

A STUDY FOR THE REVISION OF NINTH GRADE AGRICULTURE

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An examination of the educational needs of ninth grade vocational agriculture students in North Carolina is being conducted by three state-level agencies in a cooperative effort. The need for an exploratory study was identified and immediate steps were taken to plan and conduct pilot programs designed to supply data needed for planning future programs for beginning vocational agriculture students.

The North Carolina Department of Curriculum Study and Research, the Division of Vocational Education in the State Department of Public Instruction, and the Department of Agricultural Education at North Carolina State College are working together in exploring the need for and feasibility of modifying vocational agriculture in North Carolina at the early high school level.

A two-shaped approach has been taken in this exploratory work. Phase I of the study, involving a number of selected schools, consists of substituting a special course in general vocational education for ninth grade vocational agriculture. Phase II, involving other selected schools, deals with incorporating into the present Vocational Agriculture I curriculum a one semester unit on exploring agricultural occupations.

A working committee, representing each of the three agencies, has taken a lead in planning the Pilot Study, as well as developing units of instruction for each phase. Excellent relationships and patterns of communication have been established with local administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Reactions from people at the local school level have been highly favorable to both Phase I and Phase II of the study.

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Development of the Study

Criteria were established for the selection of schools to participate in the overall study--five schools were selected for Phase I and six schools for Phase II of the study. Members of the working committee held individual conferences with administrators and teachers in the selected schools to determine their willingness to participate in the study. Workshops were then planned with the group for the purposes of establishing specific study objectives, making tentative plans for teaching units, developing evaluation procedures, and working on other details pertinent to the study.

Phase I of the pilot study is specifically concerned with determining the feasibility of adapting the Agriculture I curriculum to meet general vocational education needs of ninth grade students. The overall objective of the instruction is to promote planfulness regarding occupational opportunities by helping students to make a beginning in discovering their current relationships to the world of work. A second, and equally important aspect of the instructional program is to help students personally assume responsibility for beginning to plan for their occupational futures. In addition, the instruction should help students to develop common performance skills needed in planning vocational futures.

The instructional program and class activities in Phase I give special attention to: (1) acquainting students with families of occupational opportunities available to them in such fields as agriculture, clerical, sales and service, professions, mechanics, and construction, with special emphasis on helping students to understand the process of making realistic choices among occupational families consistent with their own interests and qualifications; (2) helping students begin to understand their interests and capabilities in relation to occupational areas; (3) acquainting students with the types of work and competencies needed for success in various types of jobs; (4) acquainting students with educational opportunities available to them, and (5) helping students develop performance skills needed for planning their occupational futures.

Phase II of the study is more limited. It is geared to helping students appraise the agricultural world of work. As in Phase I, however, vocational choice is considered as a process rather than an event, and the instruction is viewed as an integral part of this process of making a vocational choice.

Instruction in Phase II of the study is designed to help students: (1) gain a better understanding of the broad field of agriculture; (2) develop an understanding and appreciation of the possibilities of success in agricultural occupations; (3) become familiar with and obtain experience in the kinds of work involved in selected agricultural occupations; (4) learn of the various educational opportunities available to them in agriculture; and (5) develop an understanding and appreciation of a procedure for evaluating an occupation.

Data are now being collected from the schools participating in Phase I and Phase II of the Pilot Study. This information will serve as a basis for helping to determine the desirability of a realistic practicality of expanding either or both phases of the Pilot program next year.

Regardless of the outcome from a research point of view, the experience has shown that it is possible for three state-level agencies and several local school units to cooperatively develop and initiate field studies involving the instructional contents of vocational agriculture.