

Career Education and the Curriculum Leader

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IF YOU weren't asked today, you'll certainly be asked tomorrow by a parent, vocational teacher, or counselor: "What are we doing about career education?" A great deal of publicity, talk, and even some state and federal funds have been devoted to efforts to restructure public education around the idea of career education.

What does career education include? Reading, writing, arithmetic—certainly! What skills could be more important on most jobs? Attitudes and values, effective human relations, study skills—essential characteristics of a good employee. Art, music, foreign language—these will be a part of the total lifework of some pupils. *To hear many describe the scope of career education, it can and should embrace all of education.*

These views and some moves which have been made by proponents of career education at the local, state, and national levels have made some curriculum people uneasy. Is career education a movement aimed at a "takeover" of the curriculum? Isn't there more to the role of the public schools than preparing students for work (no matter how broadly "work" is defined)? Can a concept so broad and so lacking in definition be a viable force for curriculum revision? These are a few of the questions instructional people are asking.

Despite the degree of interest and atten-

tion and the funds available from federal and state sources, the major strength of the career education movement is the power of the concept. Its greatest assets are the fresh hope it can bring for curriculum improvement, and the new approaches it can provide for revitalization of the instructional program. However, the movement cannot reach its potential unless, and until, its proponents can come to grips with a more specific definition of its scope. At this point, the greatest selling point career education has is the power of the idea—and if it is going to have impact, that idea has to be made clear and be communicated fully.

At present, the concept is so broad that it can be and is all things to all people. To vocational people, it is an opportunity to extend the areas they are concerned about into the academic courses. To the counselor, it is a chance to help the curriculum become more relevant for kids. To the parent, it offers hope of an educational program which is more practical, with a payoff upon graduation with a salable skill and a job. An amorphous concept may be great for getting converts, but it is difficult to build program on vague notions of the scope of a program.

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Problem of Definition

Under a global, nebulous definition, there is nothing left in the curriculum except career education! We know schools at least profess to prepare youth for leisure time pursuits (through developing avocational interests and providing exploratory experiences), and we seek to explore and clarify (if not inculcate) values other than those of the work ethic. We study current events and historical concepts. Under the broadest definitions of career education, these functions might not be an appropriate part of the school program.

The newly formed National Institute of Education has been struggling with some of these issues. The need to narrow and clarify the role of career education has been recognized. NIE Director Thomas Glennan pointed out that previous "rhetoric" suggested career education should touch "each and every one of us and our children."¹ He said, "I don't think we can be relevant to all those groups simultaneously."² He presented the following definition of career education:

Career is an individual's entire or principal work that extends over a lifetime and that provides an accustomed means of livelihood. The term implies productive interaction with the economic sector in a series of jobs that collectively constitute a career. *Education* is the acquisition of knowledge and development of specific and general abilities in both formal and nonformal situations.

Therefore, *Career Education* is the development of knowledge, and of special and general abilities to help individuals interact with the economic sector. Learning in this context would occur in both formal and informal situations which motivate the learner by causing him to experience work directly.³

Another, more complete definition is presented by Wesley Smith, California's director of vocational education:

Career Education is a comprehensive, systematic, and cohesive *plan* of learning orga-

nized in such manner that youth at all grade levels in the public schools will have continuous and abundant opportunity to acquire useful information about the occupational structure of the economy, the alternatives of career choice, the obligations of individual and productive involvement in the total work force, the intelligent determination of personal capabilities and aspirations, the requisites of all occupations, and opportunities to prepare for gainful employment. Career Education is the shared and unending responsibility of all professionals in education, and involves input from—and relationship to—all subject-matter disciplines and all supportive educational services.

In short, it is a priority objective of public education, with achievement measured by employability in occupations, both gainful and useful, that are a reasonable match of both the talent and the ambition of every citizen.⁴

Most curriculum people can accept, feel better about, and deal with the concept thus defined.

Part of Most Learnings

Career education, then, is not the total curriculum, but is a major part of most learnings. Career education means more than the study of the traditional group of community helpers in the primary grades and shop and vocational courses in the upper grades. Career education is really a reorientation of most of education toward the relevant and real world of work and the economic sector of our society and culture. The approach advocated is a well-designed and sequential one. Figure 1, "Comprehensive Occupational Education Program Model," developed by the Michigan Department of Education Division of Vocational Education, provides an overview of the plan.

From a motivational and instructional improvement standpoint, career education can be a vital force. Advocates of career education stress activity-oriented learning, often based on a unit or project approach. They encourage extensive use of the community as

¹ Thomas Glennan, *Manpower and Vocational Education Weekly*, May 23, 1973, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ Wesley Smith, State Director of Vocational Education. *Career Education: A Bridge to Relevancy in the Public Schools*. Sacramento: California Department of Education, n.d.

	Elementary School	Early Secondary (Grades 7-10)	Late Secondary (Grades 11-12)	Post-Secondary	Adult
<i>Objective</i>	To develop an awareness of the occupational world	To stimulate occupational interest and provide exploratory and prevocational experiences	To provide specialized training for a specific occupation or a grouping of closely related occupations	To provide advanced specific occupational education and training	To provide occupational training, upgrading, and/or retraining
<i>Depth and Scope</i>	General understanding with unrestricted exposure to all fields of work	Acquaintance with many specific occupations, primarily through a study of occupational clusters; opportunities for practical experiences	Training for job-entry skills and more advanced training on post-secondary level; counseling for career development	In-depth training for specific occupations or an occupational cluster; counseling for career development, continued	Training for specific employment needs of individual; job counseling for adults
<i>Number of courses or curricula</i>	Integrated as part of total program	Continue integrated program and provide separate courses which include experiences related to all fields of work	10-30 specialized programs depending upon employment opportunities and student interests	20-50 programs; many offerings will be dependent upon local demand	Many (20-50); number of offerings will be dependent upon demand
<i>Location of instructional facilities</i>	Every elementary school	Within every local junior and senior high school	Local high schools and/or area centers	Community colleges, technical institutes, and state colleges and universities	Local schools and/or area centers, community colleges, technical institutes, and colleges and universities

Figure 1. Comprehensive Occupational Education Program Model

a learning laboratory, and the use in the classroom of resource people from the real world.

When one examines the goals of career education and the methods which are suggested, it quickly becomes evident that what is being sought is what curriculum people have been trying to encourage for some time—relevant, appropriate, exciting, and activity-oriented instruction in a rich learning environment.

Curriculum people should accept the concept of career education as a movement which gives promise of helping to vitalize instruction. Moreover, they should work with vocational and occupational education specialists, guidance personnel, and other elements of the school faculty to help define and initiate the concept of career education. Most important, the curriculum person should make available the experience he has gained in trying to foster instructional improvement. Enthusiasts for career education will face the same problems curriculum specialists have confronted as they have attempted to promote new approaches to instruction.

Curriculum workers have valuable expertise to contribute. They should be an integral part of any career education study and implementation group. The career education movement needs experienced, effective leadership. This powerful new thrust is

being blunted because "it's more work," "the activities are too noisy," "we can't neglect the three R's." These are the same arguments that curriculum workers have heard over the years. They are now being employed in relation to career education. Just as we have learned before, the contribution of any new concept must be made clear to the classroom teacher, attitudes must be changed, and new skills developed. We have been through this process, and what we have learned about things that work can help advance a new concept which has promise of revitalizing the curriculum—career education. □

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