

Career Development: A New Focus

EARL J. MOORE*
NORMAN C. GYSBERS

CAREER development as a new focus for education has the potential to restructure substantially the processes and activities of education, modify the values and attitudes of educators, and maximize the opportunities for student involvement and responsibility. Career development can become the lens through which educators view and understand students. Career development concepts can become the organizer for the total curriculum.

In traditional education, students tend to be viewed as objects to be brought up to grade level in basic content areas at the end of the school year. The career development perspective, however, puts a premium on students as persons—on personalizing education to make it meaningful. Career development, defined in this context, is self-development over the life span through education, work, and leisure. It is a way of describing and understanding total human development.

Value of Career Development

To illustrate the value of the career development orientation, Figures 1, 2, and 3 contrast the traditional education orientation with the career development orientation in three different school contexts: educational processes and activities; values and attitudes of educators; and student involvement and responsibility.

Relating the school and its curriculum to the outside world is a necessary first step

in establishing career education in a school system. Instead of talking about the outside world in the abstract, the outside world can be used as a major vehicle for instruction. Teachers can use the career world outside the school as a teaching medium for transmitting basic education knowledge and skills.

The Three R's

The career world can be brought into the school by resource personnel, parents, and the students themselves. Action oriented, learn-by-doing processes should be used. For example, a teacher in Cobb County, Georgia, has used the banking business as one of the career worlds through which a wide variety of basic education objectives can be incorporated.¹ The traditional content area skills and knowledges in this instance are correlated and related to the banking business. The restaurant business, the construction industry, and other work settings can be used in a similar manner.

While a content-oriented teacher may recognize the potential careers as a medium for teaching traditional content knowledge and skills, the career-oriented teacher will appreciate the medium for the opportunities

¹ J. Smith, Project Director, Cobb County Occupational and Career Development Program, Marietta, Georgia, personal communication, 1971.

* Earl J. Moore, Associate Professor of Education, and Norman C. Gysbers, Professor of Education, both at the University of Missouri—Columbia

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Traditional Education</i>	<i>Career Development</i>
Instructional process	Book contained	Experiential centered
Learning activities	Abstract rich/Action poor	Action-Abstract balance
Content emphasis	Past	Here and now/Future
Reinforcement	Abstracting ability	Doing/Abstracting abilities
Evaluation	Group norms	Individual performance

Figure 1. Educational Processes and Activities

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Traditional Education</i>	<i>Career Development</i>
Teacher focus	Content departure	Person departure
Learning goals	Autocratic	Shared responsibility
Teacher stress	Imperfections/Failure	Worthiness/Success
School climate	Closed	Open
School staff	Specialty oriented	Interrelated

Figure 2. Values and Attitudes of Educators

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Traditional Education</i>	<i>Career Development</i>
Student—Task	Encourages dependency	Encourages responsibility
Student—Motivation	Apathetic	Involved/Creative
Student—Peers	Self-centered	Interdependent
Student—Teacher	Power struggles	Cooperative
Student—Self-image	Distorted/Shallow	Positive/Realistic

Figure 3. Student Involvement and Responsibility

it affords students to develop a personal sense of how to relate present worth to future worth. Nelson notes that through guided career exploration it is possible for a student to develop an awareness of his own potential and worthwhileness in the present and thus project this in the future as a participant in a greater world.² Through career exploration, he will have an opportunity to observe what it takes to be a responsible contributor within the adult world around him.

A Measure of Success

Exploring career worlds will help students develop a feeling of how adults achieve their place in society. Through career exploration,

² R. Nelson. "Opening New Vistas to Children Through Career Exploration." *Needed Concepts in Elementary Guidance*. Report of the Eighth Annual All Ohio Elementary School Guidance Conference, State Department of Education, Columbus, Ohio.

tion, students can examine the meanings of work and leisure and their relationships to personal life styles. Also, since career exploration is a personal endeavor and not a competitive venture, each student can explore at his own pace in his own unique fashion and thus be assured of a measure of success.

As Glasser contended in *Schools Without Failure*, self-worth and willingness to assume responsibility for one's own learning are built on a foundation of encouragement.³ The student active in career exploration can be reinforced whether or not he possesses abstract scholastic skills. This does not imply that basic competencies are not important, but simply that content-oriented group achievement tests are not the only way of providing feedback to students about their self-worth.

³ William Glasser. *Schools Without Failure*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969.

School Superintendent Alton B. Crews of Cobb County, Georgia, noted, "Perhaps the most important part of Career Development is the humane way it helps each child develop. The poorest reader in third grade might be the best with a hammer, and he will get esteem from his peers."⁴ Students with competence in basic education will find that career exploration can be enriching and rewarding and can be pursued without waiting for other students to reach their level.

Individualized Education

Career exploration as a point of departure for education has the potential of individualizing education, a subject that has been talked about for decades but has rarely been accomplished. Traditional strategies to individualize education have focused on matching student learning styles with abstract content-oriented tasks which occur only in the classroom. Little attention has been given to the learning style of students as these relate to the broader world outside the classroom.

Students have difficulty achieving self-identity because they are treated as objects and are placed in competitive situations where they can only compare themselves with others involved with the same task. The career exploration view, on the other hand, can stimulate learning which will provide individualized feedback to students concerning their self-identities.

Assuming Responsibility

Many teachers not only determine all instructional goals but also assume total responsibility for seeing to it that students attain minimal content competency. Career development-oriented thinking, however, encourages individual student planning and self-accountability. In Santa Rosa, California, teams of students organized a worker visitation unit and made visits to workers in the community. Using recorded interviews of workers talking about their jobs and pictures

⁴ Alton B. Crews, as quoted in: Eleanor Clift. "Careers for Kindergartners." *McCall's*, January 1972.

taken of these workers on the job, they prepared several narrated slide presentations which they shared with other class members and their parents.⁵

A career development-oriented school atmosphere has the potential of being a democratic school atmosphere. While a content-oriented school tends to create a passive, dependent student who may be apathetic, irresponsible, or rebellious, the career development-oriented school offers the opportunity for all students to achieve and become competent. Instead of fostering grade competitiveness, students can be encouraged to be helpful to one another. Each person, if he feels of equal worth, will aid others in achieving their individual goals. Bruner has suggested that a learning community can be a powerful force for effective learning and thus mutual learning and instruction can occur, with a sense of compassion and responsibility for members.⁶ The work world models this relationship for the student. A worker not only recognizes his individual responsibility, but appreciates the need for interdependency with fellow workers.

Who Is Responsible?

Who is responsible for career development programs in the school? The answer is that all members of the school community have a shared responsibility. At the present time, however, little is being done to assume such responsibility on a systematic basis. Many classroom teachers are concerned only with imparting knowledge, concentrating on grade level content, and manipulating the classroom environment for that purpose. Counselors and students may discuss future plans, but do so usually in the confines of the counselor's office. Parents and employers expect the schools to impart knowledge to students without understanding that the home and community can be a laboratory

⁵ C. Cunningham. Presentation at a career development workshop, Sonoma County Office of Education, Santa Rosa, California, October 22-23, 1971.

⁶ J. Bruner. "The Process of Education Revisited." In: Robert R. Leeper, editor. *Dare To Care Dare To Act*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1971.

to help students relate subject content to the outside world.

Career development as a unifying construct in education provides the opportunity for all members of the school community to cooperate and to be responsible. Unfortunately, however, many programs that are now being organized around career development concepts are really traditional education programs in disguise. Typically, such programs emphasize only the world of work in the abstract; students are taught about occupations.

Even when these activities are done in the context of the work world, the emphasis is still teacher centered and product oriented rather than student centered and worker life style oriented. Other programs rely heavily on "commercial publishers who market a fantastic collection of occupational encyclopedias, file cases of job descriptions, films and filmstrips, and more recently slide-tape programs, microfilm systems, and computerized occupational information systems—all under the guise of teaching individuals about the world of work."⁷ Such materials unfortunately are seen as ends in themselves.

The Future Begins Now

To take advantage of the current and future emphasis on career development as a way of making education relevant, we need to begin now. Teachers, counselors, and administrators should examine their current practices and techniques from a career development perspective.⁸ School-age youth at all levels must have the opportunity continuously and systematically to explore, from an internal frame of reference, their interests, aptitudes, attitudes, and values in relation to the wide range of educational and career

⁷ William H. Van Rooy and Larry J. Bailey. "A Conceptual Model of the World of Work." Career Development for Children Project, Department of Occupational Education, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1972.

⁸ Norman C. Gysbers and Earl J. Moore. "Career Development in the Schools." In: G. Law, editor. *Contemporary Concepts in Vocational Education*. Yearbook of the American Vocational Association. Washington, D.C.: the Association, December 1971.

opportunities which may be available to them, in order to avoid premature educational and occupational foreclosures.

Following are some cooperative efforts that a career development approach will require:

1. Teachers and students should:
 - a. Take responsibility to sample the career world and share their findings
 - b. Make classroom decisions and plan activities in a manner similar to the ways it is done in various work settings.
2. Teachers and administrators should:
 - a. Establish procedures and provide resources to enable students to explore the career world
 - b. Provide for the use of media, worker role models, and appropriate support personnel.
3. Teachers and counselors should:
 - a. Attend to and plan for each student's unique career needs
 - b. Plan cooperatively to take advantage of the expertise each has to offer.
4. Elementary and secondary teachers should:
 - a. Develop sequential programs of career development
 - b. Establish and maintain accountability procedures for career development programs.
5. Parents and business and industry personnel should:
 - a. Establish advisory groups
 - b. Serve as resource persons to school career development programs.

When the school builds upon the inherent interest of the child in activity and exploration, enriching his learning through appropriate experiences which help him to see what he is about and to consider what is most important to him in relation to the adult world, we then begin to have the elements of a career development program. With such a program, each member of the school staff has a stake in the child's career development; each teacher, and indeed each parent and businessman, carries some responsibility.⁹ □

⁹ W. Wesley Tennyson. "Career Development: Who's Responsible?" *American Vocational Journal* 46 (3): 56; March 1971.

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