

Perceptions of the Value of Extended Service in Horticulture

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The extended service contract/summer program has long been an integral part of vocational agriculture programs. However, the need for twelve month programs is being challenged by superintendents and other educational leaders.

Many studies substantiate the opinion that a summer program is positively related to a good total program (Miller and Parks, 1981; Arrington, 1981; Cepica, 1979; Ford, 1970); however, "the information to date represents opinions of the profession and status reports of what is being done" (AVA Agriculture Education Division Research Committee's Subcommittee on Twelve Month programs, 1979). The need to know the status in horticulture raised the following question: What are the perceptions of vocational horticulture students, parents, horticulture industry employers, and school administrators concerning the value of the extended service/summer contract?

Methodology

The procedures used to assess the perceptions of each of four groups were descriptive survey research procedures.

Respondent Selection and Data Collection

Four groups of respondents were included in this survey: students, parents, administrators, and employers. The 66 Ohio secondary vocational horticulture programs listed in the 1980-81 Ohio Agriculture Education directory were numbered, and using a table of random numbers twenty schools were randomly selected. Schools served as the sampling unit for a randomized cluster sampling procedure. Instructors at each school were contacted by telephone and asked to participate. A date for a visit to the school was arranged; during this visit, students filled out the questionnaires developed for students and provided the names and addresses of their parents; ad-

ministrators received a copy of the administrators' questionnaire and a preaddressed stamped return envelope; and teachers provided the names and addresses of five, purposely selected employers of their students. Following the school visit, the students' questionnaires were numbered and using a table of random numbers five questionnaires from each school were selected. Similarly, the parents from a school were numbered and five were randomly selected. Five questionnaires per school were used to eliminate possible skewing of the data by a large number of students in a single program. The selected parents were mailed a copy of the questionnaire developed for parents, along with an individually typed cover letter and a preaddressed stamped return envelope. All employers received a copy of the questionnaire developed for employers, an individually typed cover letter and a preaddressed stamped return envelope.

Instrumentation

Four parallel instruments were developed by the researcher through interviews with teacher educators and discussion questions used in an extended service study (Parks, 1980). The questionnaires contained 15 to 20 Likert-scale items and a five-response ranking item. As a check of face validity, a package containing a copy of each survey was submitted separately to a panel of experts.

Data Analysis

The instrument and responses of each subject were coded and statistically analyzed with a weight of "4" for strongly agree to "1" for strongly disagree. Chi-square values were calculated for selected items which corresponded across questionnaires. Correlations were calculated among and between the groups on the item dealing with rank ordering the benefits of the summer program.

Results

Chi-square analysis was completed for 14 survey questionnaire items which were parallel across two, three, or all four groups (Table 1).

For Table 2, respondents were asked to rank from 1 (highest) to 5 (lowest) potential benefits students received from having their teacher available during the summer months. The Kendall's Coefficient and Concordance described how the rankings of the groups varied together as .54. This is a substantial correlation among groups. Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients were analyzed in matrix form for between groups comparison. The very high correlation between students and parents (.90) would indicate that they vary together in their rankings and that by knowing one, the other could be predicted ($r^2 = .81$).

Summary

In making comparisons between the four groups on selected items, five items showed a statistically significant difference between the groups. Administrators disagreed with the other groups on the importance of summer FFA activities to the total FFA program, possibly due to little contact with summer FFA activities. Students did not respond as strongly as parents and employers that knowledge and experiences obtained during the summer were unobtainable during the school year. This could imply that students are not receiving what the other groups think they are from cooperative placement. The same difference existed on the item concerning the help and support received by students from on-the-job visits by the teacher; this is possibly due to a lack of attention during the visits to the student (more attention to the employer) at the cooperative training center by the teacher. Parents indicated that the number of teacher visits to on-the-job students during the summer was adequate, but student and employers responded differently. The difference in response could be ascribed to parental lack of knowledge and/or expectations of the role of the teacher in the summer placement program, or to a definite shortcoming as perceived by students and employers who are directly involved in the visitation process. The largest difference between groups existed on the item concerning allowing teachers to develop their summer program as they see fit; employers and parents agreed with this item and administrators very definitely disagreed. Parents and employers may not realize that this is a part of administrative responsibility, or they may feel a close watch by administrators hinders a program.

Table 1

Mean Response of Groups on Selected Corresponding Items

Item	Group	Mean
The vocational horticulture teacher has a summer program of activities (extended service) and is employed beyond the regular school year.	Students	3.04
	Parents	3.00
The teacher makes contacts with community people (business people, leaders, horticulture industry) during the summer.	Students	3.10
	Parents	3.12
	Employers	2.83
Summer FFA activities are an important part of the FFA program.	Students	2.81*
	Parents	3.25
	Employers	3.14
	Administrators	2.75
The teacher updates and repairs school equipment and facilities during the summer.	Students	2.79
	Parents	2.88
	Employers	2.67
	Administrators	2.67
I have gained experience and knowledge during the summer program that was impossible to get during the school year.	Students	2.55*
	Parents	3.04
	Employers	3.19
Summer experiences will help (have helped) me be more successful in a job.	Students	3.04
	Parents	3.28
	Employers	3.00
The summer program is an important part of the vocational horticulture program.	Students	2.91
	Parents	3.00
	Employers	3.28
I received help and support from my teacher when he/she visits me on the job during the summer.	Students	2.49*
	Parents	3.30
	Employers	3.25

Table 1 (continued)

Item	Group	Mean
My teacher visits me often enough at my summer job.	Students	2.30*
	Parents	2.90
	Employers	2.46
My teacher works with me and my employer is outlining my summer experiences.	Students	2.29
	Employers	3.61
The teacher presents a negative image of the school. ^a	Students	3.15
	Parents	3.32
	Employers	3.43
The school supports the teacher's summer activities.	Students	2.73
	Parents	3.22
	Employers	2.80
Teachers are allowed to develop their summer program however they see fit.	Parents	2.91*
	Employers	2.73
	Administrators	1.58
The extended service contract (allowing for the summer activities of the teacher) should be continued even if federal/state monies are withdrawn.	Parents	2.84
	Employers	3.00
	Administrators	2.82

*P < .10, Chi Square

^aScale values were reversed for negatively stated items.

Looking at the rank of each benefit across the four groups, one-to-one instruction was ranked highly by all groups. Moral support and encouragement was ranked highly by all groups except the administrators, who may not be a party to this benefit and therefore not realize its importance to the summer program. Interestingly enough, the continuation of the FFA program consistently ranked low (last on three of the four groups). This raises the question of the perceived value of the FFA program in vocational horticulture. Access to horticultural information ranked in the middle for all groups. On help in dealing with job related problems, rankings were very mixed, with employers giving this benefit the highest rank and students giving it the lowest. This discrepancy again raises the possibility that students are not receiving the assistance with their cooperative placement jobs that the other groups think they are.

Implications

The groups in this study concurred with the teachers in a 1979 study by Cepica on the importance of the summer program to the overall program. The summer program was viewed as being an important segment of the total program. The use and value of summer FFA activities was ranked low by all groups in this study; yet, teachers were found to be spending much of their summer employment time in FFA activities (Strong, 1973). Williams' study in 1977 found that supervised occupational experiences were not duplicable in the classroom; and the employers, students and parents in this study indicated that the knowledge and experiences gained during the summer program were unobtainable during the regular school year. The employers in this study upheld the results of the Miller and Parks (1981) study of horticulture industry employers which found that the summer experiences were an important facet of the vocational horticulture program.

Table 2

Mean Response by Group of Ranked Benefits of the Summer Program

Item	Mean ^a			
	Students (n=86)	Parents (n=22)	Employers (n=30)	Administrators (n=12)
One-to-one instruction	2.69	2.36	2.47	1.58
Moral support and encouragement	1.91	2.00	2.58	4.25
The continuation of the FFA program	3.77	2.73	3.23	4.00
Access to horticultural information	2.84	2.69	3.00	3.75
Help in dealing with job related problems	2.88	2.55	2.10	2.33

^aLowest mean would describe the most beneficial aspect of the summer program.

Recommendations

The data in this study seems to suggest the need for several improvements in the summer program. Knowledge of the summer program, its aims, the summer FFA program, and the teacher's responsibilities appears to be lacking in the groups studied. Communication lines between students, parents, employers, and administrators need to be opened so that there is no misunderstanding as to what is to be happening during the summer. Teachers need to be more attentive to on-the-job students, more communicative with the employers, and more sensitive to the perceptions of administrators.

This study of the perceptions of four groups of people involved in the vocational horticulture education process yielded interesting data. Future studies should be conducted on a national level to determine if the Ohio results are unique, and should be expanded to other taxonomy areas. The discrepancy between students and employers on job related issues should not be ignored; cooperative training agreements and how they are being used should be further investigated to shed light on this area. The consistent ranking of the continuation of the FFA program as the least important benefit of the summer program also raises some concerns. The perceived value of the FFA program to students of vocational horticulture and the use of FFA in vocational horticulture programs should be investigated. Studies could also include the other relatively new taxonomy areas in vocational agriculture.

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