

THE CHANGING STATUS OF SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL  
EXPERIENCE IN VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Supervised occupational experience (SOE) has been a component of vocational agriculture since 1917. National leaders such as Hamlin, Deyoe, Hammonds, Martin, Scarborough, and Binkley have written much over the years to support, expand, and modernize the concept of occupational work experience in agriculture. However, since the Vocational Education Act of 1963, less emphasis has been given to the SOE component of the program. Binkley, after a tour of vocational agriculture departments in twelve states in 1975, expressed concern that SOE programs may have decreased to a low level (Binkley, 1977). In North Carolina, a 1975 pilot study of vocational agriculture supported this view point and sparked the development of a more stringent and detailed study of vocational agriculture, from which this synopsis of the status of SOE in North Carolina is drawn.

*Methodology*

The parent study (Clary, J. R., et. al., 1979) of this report utilized a structured interview of vocational agriculture teachers and their local administrators selected through a random sampling procedure. A total of 124 names were drawn representing approximately 30 percent of the potential total population of vocational agriculture teachers. Interviewers were trained in special sessions and hired to do on-site interviewing as arranged through telephone calls made by the project staff. One hundred twenty-two teachers (98.4%) were interviewed.

Since a major objective of the study was to determine the changing roles of the vocational agriculture teachers, information was sought not only about the current situation but also that of five years previously, i.e., 1977 compared to 1972.

*The Teachers*

Some of the characteristics of the teachers and their teaching situations include the following: 98 percent were males; 30 percent were black; the mean age was 44 years; 55 percent had B.S. degrees only; 39 percent had masters degrees; 17 years was

the average number of years of teaching experience; 74 percent had 12-month contracts; 16 percent had 10-month contracts; 36 percent were in single teacher departments; and 43 percent were in two-teacher departments.

### *Program Strengths*

Teachers in the sample were asked to characterize the strength of eight components of the vocational agriculture program in their schools for the 1976-77 school year. One of these components was the supervised occupational experience program. (Table 1). Nearly one-fourth (24%) rated their SOE program as "strong" or "very strong," 41 percent as "average" and 34 percent as "weak" or "very weak." Only the adult education program component was rated weaker than SOE.

Table 1

**TEACHER VIEWPOINTS OF THE STRENGTHS OF THE SUPERVISED  
OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS IN NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS IN 1977**

Response	Geographic Area			
	Mountains	Piedmont	Coastal Plains	Statewide
<b>Very Strong</b>				
No.	0	0	2	2
%	0	0	3.6	1.7
<b>Strong</b>				
No.	4	11	12	27
%	20.0	23.9	21.8	22.3
<b>Average</b>				
No.	10	19	20	49
%	50.0	41.3	36.4	40.5
<b>Weak</b>				
No.	5	11	14	30
%	25.0	23.9	25.5	24.8
<b>Very Weak</b>				
No.	1	4	7	12
%	5.0	8.7	10.9	9.1

### *Teacher Approach to SOE*

Answers by the teachers to three questions provided indications of their attitudes toward SOE. First, on a statewide basis, teachers reported that they expected about 58 percent of their students to develop SOE programs (Table 2, Section A). There was, however, considerable variation by region on this item with the Piedmont teachers expecting about 45 percent of their students to have SOE, while respondents from the Mountain and Coastal Plains regions expected approximately two-thirds of their students to have SOE.

Attitudes of teachers toward SOE may also be seen from their reaction to providing class time for study of SOE (Table 2, Section B). Statewide, nearly 91 percent of the teachers reported such class study-time. Sixteen percent of the teachers reported an increase in class time allowed for SOE over 1972, while 28 percent said they were spending less class time. A majority of the teachers (56%) viewed the 1977 emphasis on class time as equal to that of 1972, (Table 2, Section C).

### *SOE Emphasis and Opportunity*

When asked about the emphasis they planned to place on SOE in the future, about one-half of the teachers (50.8%) said that it would be increased. Only one respondent planned to give less emphasis to SOE in the future.

Teachers were also asked to compare student opportunities for SOE in 1977 with those of 1972. Two-thirds of the teachers reported that opportunities in 1977 were equal to or better than in 1972.

### *Facilities for SOE at School*

Some indication of the opportunities for SOE at the school may be perceived from the viewpoints of teachers regarding the status of agricultural facilities at their schools. Three facilities commonly used to provide simulated SOE opportunities were rated "inadequate" or "not available" by the following percentages of the teachers: (1) greenhouse - 38%, (2) land laboratory - 50%, and (3) land laboratory equipment - 58%.

### *Home Visitations*

Visits to homes of students for the purpose of supervising occupational experience programs have always characterized the

Table 2

**TEACHER EMPHASIS ON SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE  
IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1977**

		Geographic Area			
		Mountains	Piedmont	Coastal Plains	State- Wide
<b>Section A - Teacher Expectations of Students</b>					
No. of Teachers Responding		18	44	55	117
Percentage of Students		67.5	44.8	66.4	58.4
<b>Section B - Teachers Providing Class Time for SOE Study</b>					
Yes	No.	19	38	52	109
	%	95.0	84.4	94.6	90.8
No	No.	1	7	3	11
	%	5.0	15.6	5.5	9.2
<b>Section C - Teacher Emphasis on SOE Class Time in 1977 versus 1972</b>					
More	No.	1	8	6	15
	%	5.6	22.9	14.6	16.0
Same	No.	10	19	24	53
	%	55.6	54.3	58.5	56.4
Less	No.	7	8	11	26
	%	38.9	22.9	26.8	27.7

role of vocational agriculture teachers. In 1977, 58 percent of teachers in North Carolina reported that they made visits to students on a "regular basis." However, nearly one-third (32.0%) of the respondents acknowledged that fewer visits were made in 1977 than in 1972. Thirty-five percent of the students received only one visit each year, and 16 percent did not receive any visits by the teacher of agriculture.

#### *Administrative Support for SOE*

In 1977, fewer than one-third of the teachers were able to leave school by 2:00 p.m. to supervise the SOE programs of students. Five years earlier, almost half (45%) of the teachers could leave by 2:00 p.m.

Assuming that on-the-job supervision of students was a legitimate expense of the vocational agriculture program, teachers were questioned about the extent of reimbursement received for travel to student homes. The percentage of teachers who reported adequate reimbursement for "all" visitation was 13 percent; for "most" of the visitation, 33 percent; and for "some" visitation, 43 percent. About eight percent of the teachers reported that they received no reimbursement to visit students.

In spite of this, teachers reported that they were encouraged by their principals to make home visits. However, a rather large percentage (32%) indicated that their principals were "indifferent" in their attitudes toward home visits.

#### *Summary*

1. Supervised occupational experience programs in North Carolina were classified as "weak" or "very weak" by about one-third of the teachers (34%), while one-fourth of the group classified their programs as "strong" or "very strong."
2. Teachers of vocational agriculture expect or require an average of 58% of their students to develop SOE programs. Nearly all teachers provide classroom instruction on SOE although 28 percent reported the emphasis decreased since 1972. About 51 percent of the teacher indicated that they planned to increase emphasis on SOE in the future.
3. Two-thirds of the teachers felt that opportunities for students to develop SOE were equal or better in 1977 than in 1972.

4. Opportunities for simulated SOE in school facilities were rated "inadequate" or "not available" by a majority of the teachers.
5. While over one-half of the teachers reported visiting students on a regular basis, home visitations were decreasing, and one-half of the students received no more than one visit.
6. Sixty percent of the teachers were encouraged by their principals to make visits although about one-half of the teachers reported that reimbursement for travel was not adequate to cover a majority of the home visitations that should be made.
7. The amount of school time available for home visitations has been reduced since 1972.

### *Conclusions*

The supervised occupational experience program in some North Carolina schools is weak, but teachers indicated a desire to place more emphasis upon it in the future. Although teachers rated opportunities for students to develop SOE programs in 1977 as equal or better than in 1972, opportunities for simulated SOE at the school are generally still inadequate or non-existent.

Most teachers are offering classroom study on SOE, but most students are getting an inadequate number of supervision visits from their teachers, and even those are decreasing.

Teachers are being hampered in developing SOE programs by the lack of school-released time for supervision of students and by inadequate reimbursement for travel for the necessary visitations.

### *References*

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- Clary, J. R., Selz Mayo, T. R. Miller, C. E. Bryant, and A. P. Bell. *Status of Vocational Agriculture and the Changing Roles of Its Teachers in North Carolina*. Final Report. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C., 1979.