Career education in business data processing teacher education

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The career path for teachers of business data processing has virtually been non-existent in the State of Oklahoma. Higher education institutions, however, have offered some coursework in data processing since 1958. Most of these courses were designed for scientific applications oriented toward the physicist and engineer.

Business data processing programs at the secondary, post-secondary and adult levels began in the fall of 1966 with one of the first statewide systems in the nation. At that time, prospective teachers could not be attracted from industry and special courses were designed to prepare teachers for these programs. These special courses were offered for two consecutive summers in 1966 and 1967. They included the minimum technical skill areas necessary to begin a two year or business data processing curriculum.

Institutions offering teacher education failed to respond to the need for additional training and development of these teachers beyond the two original special courses. As a result, business data processing teachers in Oklahoma have been left entirely on their own for professional development. What has happened is that some of the teachers have taken more advanced courses in an attempt to keep themselves updated as the technology changes and some have done very little. If the level of expertise of the teacher has any effect on curriculum or on effectiveness in preparing people for career paths in the areas of business data processing, then the career development of the data processing teacher must be a high priority item in the career path for teachers of business data processing.

In-service education is a very high priority within the computer science education department. Oklahoma is fortunate to have a person at the State Department of Vocational and Technical Education level as a consultant in the professional development of the data processing teacher. The relationship between the State Department and the teacher education institution is excellent and allows for better planning, greater continuity, and added dimensions in in-service programs.

In summary the data processing teacher education program in Oklahoma is concentrating on three main areas of concern. The first of these is the preservice program for prospective teachers mentioned previously. The program is geared to provide the prospective teacher with the technical, related and professional skills necessary to be successful in the classroom.

The second area of concern lies in in-service education. At this time, there are no certification standards specifically for business data processing teachers. In order to keep the teacher in the classroom updated on technological changes and advancements within the industry, seminars and conferences are being used. Hardware manufacturer representatives, textbook authors, and other specialists are recruited as instructors and college credit for completion is granted, through the institution. While these seminars should be continued, an organized graduate training program for business data processing teachers is needed urgently.

The third area of concern also falls in in-service education but is structured for the secondary Business Education teacher. Many of these teachers are aware that a minimum unit of instruction (10-30 hours) should be introduced to all secondary business education students. The problem, however, is that in most cases the teacher has had little or no training in this area. Institutes and seminars are also being employed in an attempt to bridge this gap.

In talking with educators in other states and by reading some of the available literature, it appears that problems confronting the professional teachers of Business Data Processing are similar in many areas of the country. For example, should the profession demand any type of standards for the new teachers? Should these standards include industrial experience, mathematics, accounting, communi-
cation skills, and others? If so, what would be the minimum standards acceptable? Do we offer a forum such as a national organization for data processing teachers to express ideas and seek answers to their problems in the classroom? How can industry help in this effort? The list can go on and on.

Oklahoma is attempting to deal with some of these problems, but it appears that a much larger effort is needed. Guidelines for career education paths for teachers as well as for students must be defined if we are going to achieve an acceptable level of success in providing industry with a quality product.