

A SUMMARY OF AN EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR OF THE NEBRASKA VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE CORE CURRICULUM

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One of the most critical concerns confronting instructors of vocational agriculture has been that of deciding what to teach and how to organize course content. Additionally, with both teacher and student mobility becoming more prominent, a need was identified in Nebraska to develop a state-wide Core Curriculum for Vocational Agriculture. This Core Curriculum would make up about 70 percent of the local instructional program, with the remaining 30 percent being developed at the local level for specific community needs.

The Nebraska Vocational Agriculture Core Curriculum Project was a two-year project funded by the Nebraska State Board for Vocational Education. The first year of the project dealt with developing core curriculum materials for both teachers and students for the four year Vocational Agriculture program. In general, Core I was designed for freshmen, Core II for sophomores, Core III for juniors, and Core IV for seniors. These materials were developed on a unit approach with instructors being encouraged to localize by adding lesson plans developed at the local level. The second year of the project was devoted to implementation of the core curriculum materials. The format utilized in the development of the Nebraska Core materials was that of the Mid-America Vocational Curriculum Consortium, with the Oklahoma Core Curriculum for Vocational Agriculture serving as a basis for content.

A final concern dealt with the acceptance of the Vocational Agriculture Core Curriculum materials by Nebraska teachers. This study was designed to measure teacher acceptance of these materials during the 1977-78 school year.

Procedure

A ten-question survey instrument was sent to all vocational agriculture teachers in Nebraska. One hundred and three teachers responded, yielding a 67 percent return. The respondents represented seven of the eight Nebraska Vocational Agriculture Association Districts.

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General Findings

Thirty-nine of the teachers (38% of those responding) were in class A or B schools (secondary student enrollment of 216 to 2300), while sixty-four teachers (68% of those responding) were in class C or D schools (secondary student enrollment of 10 to 215). Eighty-seven of the 103 schools (84%) had 80 or less students enrolled in the agriculture program, 41 schools (40%) had less than 50 students enrolled.

Eighty-six schools (83%) were in a rural district setting, five schools (5%) were in an urban setting, and twelve schools (12%) had both rural and urban areas in their school districts.

Eighty-three teachers (81% of the respondents) were in single teacher departments. Thirty teachers (29% of the respondents) had attained the M.S. Degree and twenty-seven teachers (26% of the respondents) served as student teaching center supervisors in vocational agriculture.

Only seven teachers were on less than an 11-month contract. Sixty-four teachers had less than five years teaching experience, 20 teachers had between five and ten years, and 17 teachers had over ten years experience. Ninety-one of the respondents (88%) had earned their B.S. Degree at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, while the remaining respondents obtained degrees in Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, California, and Oklahoma.

Specific Findings

1. On a scale of one (poor) to ten (excellent), all 103 teachers who responded rated the Core Curriculum concept as "5" or higher, with sixty-eight teachers scoring the core concept as "8" or higher.
2. Table 1 shows that 69 teachers (67% of the respondents) used Core I teacher materials 50 percent or more of the instructional time, 47 teachers (46%) used Core II, 36 teachers (35%) used Core III, and 37 teachers (36%) used Core IV 50 percent or more of the instructional time.
3. Table 2 shows that 43 teachers (42% of the respondents) used Core I student materials 50 percent or more of the instructional time, 27 teachers (26%) used Core II, 22 teachers (21%) used Core III, and 22 teachers (21%) used Core IV student materials 50 percent or more of the instructional time. Student materials for Core I were made available to all vocational agriculture teachers.

Table 1

NEBRASKA VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE INSTRUCTORS' USE OF TEACHER
CORE MATERIALS IN PERCENTAGE OF INSTRUCTIONAL TIME BY CORE

	Percentage of Instructional Time										
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Core I	1	3	9	4	14	3	23	6	22	8	7
Core II	5	6	15	9	15	3	17	7	13	4	3
Core III	7	7	21	6	13	5	11	5	8	5	2
Core IV	8	7	23	6	11	11	13	5	4	2	2

Table 2

NEBRASKA VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE INSTRUCTORS' USE OF STUDENT
CORE MATERIALS IN PERCENTAGE OF INSTRUCTIONAL TIME BY CORE

	Percentage of Instructional Time										
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Core I	33	1	10	3	6	5	12	3	11	8	4
Core II	39	5	13	4	3	6	8	1	7	4	1
Core III	42	5	9	4	9	6	4	2	5	4	1
Core IV	35	5	12	6	5	8	5	2	3	3	1

Student materials for Cores II, III, and IV were made available to the vocational agriculture instructors in ten model sites throughout Nebraska, and many others duplicated student materials locally for the year surveyed.

4. Table 3 shows that 80 teachers (78% of the respondents) planned to use the teacher's Core I 50 percent or more of the instructional time during 1978-79, 62 teachers (60% of the respondents) planned to use the teacher's Core IV 50 percent or more of the instructional time. About 98 percent of the respondents planned to use the teacher's core materials to some extent.
5. Table 4 shows that sixty-four teachers (62% of the respondents) planned to use the student Core I materials 50 percent or more of the instructional time during the 1978-79 school year, 59 teachers (57%) planned to use Core II, 45 teachers (44%) planned to use Core III, and 42 teachers (41%) planned to use Core IV materials 50 percent or more of the instructional time. About 75 percent of the respondents planned to use student Core materials to some extent.
6. Four major inservice sessions dealing with the Core were held around the state in each of ten model sites during the year. On a scale of one (ineffective) to ten (very effective), seventy-five teachers (73% of the respondents) rated the in-service sessions as "5" or higher, with 27 teachers (26%) rating the sessions as "8" or higher.
7. On a scale of one (impractical) to ten (practical), ninety-three teachers (90% of the respondents) rated the Core approach as "5" or higher, with 55 teachers (53% of the respondents) rating the Core concept as "8" or higher. Considerable comment and response was received from teachers concerning suggestions and problems. Those responses and comments tended to group into the following:
 - a. The Core is a valuable teaching tool, but the local teacher needs to localize the materials.
 - b. More in-depth Core materials and several new units in other areas could be prepared.
 - c. In-service education should be continued.
 - d. Procedures for future updating should be planned.
 - e. The Core should be supplemented by the local teacher.
 - f. The transparency masters and other supporting materials are excellent.
 - g. The Core provides an excellent master plan.

Table 3

ANTICIPATED USE OF TEACHER CORE MATERIALS BY NEBRASKA
VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE INSTRUCTORS IN PERCENTAGE OF
INSTRUCTIONAL TIME BY CORE

	Percentage of Instructional Time										
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Core I	2	0	3	4	8	8	25	9	18	12	8
Core II	0	2	5	3	10	7	20	7	24	9	5
Core III	3	0	13	5	10	6	19	11	16	7	4
Core IV	3	0	12	4	12	7	24	6	18	4	4

Table 4

ANTICIPATED USE OF STUDENT CORE MATERIALS BY NEBRASKA
VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE INSTRUCTORS IN PERCENTAGE OF
INSTRUCTIONAL TIME BY CORE

	Percentage of Instructional Time										
	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Core I	17	2	1	4	4	8	18	4	16	11	7
Core II	18	1	6	2	5	10	18	3	16	8	4
Core III	24	2	8	2	7	7	14	2	11	7	3
Core IV	24	1	6	3	12	7	13	2	12	5	3

- h. The Core is important for first-year teachers.
- i. Local schools may have a problem budgeting enough money for the student cores each year.
- j. Switching to a new curriculum needs in-service work.
- k. Selling the Core concept to the school administration is necessary.

Summary

Teacher materials were used by a majority of the respondents during the past year. The planned use of teacher and student materials for 50 percent or more of the instructional time was from one and one-half to two times the actual use in 1977-78. These data indicate that vocational agriculture teachers in Nebraska support the Core concept to the extent of making a significant attempt to incorporate the Core concept into local programs.

(Knight--Continued from page 6)

Generalizations about the less adequate competence of teachers recruited from industry are at best questionable. The major concern is not the source of teachers, but the selection and preparation processes. Recruiting teachers from industry can serve as a valuable supplement to the current method of teacher preparation. This can be especially true if defensible selection criteria and a preparation program in the pedagogical skills are developed.

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