

*A county studies its offerings
in an important
and controversial area.*

Clarence Fielstra

Values of Work Experience Education

MANY countries are currently showing interest in work experience education for secondary school students. In the United States, much attention is being directed to the kind of program which has been established in the high school districts of Santa Barbara County, California. An evaluation of this latter program is reported in this article.

The program in Santa Barbara County operates under the provisions of the California Administrative Code (Article 13.1, Sections 115.20 through 115.26, Subchapter 1, Chapter 1). In accordance with the Code, three classifications of work experience education have been established: (a) Exploratory Work Experience Education, (b) General Work Experience Education, and (c) Vocational Work Experience Education.

The "exploratory" program is intended to provide students vocational guidance through affording them opportunities to observe and sample systematically a variety of conditions of work for the purpose of ascertaining their interest and suitability for the occupations they are

exploring. There is no intention, under this classification, to teach production skills of any kind.

The "general" program is designed to provide students experience in real jobs, so that they may develop desirable work habits and attitudes. The part-time jobs held under this classification need not be related to specific occupational goals.

The "vocational" program has as its purpose the extension of vocational learning opportunities to students through part-time employment in the occupations for which their courses in school are preparing them.

The Code stipulates that the school district shall grant credit to high school students who satisfactorily complete work experience education under the above classification. In the "exploratory" program five semester periods of credit may be given for any one semester, with

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a maximum of ten semester periods to be allowed during high school years; in the "general" program ten semester periods of credit may be given for each semester, with a maximum of twenty semester periods to be allowed; and in the "vocational" program ten semester periods of credit may be given for each semester with a maximum of forty semester periods to be allowed.

Participants in the Program

In an evaluative study supported by a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation of San Francisco,¹ it was found that approximately one-fourth of all the graduates from the following high schools from 1953 through 1959 had participated in the work experience education program: Carpinteria Union High School, Lompoc Union High School, Santa Barbara City High School, Santa Maria Joint Union High School, and Santa Ynez Valley Union High School.

Many more girls than boys took part in the program, making up two-thirds of the total number in 1955 and 56 percent of the total in 1960. The mean I.Q. of the male participants in the program was almost exactly the same as that of male nonparticipants, but the mean I.Q. of female participants was higher than that of female nonparticipants, the difference being significant at the 5 percent level of confidence. There were no significant differences between the mean grade-point averages earned in high school by participants and by nonparticipants.

Two-thirds of the students enrolled in the program earned school credit only,

¹ Clarence Fielstra. *Work Experience Education Program in Santa Barbara County High School Districts*. Unpublished report to the Rosenberg Foundation, 1960. p. x+228. (To be published by Santa Barbara County Schools Office, Goleta, California.)

and one-third of them earned both school credit and hourly wages for their part-time employment. The mean total number of semester periods of credit earned in the program was approximately ten. There were no significant differences whatsoever between participants and nonparticipants in (a) the mean number of semester periods of credit earned in nonacademic subjects, (b) the mean number of semester periods of credit earned in academic subjects, and (c) the mean number of total semester periods of credit earned in high school. On the average, then, students in the program completed work experience education without permitting it to interfere with other subjects; they did so by scheduling their part-time employment chiefly during study periods of the school day or after school hours.

Opinions on the Program

When asked how valuable they considered the work experience education program to be to students who took part in it, the respondents—consisting of former student participants, parents of participants, and faculty members of the five high schools—replied as indicated in Table I.

Not only parents and faculty members but also employers (for whom student participants worked) were asked for their opinions concerning the place of the work experience education program in the high school curriculum. Their replies are shown in Table II.

More than 95 percent of the parents, teachers and students whose opinions were obtained considered the program to be of "much" or of "some" value; and an average of less than 2.5 percent of these groups believed that the program was of "little" or "no" value. Furthermore,

Table I
Value of Work Experience Education to Students

Opinion Expressed	Percent Expressing Opinion		
	Parents	Faculty	Students
Much value	76.4	57.7	59.6
Some value	19.5	38.5	35.6
Little or no value	1.6	2.3	3.4
No response	2.5	1.5	1.4

great majorities of the respondents (98 percent of the parents, 83 percent of the teachers, and 90 percent of the employers) considered the program to be an "essential" or "useful" part of the total school program.

Student Benefits from Program

Based on the opinions expressed by four groups of respondents—parents, teachers, employers, and students—the following purposes of the work experience education program are those which are most often achieved by student participants in the high school districts of Santa Barbara County (listed in order of average rankings by the groups of respondents):

1. To learn what employment entails
2. To gain knowledge and attitudes necessary for successful job performance

3. To develop better understanding of the meaning of work

4. To learn to assume greater responsibility

5. To learn how to get along with fellow workers and employers

6. To explore the fields in which occupational interest lies and to determine suitability for those fields

7. To acquire better work habits

8. To make wiser career choices.

School Benefits from Program

All of the principals and more than half of the teachers whose opinions were obtained expressed the belief that the high schools of Santa Barbara County gained several benefits as a result of their offering the work experience education program. Chief among those benefits were the following, listed in order of rankings by the teachers:

Table II
Place of Work Experience Education in School Curriculum

Opinion Expressed	Percent Expressing Opinion		
	Parents	Faculty	Employers
Essential part of curriculum	38.2	29.2	43
Useful supplement to curriculum	60.2	54.6	47
Borderline activity; readily dispensable	1.6	10.8	6
No response	0.0	5.4	4

1. Provides assistance in occupational guidance

2. Develops good school-community relations

3. Acquaints employers with the work that young people trained in the schools can perform

4. Utilizes many community facilities and resources for training purposes and thus makes it possible for the school to provide training in fields that the school program otherwise could not serve

5. Provides an opportunity for the school to relate academic training to job requirements

6. Provides a direct avenue through which the school can meet community needs

7. Increases the school's ability to hold students in school for a longer period of time.

Although almost one-half of the teachers said that the work experience education program had "no effect" on their courses, 45 percent of them reported that the program had at least "some" effect. The effects on their courses most often noted by teachers were these:

1. Provides some topics or problems for discussion

2. Provides motivation for additional interest in the course(s)

3. Provides basis for more use of related community resources.

Employer Benefits from Program

According to opinions expressed by employers with whom students in the work experience education program had been placed, the greatest benefits of the program to the employers themselves were those listed here, in order of rankings by the employers:

1. Helped train future full-time employees

2. Made available a valuable and carefully selected labor supply, and implemented recruitment from it

3. Improved public relations

4. Resulted in improved office procedures

5. Resulted in improved production methods

6.5 Reduced costs resulting from excessive turnover

6.5 Improved morale in the firm.

In the attainment of these objectives through the employment of youth in the program, the employers reported that they had had complete support and cooperation from labor unions and governmental agencies.

Participants vs. Nonparticipants

A follow-up study was made of 1,131 graduates from the high schools of Santa Barbara County, of whom 320 had taken part in the work experience education program while in high school and 811 had not. It was found that male participants in the program slightly excelled male nonparticipants in such factors as total semester periods of academic subjects completed in high school; semester periods of science, mathematics, business education, and shop completed in high school; socioeconomic level; satisfaction with present job; weekly salaries earned in post-high school employment; grade-point averages earned in college; years of non-college post-high school training completed; agreement of high school interest-inventory scores with fields of occupational choice at time of high school graduation; agreement of interest-inventory scores with fields of occupational choice at time of high school graduation; agreement of interest-inventory scores with fields of occupations presently held; and in incidence of marriage within three or four years after graduation from high school. None of the differences was statistically significant at the 5 percent level of confidence.

It was found also that female participants in the program slightly excelled female nonparticipants in such factors as grade-point averages earned in high school; socioeconomic level; semester periods of social studies, mathematics, English, and business education completed in high school; total semester periods of subjects completed in high school; satisfaction with jobs presently held; weekly salaries earned in post-high school employment; years of non-college post-high school training completed; agreement of interest-inventory scores with fields of occupational choice at time of high school graduation; and agreement of interest-inventory scores with fields of occupations presently held. These differences, however, were all found to be without statistical significance at the 5 percent level of confidence.

Among the other differences found between former participants and nonparticipants in the program was the difference in percentages of the former students in both groups who reported receiving, while in high school, the kinds of help which were considered to be objectives of the work experience education program. Much higher percentages (by 20 percent or more) of participants than of nonparticipants said that they had received the following kinds of help:

1. To broaden understanding of the occupational world and of working conditions in the world of work
2. To make the transition from school to work
3. To learn what employment entails
4. To make progress toward chosen occupational goals
5. To explore the fields in which occupational interest lies and to determine suitability for those fields
6. To develop understanding of the meaning of work

7. To develop better personality and more poise
8. To augment financial resources
9. To develop understanding of the community.

Another difference found between participants and nonparticipants was in the sources of the vocational guidance which they reported that they had received while they were in high school. Chief sources reported by participants were: (a) work experience education program, (b) regular school subjects, and (c) parents and friends. Chief sources reported by nonparticipants were: (a) parents and friends, (b) regular school subjects, and (c) part-time jobs—not related to the program.

Strengths of the Program

Among the several outstanding strengths of the work experience education program in the high schools of Santa Barbara County is the extensiveness of its use of community resources. Banks, libraries, hospitals, medical offices, law offices, publishing offices, pharmacies, retail stores, automobile service shops, and literally hundreds of other community facilities are supplementing school classrooms as centers of some very important functions of education. Thus, millions of dollars worth of such facilities, plus the immeasurably valuable human resources afforded by the employers, are made a part of the educational program of the high school districts. These excellent, up-to-date, varied facilities and resources could not be financed by means of school budgets; but even if they could be, much would be lost in terms of the good school-community relations and understandings which are re-

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foreign language education should supersede vested interests represented by the different language specialties.

7. Be cognizant of the struggle to keep foreign languages in the school curriculum. Only by looking at past errors can foreign language programs be adapted to the modern age.

The future of foreign language education in this country is bright. It is to be hoped that this future will not be dimmed by injudicious attitudes and archaic methods of instruction.

Work Experience Education

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sulting through the work experience education program.

Another outstanding strength of the program lies in its contribution to the dignifying of work. The cooperation of community and school leaders in the development of the program is providing students with assurance that education about work and experiences in work are considered important in the development of mature and effective citizenship. The granting of school credit for participation in the program is giving students further evidence that well-selected, well-planned, and well-supervised experiences in actual jobs are valued just as highly as the educational experiences that are carried on exclusively within classrooms of a high school. Furthermore, the initiation into the world of work is providing students with new insights regarding the nature of our economic system; and in many instances it is adding to their sense of being an important part of their community with both the opportunity and

responsibility for making their own best contributions to society whether it be on the professional level or the level of unskilled labor.

In summary, several findings have been arrived at through the evaluative study of the work experience education program carried on in the high school districts of Santa Barbara County. These findings clearly indicate that such a program is of much value to high school students and to the communities served by the high schools. The program has apparently contributed a great deal to the "status" of work in the minds of students, whose general enthusiasm for the program strongly reflects their "healthy" attitudes toward vocational aspects of life. Moreover, the program has afforded effective and greatly needed means of providing vocational education and guidance for the college-preparatory and the non-college-preparatory student; it serves this purpose for the dull, the normal, and the gifted student without reducing their participation in either academic or nonacademic subjects of the high school curriculum.

In light of the evident values of a well-planned, well-supervised, and carefully evaluated work experience education program at the high school level and in light of the strong public and professional support given such a program, it would seem that the present trend toward establishing the program in the comprehensive high schools of the country should be encouraged and accelerated.

A study of the evaluative report on work experience education in the five high school districts of Santa Barbara County might well serve as an initial step in the planning of these programs for other high schools.

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