Technical Skills Update</u>		
SDVE Staff		1.33	1.50	1.00	.83	1.08	.42
Teacher Educators		1.60	1.88	.93	.93	1.27	.47
Secondary Administrators		.88	1.17	.47	.89	1.14	.44
Postsec. Administrators		.70	1.14	.55	.24	.37	.37
Secondary Teachers		.96	1.31	.40	.88	1.18	.33
Postsecondary Teachers		.72	1.01	.47	.40	.64	.32
		<u>Informational Update</u>			<u>Curriculum Update</u>		
SDVE Staff		.50	.75	.58	.83	1.08	.50
Teacher Educators		.86	1.07	.43	1.14	1.50	.43
Secondary Administrators		.68	.85	.35	.74	.97	.31
Postsec. Administrators		.13	.19	.18	.21	.37	.16
Secondary Teachers		.71	.93	.33	.79	.99	.34
Postsecondary Teachers		.34	.46	.27	.42	.55	.33
		<u>Research Update</u>					
SDVE Staff		1.83	1.92	1.33			
Teacher Educators		1.64	1.93	1.50			
Secondary Administrators		1.40	1.49	.97			
Postsec. Administrators		.46	.60	.49			
Secondary Teachers		1.16	1.30	.76			
Postsecondary Teachers		.79	.93	.59			

<sup>a</sup>**Descriptors: Coor.=Coordination, Del.=Delivery, Fund=Funding**

Scale: 0.00-0.49 = shares minor (less than 30%) responsibility; 0.50-1.49 = shares major (30% to 50%) responsibility; 1.50-2.00 = has primary (51% or more) responsibility.

Postsecondary school administrators and postsecondary vocational teachers perceive vocational teacher education to have lower levels of professional development

responsibilities in a professional development program than do the other program partners.

Compared to the other program partners, SDVE professional program staff and vocational teacher educators perceive vocational teacher education as having higher levels of responsibilities in a professional development program.

## **Implications**

Despite shifts in professional development responsibilities and various education groups assuming new professional development roles, vocational teacher education is still viewed as playing a major part in providing related activities. However, as the literature and the results of this study indicated, the role of teacher education is not agreed upon by all partners. Because discrepancies do exist regarding the responsibilities of teacher education, there is a need to consider possible alternatives for providing professional development program components with partner groups having coordination, delivery, and funding responsibilities that may have traditionally been held by others.

The low ratings by the postsecondary respondent groups implies a lack of communication or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the performance of vocational teacher education. Perhaps this dissatisfaction is the result of professional development efforts by teacher education being aimed primarily at secondary personnel with little attention given to the needs of postsecondary personnel. If this is the situation, then new efforts should be directed toward the needs of postsecondary educators through inservice programs and related research. The differences in perceptions may also be the result of real or imagined rivalry between university and postsecondary educators.

Research efforts should be directed at investigating the causes of the differences in perceptions between the postsecondary partners and the other partners. Whatever the causes of these differences, there is need for an improved working relationship. The differences in perceptions clearly indicate that prior to implementing a state-wide professional development program, the Idaho partners must reach consensus regarding responsibilities.

The relatively high rating scores assigned by teacher educator and SDVE staff respondents, compared to those respondents located in secondary or postsecondary school settings, implies that those educators out "in the trenches" view teacher education from a different perspective. Perhaps more frequent contact with teachers and administrators by teacher educators and SDVE personnel is needed in order to keep in touch with the current school situation.

The relatively high self-ratings by teacher educators may also indicate that they perceive vocational teacher education as more than a provider of teacher preparation and summer inservice programs. The role of vocational teacher education is expanding beyond just preparing teachers and administrators for public schools. For example, vocational teacher education is preparing training and development specialists for industry. The research efforts of vocational teacher educators are also increasing as is collaboration with other university departments for the improvement of teaching. However, other program partners apparently view vocational teacher education as having a more narrow role. As vocational teacher education programs take on expanded roles, the support of other vocational education program partners is needed since these groups can serve as catalysts or inhibitors to the progress of the profession.

Although the findings of this study can only be generalized to the program partners in Idaho, they should be of interest to vocational education personnel in other states that

are in the process of developing or revising teacher professional development programs. The Idaho information is especially pertinent in view of many states' efforts to streamline state department of education services and responsibilities. If Idaho's respondents are typical of those in other states, then more studies of this type are warranted. By understanding the perceptions of program partners' and eliminating problems before they arise, costly and time consuming program revisions may be avoided.

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