

FROM THE EDITOR: *This "At Issue" contains an essay by Kenneth Gray examining the compatibility between training and development/human resource development and teacher preparation programs. A rationale is presented supporting compatibility based on a common mission.*

Seeking a "Tie that Binds"
**Integrating Training & Development/Human
Resource Development and Teacher Preparation**

Kenneth Gray

The Pennsylvania State University

Over the last 10 years higher education vocational/industrial teacher education programs have decreased in number. As a result of both diminishing student interest and job opportunities for graduates, many programs have disappeared. Those that have survived have done so partly by (a) reducing the number of different vocational teacher education programs they offer and/or (b) diversifying to include the preparation of training and development (T&D)/human resource development (HRD) practitioners for business and industry. This latter development is the topic of this essay.

Initially T&D/HRD was somewhat of an add-on emphasis to vocational/industrial teacher preparation departments. Declining teacher education enrollments and growing T&D/HRD enrollments have changed this situation. In many programs, T&D/HRD is both the fastest growing and largest of all programs of study. The stepchild (T&D/HRD) is now an equal partner if not the heir apparent. In many higher education programs today, the preparation of T&D/HRD professionals is now the "bread and butter" activity.

Gray is Professor, Department of Workforce Education and Development, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

Not surprisingly this development has led to some tension revolving around the question of compatibility. Specifically, faculty (and sometimes students as well) question whether or not T&D/HRD professional preparation is compatible with teacher preparation (TP). When T&D/HRD enrollments were small, teacher educators wondered how T&D/HRD fit. Today, with the situation reversed, T&D/HRD faculty sometimes wonder how TP fits.

The contentiousness related to T&D/HRD/TP compatibility perhaps is best exemplified in debates regarding common core degree requirements for both groups. This is both a practical as well as an ethical issue. At many institutions neither the T&D/HRD nor TP enrollments or faculty are sufficient in number to offer a completely unique program of study. Combining those seeking advanced degrees in secondary and postsecondary education and T&D/HRD into one class is a practical necessity. It is clearly unethical to do so, however, without a valid educational rationale.

This last point, namely a valid academic rationale for common core preparation, seems to be the linchpin in T&D/HRD/TP compatibility debates. Is there a valid educational rationale for preparing a variety of workforce education professionals under a common academic umbrella? The argument presented here is that there is. The purpose of the remainder of this essay is to present the rationale.

Workforce Education: A Single Profession Endeavor

Perhaps the most visible sign that the vocational education/technical education community is undergoing dramatic change is to observe that virtually all higher education academic departments and most professional organizations have considered name changes. While “a rose is a rose by any name,” in this case the activity is not indicative of changing fashion but of a sometimes desperate search for identity in a radically changing enrollment and membership-driven environment. No doubt, in some cases, the conservative nature of the profession can be blamed for lack of consensus; but even among those committed to change, finding a rationale to do so proves to be illusive. In particular, the search for commonalities among various groups of practitioners or members—commonalities that could lead to the development of both new common nomenclature and directions for the future—has been mostly unsuccessful. I would argue, however, that a common ground does exist and begins with

the vision of all those involved in work-related education having a common profession identity. Is this vision valid? The basic test is whether there is a common mission that applies to all groups.

The Common Mission

One characteristic of a professional group is a mission or purpose that is common to all practice, regardless of the clientele, service, or setting. Practitioners who share a common purpose can logically be said to share a common professional identity. The health field is certainly diverse, yet all professionals are guided by the common Hippocratic oath and, as a result, share a common professional identity.

It is argued that there is a common mission or professional purpose that applies to practitioners in high school vocational education settings, postsecondary pre-baccalaureate technical education settings, T&D/HRD, employment and training settings as well. The common mission is to improve the occupational status of the individual student/client. This is accomplished in one of two ways: either by increasing (a) the individual's labor market advantage in competing in the labor market or (b) the individual's performance/productivity on the job. It is argued that all professionals who provide instructional interventions aimed at this purpose are united in a common profession. One title used to name this profession is *Workforce Education and Development*. First coined by the faculty at Southern Illinois University, *Workforce Education* is defined in this essay as:

that form of pedagogical practice that is offered at the pre-baccalaureate level, in business and industry, and employment and training settings where the objective is to increase either individual occupational opportunity or increase productivity by solving occupational human performance problems. (Gray & Herr, 1997, p. 3)

Testing the Rationale

Arguably the validity or test of this "common profession" argument lies in whether (a) there exists a common set of ethics or professional imperatives that flow from the mission and that apply

equally to practitioners in all settings, (b) there exists a common type of intervention that is used to achieve the mission, and (c) there exists a common body of academic background knowledge that is a prerequisite for effective practice in all settings. Each of these issues is explored below.

Is There a Set of Common Ethical Standards?

As suggested by the writings of Thomas Green (1987), a characteristic of a professional endeavor is the existence of a common set of ethical standards or purposes. Stated another way, if uniting high school vocational educators, T&D/HRD practitioners, and employment and training professionals into a single professional title is legitimate, these groups should share a common set of ethical standards which, in turn, would confirm a common mission. It can be argued that these groups do share such a set of ethical standards, namely that all interventions should be conducted in a manner that (a) promotes learning, (b) insures safety of students/clients, (c) does not violate public/employer trust, and (d) promotes the transition of knowledge to the workplace.

Clearly, it is difficult to imagine practitioners in any workforce education setting who could be considered ethical and professional if they willfully violated any of these standards. Granted, in some settings, other professional ethical standards may need to be added. The salient question, however, is whether any could be deleted. I do not think so.

Is There A Common Intervention (Core Product)?

A second test of viewing workforce education as a single profession uniting secondary and postsecondary vocational teachers, T&D/HRD professionals, and employment and training specialists is the existence of a common (or typical) type of intervention used to achieve the mission of the profession. For example, even though doctors and counseling psychologists have the same mission (i.e., individual health), they employ different interventions (drugs versus counseling), and partly for this reason counseling psychologists are not considered to be members of the medical profession.

There is a common "product" or intervention employed by all workforce education professionals; it is work-related "instruction."

The design and/or delivery of instruction to improve students/clients labor market status or to solve human performance problems is the core product of workforce education professionals. It is that activity that makes them unique from other professionals such as general educators or the personnel/ compensation/labor relations functionaries in business and industry.

Clearly, the central, tangible, observable product delivered by all professionals who practice in educational settings is instruction. Of course, human performance in business and industry can be improved with non-instructional strategies, such as voluntary or involuntary transfers, compensation adjustments, and contract negotiations. These are functions of personnel departments, not T&D/HRD activities. In reality, when these strategies are not effective, the professionally-trained T&D/HRD professional becomes involved in order to conduct needs assessments that guide instructional design, which in turn determines the modality of instruction. Supporting this argument is the reality that equal numbers of new professionals are being prepared in instructional design/instructional technology programs at the university level as in purely T&D/HRD programs.

Is There A Common Knowledge Base?

The final test of the validity for viewing workforce education as a single professional endeavor is the existence of a common "knowledge base" required for successful practice regardless of setting. In most professions, it is the certified knowledge base, and often the license it entitles, that separates the professional from the rest. For example, while many individuals are employed as accountants, the CPA endorsement is recognized as the professional signature.

A common knowledge base does exist. This knowledge is of two types. First, are concepts drawn from the academic fields of micro and labor economics, the sociology of work, and career development psychology. These academic fields provide the knowledge base to develop effective workforce education in all settings. While undoubtedly some practitioners need additional background in adolescent psychology, others require additional background in adult learning, and still others need a background in organizational development. All need the insight and understanding that comes from (a) that aspect of economics that deals with labor markets and productivity,

(b) an understanding of the role of work in society and family, and (c) an understanding of the career development process.

The second body of knowledge prerequisite for successful practice in all workforce education settings is competence in the fields of curriculum/instructional design and delivery. It is interesting to observe, for example, that, to a great extent, it is this background (or lack thereof) that separates the professional from the part-time educator or the T&D/HRD professional from a foreman or middle manager assigned to teach. Competencies for successful practice in workforce education include the basics of curriculum, instructional development, and basic learning psychology.

Implications

The purpose of this essay has been to argue that secondary and postsecondary vocational technical educators, T&D/HRD professionals, and employment and training specialist are members of a common profession. The profession—labeled herein “workforce education and development”—has a common mission and set of ethical standards, a core intervention product (i.e., work-related instruction), and a common knowledge base.

This “common profession” rationale does not require any professional to give up anything; it requires only the recognition of a larger professional identity. In the health profession, for example, professionals practice a wide variety of services in a wide variety of settings and affiliate with many unique professional groups; ultimately, however, they all view themselves as part of the health care profession, sharing common ethical standards, a common mission, and a “core” knowledge. This model applies to workforce education as well. Workforce education is practiced in a wide range of settings; practitioners have different professional roles and affiliations, yet this does not preclude them from being workforce educators.

The common profession concept provides academic departments a defensible rationale for uniting within a single unit the preparation of workforce education practitioners regardless of setting. The rationale outlined above also provides specific guidance regarding the nature of a common knowledge base and thus a rationale for common core degree requirements.

Personally, while T&D/HRD is not my field, I do consider myself to be united with my T&D/HRD colleagues by a common professional

identity. Namely, we are all workforce educators of one sort or another. At Penn State it is the common professional “tie that binds.”

References

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