The Sound School Regional Vocational Aquaculture Center
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Components of Vocational Agriculture Laboratory Practicals

Laboratory practicals have been part of Vo Ag classes for over a century. The laboratory practicals had very defined outlines - so that the Vo Ag labs were often non classroom or out in the field so curriculum guides were used to review instruction. Although some refer to Vo Ag curriculum guides as enhanced course outlines they had detailed instructional occupational goals defined by skill based activities. Applications had foundation, skill based activities which often themselves had supporting lab practicals. The lab practicals presented operations, protocols and best practices as stand alone materials. They were measurable and collectible. The curriculum guides also sought to eliminate "stranded" applications, those which had no foundation skill based activities and "no end" activities for which no industry application could be found. The practical component was always linked to the classroom instruction.

Vo Ag classes were "blocked" to allow for these skill based activities or industry applications. In both cases the expectation was on the student performing the activity or application not just witnessing or exposure to it with printed material. It was participatory and thus the "hands-on" label so often used today. The laboratory practical was always associated to employment/occupational instruction of FFA which also occurred in a classroom setting. Students had the technology and science of the activity and why it was important to the occupation or business. That classroom component had features associated with academic instruction especially fact sheets for protocols, best practices and operations. They were presented before the activity or application to be kept in student notebooks. The business aspects were included in FFA participation such as

record keeping, interviewing, etc. Vo Ag instruction directly linked the theory or content material to occupational outcomes, the performance of the activity or application. The most apparent linkage was to use of job titles in the curricular map. Early diagrams describe the unique role of Vo Ag teachers as connecting the academic "school" instruction to "practical" vocational experiences. Employment descriptions often had phrases such as "ability to meet with and work with industry" to reflect this unique non traditional role as compared to comprehensive high schools educators.

The special role of Vo Ag educators between school and work was also realized in the educational specification design criteria of a separate classroom and laboratory space - which sought as much as possible to duplicate what would be found in industry. For example the plant science classroom instruction prepared students for activities/applications in the greenhouse. The Vo Ag teacher linked the classroom to the laboratory practical lab (activity or application) to do this up to date and correct industry equipment was required. FFA instruction provided material on agribusiness, cost of production, crop reports and supply demand economics. How did the vocational experiences fit into the four year program for high schools, they did so as a scope and sequence within a separate Vo Ag program of studies. Students had a broad based exploratory program the first two years with concentration/specialization in their third and fourth years.

The assessment was in two sections, written for the instruction and performance for the practical. The assessment for industry applications (practical) was performance based which was measured. If students performed the lab practical (applications or activity) and met industry expectations they were termed "competent." For some courses skill based activities provided the framework to attain industry competency certificates. At this time, we offer two such certificates one for science HACCP and for in technology safe boating. It is hoped to expand that number from two to eight.