

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ASSISTANCE RECEIVED FROM PARENTS AND TEACHERS WITH SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

David L. Williams  
Professor

Agricultural Education  
Iowa State University

## Introduction

Learning by doing is an educational principle that has directed vocational agriculture education for over sixty years. This principle has been applied through various experiential learning methods. Supervised occupational experience (SOE) is one such method commonly used in vocational agriculture to extend formal education to agribusinesses, farms and other sites of agricultural activity where students apply skills already learned and develop new occupational skills under the supervision of parents, employers, teachers or others. Educational programs, such as SOE, that reach beyond regularly scheduled classroom and laboratory activities and beyond the school campus demand special assistance from teachers and parents. An Iowa study (Williams, 1977) reported that vocational agriculture students identified the help given by their parents and vocational agriculture teachers among the most important factors in planning and conducting their SOE programs.

## Objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

1. Identify the ways vocational agriculture teachers assist with SOE programs and determine if significant differences in assistance provided exist between students who received the Chapter Farmer Degree and students who received the State Farmer Degree.
2. Identify the ways parents assist with SOE programs and determine if significant differences in assistance provided exist between students who received the Chapter Farmer Degree and students who received the State Farmer Degree.
3. Determine if significant differences exist in assistance provided by parents and teachers in developing SOE programs.

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## Methodology

The population was the 1977 Iowa high school graduates who received the Chapter Farmer Degree or the State Farmer Degree as their highest FFA degree while enrolled in high school vocational agriculture. Samples of 100 Chapter Farmers and 100 State Farmers were randomly selected from the population. A mailed questionnaire was developed and used to collect data from the sample groups approximately six months after they were graduated from high school. The questionnaire assessed assistance students received from their parents and vocational agriculture teachers in developing SOE programs. A 1-to 99-point scale was used for the research participants to indicate the amount of assistance received by responding to 30 assistance items. The questionnaire and a cover letter were mailed to the homes of individuals in the samples. Three follow-up mailings were made at two-week intervals to the nonrespondents. These procedures yielded an 86 percent return from the State Farmer Degree group and 64 percent return from the Chapter Farmer Degree group.

The data collected using the 1 to 99 continuum were transformed to normal deviates. This procedure, as described by Warren, *et al.* (1969), spreads out the tails and pushes together the middle of an equal appearing interval scale. To avoid the use of negative values, the normal deviates were multiplied by 100 and 500 was added to each value. Therefore, the assistance scores reported could range from 267 (no assistance) to 733 (much assistance) with a mid-point of 500 (average assistance). The mean value and standard deviation were computed for each assistance item, and the t-test was used to test for significant differences between mean scores for Chapter Farmers and State Farmers. The paired t-test was used to test for significant differences between assistance provided by teachers and parents.

## Characteristics of Respondents

The Chapter Farmers and State Farmers were similar in many ways. Most of the people in both groups had a farm background and a majority had completed four years of vocational agriculture. Sixty-six percent of the Chapter Farmers compared to eighty percent of the State Farmers had entered or planned to enter an agricultural occupation. About one-half of both groups were attending an area vocational school or university.

When students were asked to indicate the one type of SOE they considered to be the most important, 64 percent of the Chapter Farmers and 71 percent of the State Farmers reported farming programs. Farm placement was identified by 27 percent of the

Chapter Farmers and 19 percent of the State Farmers as their most important SOE. Only six percent or less of both groups identified agribusiness placement as their most important SOE, and none reported supervised laboratory as their most important SOE.

Eighty-eight percent of the Chapter Farmers and 90 percent of the State Farmers indicated that they received adequate help from their parents in developing SOE programs. Approximately three-fourths of the respondents reported that the assistance they received from their vocational agriculture teacher was adequate. A larger percentage (31 percent) of the Chapter Farmers than the State Farmers (13 percent) indicated that their vocational agriculture teacher did not visit them at the site of their SOE. Lack of individualized, personalized help through SOE visits may help explain why one-fourth of the Chapter Farmers did not view teacher assistance as adequate. About one-fourth of each group indicated that the teacher visited them three or more times per year. The mean number of teacher SOE visits received by the Chapter Farmers was 2.4 compared to 2.8 for the State Farmers.

### *Assistance Provided by Teachers*

Table 1 presents a summary of the analyses of data pertaining to assistance provided by teachers and parents as perceived by students. The assistance provided by teachers are rank-ordered in Table 1 based on the mean score for the total sample. Nineteen of the items had means of 500 or above, indicating that students perceived their vocational agriculture teachers providing "average assistance" or above in nineteen different ways. The five ways teachers provided the greatest assistance were: (1) keeping records on SOE, (2) providing encouragement for SOE, (3) summarizing records for SOE, (4) learning skills in agriculture, and (5) setting educational goals in agriculture. It is interesting to note that two of these five items pertained to assistance with SOE program records.

The five assistance items with the lowest means for the total sample were: (1) financing SOE enterprises and activities, (2) providing equipment for SOE, (3) locating a place for SOE, (4) selecting crops for SOE, and (5) selecting supplies for SOE. Both groups, Chapter Farmers and State Farmers, rated each of these teacher assistance items below 500.

Significant differences in means were observed between the two groups for ten of the assistance items. In each case where significant difference was observed, the mean was greater for the State Farmers than the Chapter Farmers. Several assistance items where such observations were made pertained to planning SOE activities and assessing outcomes of SOE programs.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSES OF DATA FOR ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY  
PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING STUDENT  
SOE PROGRAMS AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS

Assistance	Parents Rank Order	Teachers Rank Order
Providing equipment*	1	29
Locating a place*	2	28
Learning skills in agriculture*	3	4
Marketing agricultural products*	4	25 <sup>a</sup>
Determining interest in agriculture*	5	7
Producing agricultural products*	6	23
Providing encouragement**	7	2
Financing*	8	30
Selecting animals*	9 <sup>a</sup>	20
Expanding SOE*	10	16 <sup>a</sup>
Determining size*	11	24
Developing an agreement*	12 <sup>a</sup>	18
Selecting supplies*	13	26
Making decisions related to SOE*	14	19
Making long range plans for SOE	15	14 <sup>a</sup>
Determine cost of producing crops and animals	16	9
Selecting approved practices*	17	17 <sup>a</sup>
Making business arrangements*	18	22
Identifying agricultural experiences to obtain	19	12
Selecting improvement projects	20	13
Setting educational goals in agriculture**	21	5 <sup>a</sup>
Identifying agricultural skills to develop**	22	11
Setting goals**	23	10 <sup>a</sup>
Developing a budget	24	21 <sup>a</sup>
Keeping records**	25	1
Selecting crops*	26 <sup>a</sup>	27
Evaluating SOE Programs**	27	8 <sup>a</sup>
Developing detailed plans**	28	15 <sup>a</sup>
Summarizing records**	29	3 <sup>a</sup>
Interpreting records**	30	6

\*Mean for parents was significantly higher ( $P=.05$ ) than the mean for teachers  
 \*\*Mean for teachers was significantly higher ( $P=.05$ ) than the mean for parents  
<sup>a</sup>Mean for students who had attained the State Farmer Degree was significantly higher ( $P > .05$ ) than the mean for students who had attained the Chapter Farmer Degree.

The five ways teachers provided greatest assistance to State Farmers were: (1) keeping SOE records, (2) summarizing records for SOE, (3) providing encouragement for SOE, (4) learning skills in agriculture and (5) setting goals in agriculture.

Teachers provided greatest assistance to Chapter Farmers in the following ways: (1) providing encouragement for SOE, (2) keeping records for SOE, (3) learning skills in agriculture, (4) summarizing records for SOE and (5) determining interest in agriculture.

The lack of significant differences between the two groups for twenty assistance items indicated that the students perceived teacher assistance equally important in many ways in developing SOE programs for Chapter Farmers and State Farmers.

### *Assistance Provided by Parents*

Table 1 also presents the rank order for assistance provided by parents. The total sample of students rated 23 of the 30 assistance items above mid-point on the scale, indicating that students thought their parents provided "average assistance" or better in developing their SOE programs. The five ways parents provided the greatest assistance according to the total sample were: (1) providing equipment for SOE, (2) locating a place for SOE, (3) learning skills in agriculture, (4) marketing agricultural products and (5) determining interest in agriculture. It should be noted that three of these assistance items were among the ones with the lowest rank for teachers.

The five parental assistance items with the lowest means for the total sample were: (1) interpreting results of records for SOE, (2) summarizing records for SOE, (3) developing detailed plans for SOE, (4) evaluating the SOE program and (5) selecting crops for SOE. Some of these same assistance items were among the top ways teachers assisted on developing SOE programs. Significant differences were observed between means for Chapter Farmers and State Farmers for three assistance items. The means for (1) selecting animals for SOE, (2) developing an agreement for SOE and (3) selecting crops for SOE were significantly higher for State Farmers than for Chapter Farmers. These findings were expected since the scope and efficiency of crop and livestock enterprises are considered in awarding the State Farmer Degree.

Chapter Farmers and State Farmers were in agreement on the top four ways parents assisted in developing SOE programs: (1) providing equipment for SOE, (2) locating a place for SOE, (3) learning skills in agriculture and (4) marketing agricultural

products. These findings suggest that a major role of the parents in developing SOE programs is to help arrange for facilities and equipment.

Similarity (lack of significant difference between groups) in responses for the two groups for 27 of the 30 assistance items indicates that parental assistance was equally important in many ways in developing SOE programs for Chapter Farmers and State Farmers.

### *Comparison of Assistance Provided by Parents and Teachers*

Table 1 identifies the 25 assistance items where significant differences were observed in the assistance provided by parents and teachers as perceived by the total sample of students. In sixteen of these comparisons the means for parents were significantly greater than the means for teachers. It should be noted that several of these parental assistance items were related to initiating SOE programs as well as conducting and expanding SOE programs.

Nine special ways that teachers can provide assistance in developing SOE programs were identified using the paired t-test. There were nine assistance items where the means for teachers were significantly higher than the means for parents. These findings disclose that students perceived their teachers to be the major source of assistance with SOE program records and other activities related to planning and replanning of SOE programs.

These comparisons revealed that students perceived their parents and teachers assisting in different ways with SOE programs. Assistance from both are important to the development of quality SOE programs for vocational agriculture students.

### *Conclusions*

1. Students perceived that their vocational agriculture teachers provided the greatest assistance in areas related to keeping records, providing encouragement, setting educational goals and learning skills in agriculture.
2. State Farmers received significantly more help from their teachers than did Chapter Farmers with 13 of the 30 assistance items studied. Several of these 13 items were related to planning and evaluating SOE programs.

3. Students perceived that their parents provided the greatest assistance in areas related to providing facilities, developing interest in agriculture, learning skills in agriculture and marketing agricultural products.
4. State Farmers received significantly more assistance from their parents than did Chapter Farmers with 3 of the 30 assistance items studied. These items were: selecting animals, developing agreements and selecting crops of SOE programs.
5. The total sample of students perceived that they received significantly more assistance from parents than teachers with 16 of the 30 assistance items. These sixteen items were related to development of interest in agriculture, providing resources for agricultural production projects, producing and marketing agricultural products and making business arrangements and decisions.
6. The total sample of students perceived that they received significantly more assistance from teachers than parents with 9 of the 30 assistance items. These nine items were related to providing encouragement, keeping and using records, developing plans, setting goals for SOE and evaluating SOE.

#### *Implications for Teacher Education*

1. Inservice and preservice teachers of vocational agriculture should understand that students do recognize the assistance provided by parents and teachers in developing SOE programs. Teachers are responsible to provide their own assistance, and to activate parental assistance in the development of SOE programs.
2. The teacher education curriculum should include instruction on the nature and purpose of SOE as a component of vocational agriculture and the basic principles applied through SOE programs.
3. Vocational agriculture teachers should be introduced to ways and means to orient students and their parents to SOE early in the student's first vocational agriculture course. The SOE instructional materials developed by Williams (1978) was designed to assist teachers in this task.
4. Teachers should understand how to involve the parents of their students in selecting, planning and conducting SOE

programs. SOE program agreements and training or calendarized plans are educational tools that can be used to help activate parental assistance. These tools are included in most vocational agriculture student record books.

5. The teacher education curriculum should include instruction on how to perform teacher activities that will assist students in developing quality SOE programs.

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(Bennett and Legacy--Continued from page 34)

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(Continued on page 46)