

The Cluster Concept in Career Education

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CAREER education is a systematic way to acquaint children with the world of work in the elementary and junior high years and to prepare them in high school and college to enter and advance in a career field carefully chosen from among many.

Career education is divided into three inseparable segments: (a) career awareness through a study of the world of work in the elementary grades (K-6); (b) career exploration and orientation in the intermediate grades (normally 7-10); and (c) career preparation conducted at the senior high level (11-12).

For students to make vocational career choices from the wide range of occupational information, the curriculum program must permeate the entire school. The subject of career education cannot be treated as an isolated subject. Rather it must be an integral part of all subjects in the curriculum and must contribute to the entire curricular motivation and enrichment of the many learning experiences of all students as they grow and develop. The program is conceptualized to involve all disciplines as they relate to student experiences and occupational information.

There are more than 23,000 active job titles in the United States today. To help teachers deal effectively with these many possible occupations, the U.S. Office of Education has broken these jobs into 15 occupational clusters:

1. Business and office occupations

2. Marketing and distribution occupations
3. Communications and media occupations
4. Construction occupations
5. Manufacturing occupations
6. Transportation occupations
7. Agri-business and natural resource occupations
8. Marine science occupations
9. Environmental control occupations
10. Public service occupations
11. Health occupations
12. Hospitality and recreation occupations
13. Personal service occupations
14. Fine arts and humanities occupations
15. Consumer and homemaking occupations.

All types of jobs are included in these 15 clusters, from basic trade skills to those requiring a doctoral degree.

The career orientation program through cluster study must present to students:

1. A more adequate knowledge of jobs and career alternatives in our technological society
2. A knowledge of the economics necessary for participating in a technological society
3. A knowledge of the kind of education or training required and work traits necessary in obtaining employment and in gaining access to jobs and careers

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4. A self-appraisal regarding personal skills, abilities, and life aspirations

5. An opportunity to develop attitudes toward the world of work which enable one to fulfill his job career goal

6. An opportunity to develop the attitude that socially useful work has dignity and worth.

Many schools are using the "cluster" framework in orienting students to careers. Here students analyze the world of work through career clusters. In the analysis of a cluster, important points of emphasis are directed toward needs, varieties of occupations, and opportunities available. In grades 7 and 8, several clusters may be explored and analyzed; and in grades 9 and 10, the exploration may narrow down to a more oriented study of one, two, or three clusters. In grades 11 and 12, students may concentrate their career preparation by developing learning and skills in one cluster of vocations or, more likely, by concentrating on developing learning in one vocation within a cluster.

The theory behind the cluster is that 97 percent of the approximately 23,000 occupational titles can be grouped into a few cluster areas according to similar characteristics and purposes. For example, the communications cluster would entail the following occupations for analysis: artist, cameraman, computer programmer, film editor, offset pressman, photographer, production director, proofreader, prop man, radio-television announcer, reporter, telephone operator, type-setting machine operator, and writer. Some developmental objectives for analytical study of the communications cluster might be:

To understand the importance of communication to the well-being of society

To explore the variety of occupations available in the area of communication

To discover job opportunities within the community for individuals interested in communications careers.

Occupational cluster learning might include on-site observations, hands-on laboratory experience, role playing, and many other appropriate activities.

Some instructional activities that stu-

dents may pursue in studying the communications cluster are as follows:

Students visit local newspaper printing companies.

Students write articles to be printed in a class newspaper.

Students visit local television and/or radio stations, and then role play the job of the announcer by utilizing news articles written by the entire class.

Students visit telephone offices, and then role play both the operator and the consumer.

Students make posters and develop commercials to be used as 60-second videotaped commercials.

Implications of Career Education

Many implications for successful implementation of career education seem evident. Among these are the following:

1. Career education programs should be simple, flexible, and adaptable to individual community needs. Needs and problems in communities vary in priorities. Clusters to receive curricular attention by school districts may vary somewhat because of community priorities.

2. The student program should combine work experience education with a broad career information effort and tutoring program. The career information phase should make use of all community resource people, public and private employers, so that students can learn about jobs in many career areas.

3. The tutoring effort should also make use of workers and professionals to support classroom teachers with individualized and small group instruction.

4. Work experience education for grades 8, 9, and 10 will be largely exploratory. In grades 11 and 12 it will be more intensive in nature or allied with specific cluster vocations.

5. Teachers, counselors, and administrators must be exposed to a thorough in-service program on career education in order to develop the sophistication and commitment necessary for success in this changed curriculum.

6. The initial step for implementing career education in a school district will be informational meetings and the establishment of an *ad hoc* committee which includes broad representation of business, industrial, labor, and educational organizations. This committee will



Communications and media (printing)



Health (health community assistant)

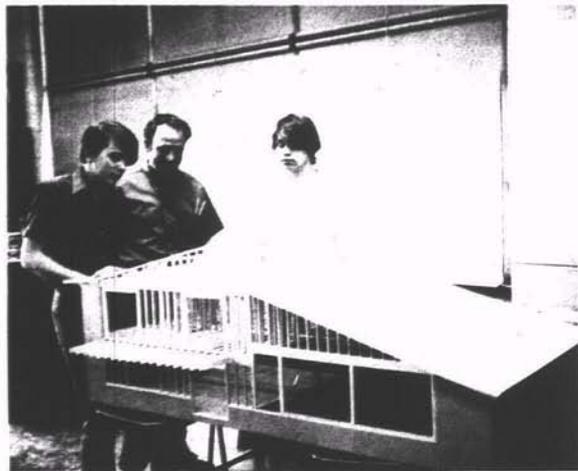


Marketing and distribution (produce sales)

The cluster concept of career development, in order to deal effectively with the many possible jobs, groups them into 15 occupational "clusters."



Health (pharmaceutical)



Trade and industrial (construction)



Trade and industrial (small engine repair)

have the task of formulating plans and priorities appropriate to the local situation.

7. Career education will call for more integration of the disciplinary subject matter in high school. With the explosion of knowledge and subject matter, it seems reasonable to request that science, mathematics, English, and social studies become relevant, one discipline to the other.

8. The whole community should be used as a learning laboratory. This implies use of community people as resource speakers and use of the community for field trips and work experience.

9. Team teaching will take on increased emphasis as the collaboration of all becomes an essential requisite for the success of the program.

10. While career education is expected to be necessary for all grades K-12, there appears to be an urgency to place priority effort in the exploratory program for grades 7-10. It is in these grades that the exploratory cluster study should draw major attention.

Limitations of Career Education

Career education appears to have a promising future. However, there are many limitations that must be recognized in developing the program.

1. Care must be exercised to avoid work-study programs as a back entrance into child labor.

2. Career education must not be used to discourage the disadvantaged in seeking admission to college.

3. Educational planners must not oversell this program as a panacea.

4. The academically-oriented community must be solicited for support in order to restructure the curriculum successfully.

5. Necessary funds that might be needed to mount a vigorous restructuring of the curriculum may be difficult to secure from the electorate.

6. It is not yet known whether business and industry will cooperate in providing sufficient opportunities for work-study programs.

7. The consumption market for workers must be studied carefully by educators lest we produce too many trained people for jobs available.

8. The trend of the American economy is "anti-youth" in the sense that employers prefer to hire people in their twenties rather than in their teens. The key to successful career education—the expansion of work-study programs—runs counter to present trends. An educational campaign will need to be conducted with business and industrial leaders to overcome anti-youth employment tendencies.

9. While career education is fostered, we must continue as always to teach boys and girls how to read, write, talk, and calculate.

In summary, clustering has these educational advantages according to proponents: (a) courses can be organized around common core areas of study; (b) a student can transfer within the cluster from one job objective to another without undue loss of time; (c) once out in the world of work, an ex-student will be able to adjust more easily to related jobs; (d) schools can enter into clustering by phases (that is, start with only one or two clusters); (e) any kind of high school—large, small, urban, rural, suburban—can cluster.

If the cluster approach to learning enjoys successful growth in our schools, it will come about through the involvement of administrators, teaching staffs, counselors, and students, along with parents and community leaders from the school areas.

Counselors should redirect more of their time and energy to career guidance rather than devoting a preponderance of time on college entrance. Job placement; career information and orientation; and optional learning opportunities, such as work experience and youth volunteer activities, should become a major function of guidance counselors.

Installation and operation of the cluster approach in career education at the junior high school level provide an opportunity for these students to have a curriculum which is meaningful, realistic, and viable. If this implementation is to be a significant innovation in these schools, it will be achieved only by considerable diligence and hard work on the part of administrators and teachers working as a team with their students, parents, and community. □

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