

CAREER EDUCATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE

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The definition and understanding of the concept of career education is now well along. Whether you accept it or reject it, you need to comprehend its relationship to existing programs in occupational education. Does it complement them or replace them? Must all old ideas and practices automatically become outmoded with this new thrust? These and many other questions come immediately to mind. This paper will attempt to answer some of them at least from the viewpoint of a professional staff member who has spent more than 25 years in the field of agricultural and occupational education.

Let's assume that you are familiar with career education as defined by the U. S. Office of Education and as illustrated in the models which have been and are being explicated. With these in mind, a way to approach this subject is by reviewing those educational activities we engage in which can be classified as meeting fully the goals of career education. You may say that everything we do would so qualify and I wouldn't argue much with you. However, a few specific points may help to tell the story.

Let's start with the beginning course in agriculture or Agriculture I as it would commonly be called. Undoubtedly, you teach jobs or units (I'm old fashioned!) or modules of instruction which cover the scope of agriculture, the kinds of jobs available, and the changing picture of agriculture, and its related services. This is certainly career exploration. You also likely teach units which are designed to develop leadership, citizenship, and cooperation. This to me is certainly necessary for success in any career. And lastly, you begin to develop specific skills, understandings, and attitudes regarding entry level jobs in agriculture. These include both pre-vocational and occupational skills. Surely, career education at its finest. In Agriculture 2, you build upon all these abilities plus adding new ones. Hopefully, too, you have involved and used community and human resources to make the units relevant to the world of work. For example, last fall on a visit to a student teaching center in Western New York, the Agriculture 2 class, after classroom study, visited a farm and observed the artificial inseminator at work. They experienced the actual conditions under which a man earns a living. The sight, the smell, the sound! They had the opportunity to talk face-to-face with him about his working conditions, his pay, his hours, and many other aspects of the job. Career Education--you be the judge.

In more specialized offerings at the 11 and 12th grades, whether in central schools, city schools, or in area centers, occupational education is the thrust. The skills needed by entry level workers in a number of occupational clusters have been identified. Through classroom and laboratory instruction, coupled with on-the-job work experience, students get the opportunity to actually find out whether or not they have the ability and interest to become proficient in a given job. At the same time, of course, they are pursuing regular courses in high school which also serve to make them employable.

Just what does "Education for Occupational Competency" attempt to do? Let's first set the records straight. In order to profit from the regular instruction in occupational education, a student must have mastered the basic skills -- or the three "R's" as they were once called. I would add another dimension -- the ability to communicate in today's complex world. A student with work skills but lacking these essentials is in a precarious position regarding his ability to support himself in our society. I am simply saying that occupational education cannot be successful if it is an academic dumping ground. Students must have the basic skills if they are to progress in vocational and technical education. Calvin Gross, a recent Superintendent of Schools in New York City, called attention to the importance of these basic skills when he said, and I quote, "We must insist on mastery of the fundamentals before a child goes on to study something else. As soon as a child slips below a certain achievement level in reading, put him in a class that's half as big and double the time spent on reading. If he continues to slip, cut the class size again, increase the time, because he has to learn to read. If he can't read well, he will find locked doors for the rest of his life." end of quote. If students do not have such basic skills, then let's provide opportunity for them to secure remedial help -- yes, yes, even in lieu of occupational or career education.

What does education for occupational competency encompass? Certainly it includes the development of motor skills, whether in the use of a typewriter or business machine, an electronic tube tester, or a piece of high-powered industrial or farm machinery. But it also includes the development and understanding of how the machine operates; the principles of the gas engine, for example -- the related science and information necessary to apply the principle, and a proper attitude toward the job to be done. Professor Emeritus W. A. Smith of Cornell has perhaps said it more clearly than I, in a monograph prepared for use in a class entitled, "Principles of Occupational Education". He outlines three specific functions of occupational education; namely, (1) a program of guidance to a vocation, (2) a program of preparation in the various worthy vocations, (3) a program of continuous adjustment leading to improvement in performance and satisfaction in the vocation entered upon.

You have heard some people say that a man or woman may "pick up" the kind of training he or she needs. You can probably think of individuals who are capable plumbers, repairmen, or farmers who had no formal training. I daresay you can also recall a few "inept" performers in various trades or crafts. The question then is -- shall such training be gained by trial and error -- or should it be planned for as a part of our educational system? This question has long been answered by our professional schools -- we don't have "pick up" doctors, lawyers, or teachers. We have provided opportunity for these vocations to be pursued in a logical way with a known end product.

If we believe this for the fields mentioned, why not for those fields which may require less formal training? Can we not identify the skills and abilities, understanding, and knowledge needed by workers in any occupation? I submit that we can, and once identified, with capable teachers, these abilities can be taught. This is not to say that every school district should offer every possible program in occupational education. Practical considerations and good common sense dictate that some selection must be made.

Then what is good occupational education? I would like to refer to one of my college professors who helped me to understand the scope and intent of occupational education. Dr. H. M. Bryam of Michigan State University, along with Dr. Ralph Wenrich of the University of Michigan, in their book Vocational Education and Practical Arts,¹ list the following essential characteristics of occupational education:

1. The teacher or coordinator is experienced and skilled in the occupation for which he is providing training.
2. The students in the class have made a tentative occupational choice based upon their interests, capacities, and the requirements of the occupation.
3. The environment in which the instruction is given is, or simulates, the working environment to the maximum possible degree.
4. The aim of the courses is to train present and prospective workers for proficiency in a family of occupations. (Today, we're using the word cluster instead of family.)
5. Teaching content is such as to function specifically in the occupation and is based upon competencies required in the occupation.
6. The training is placed at the grade level, and the instruction is given, when the student understands his need for it and can readily use it.

7. The course or courses are complete enough to develop occupational competence at a given level.

Now you be the judge of whether or not occupational education, as defined herein, is good career education.

We can't live in the past, as much as we might like to -- or even in the present. We must look to the future. What must we do, in addition to that which we have been doing? If your school district accepts the concept of career education and attempts to implement it from K through Grade 12, you can play a very important role. Quite likely an intensive in-service program will be necessary for all teachers. This will include an understanding of the concept as well as specific measures or practices to get it underway. I visualize the occupational teachers as providing the basic information and even materials to help teachers K through 6 in exploring the major occupational clusters. Believe it or not, agriculture in some ways touches at least 6 of the projected U.S.O.E.'s 15 clusters. With a little stretching, you could even add three more. Hopefully, with your knowledge of the community, you can contribute many ideas to help make exploratory study in these areas relevant and meaningful. At the junior high level, efforts with counselors and teachers to inform students of the scope and career opportunities in these occupational clusters will continue. You may well be called upon to provide additional services to help insure that students know something about the world of work. Better articulation between teachers at all levels is a necessary prerequisite to success in any career education program. At the upper high school level, we must make certain that our occupational programs are realistic, up-to-date, and appropriate to the ability level of the students enrolled. The fact that some persons' skills and abilities are outmoded today is not necessarily a reflection on the training received in the past. It is more, in my opinion, a reflection on the individual's lack of awareness and feeling of need to keep abreast of change and to prepare for it. I further realize that with new and expanding technology, training programs must constantly be revised. This requires continual inservice training on the part of those teachers engaged in occupational education and a continued scrutiny of pre-service programs designed to train such teachers. The various fields of vocational and technical education, including agriculture, business, distributive, health, home-making, office, trade and industrial, and technical education can provide a trained work force for our nation's economy -- a major objective of career education. Many studies show that the need for trained workers in all fields of endeavor still exist today. Please note that I said trained workers.

We are truly living in an age of specialization. The world of work requires that an individual must be proficient, capable of adapt-

ing to new ideas and new technology, willing to learn, and with a favorable attitude. I sincerely believe that all types of work which contribute to the good of mankind are honorable and deserving of respect. John Gardner said it in the following way: "An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity, will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water."

Career education -- what is it? Is it another panacea that promises to solve all the ills of education? Is it promising too much and, therefore, doomed to failure? Or is it the logical, sound, 21st Century approach to making all education relevant and meaningful? Probably none of these alone is the answer -- rather some of all of them. Certainly, teachers at all levels must do a better job of relating education to reality -- of helping students to make the transition from study to work.

Pucinski and Hirsch in the publication, Courage to Change -- New Directions for Career Education,² put educators on the firing line by saying, "The most glaring deficiency in American education can be stated quite simply: its content for the most part is empty, dull, and meaningless to students; too often, it has no relationship to the adult world they will face; and in too many cases it lacks humanness." Let's make sure that we in occupational education don't fall into these classifications. Let's be part of the solution and not part of the problem! The challenge of career education is up to us -- it can be a milestone in education -- or it can be a millstone around our necks. What commitment will you make?

FOOTNOTES

¹Byram, H. M., and Ralph Wenrich, Vocational Education and Practical Arts, New York, the MacMillan Company, First Edition. 1956. P. 201.

²Pucinski, R. C. and S. P. Hirsch, The Courage to Change -- New Directions for Career Education, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1971. P. 6.

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