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Harold L. Munson and Bonnie J. Rubenstein

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School is Work: An Approach to Infusing Career Education in the School Curriculum

Harold L. Munson
Bonnie J. Rubenstein

School is work. More than a decade ago, Murphy (1973) wrote:

The conception of life as built around successful work is one that has to be built in by steady indoctrination over a long period, and if this indoctrination is not available, this conception of life will ordinarily fail to appear. (p. 159)

There is every reason to organize the instructional activities of the school to afford young people specific opportunities to experience directly the different ways they work and to help them assess more adequately how they feel about their everyday work tasks.

School is a workplace--a workplace where learning is the product. The learning process involves young people in working with data, people, and things. Work tasks in the school can be related directly to the 24 different data-people-things work functions identified by the U.S. Department of Labor. In the

Harold L. Munson is Professor of Education and Chair, Center for Counseling, Family and Worklife Studies, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York. Bonnie J. Rubenstein is Director of Guidance, Rochester City School District, Rochester, New York.

Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Fourth Edition (1977), each job in the labor market has been coded to reflect its primary work functions. This structure can be adapted to the school curriculum, making the infusion of concepts about work, work roles, and worker traits an integral part of the teaching-learning process. Munson (1978) proposed a life experiences model emphasizing the importance of classroom exposures and the involvement of classroom teachers in the creation and presentation of career education activities.

The curriculum of the school affords a wide base for exploratory experiences. Some school subjects provide data-oriented work experiences in which young people work with words, symbols, or numbers; others emphasize interpersonal considerations and are people-oriented; and in a large number of school experiences, things-oriented work activities are primary. The work environments within the school are equally diversified: the laboratory, gymnasium, library, music room, stage, and shop all afford different but valuable exposures to different ways of working. Schoolwork from this point of view can have an immediate relevancy--a "here and now" flavor that young people can sense and one they can readily identify.

In reconsidering career education practice, Munson (1978) defined career education as "the planned exposure of individuals to the concepts, information, and experiences that can facilitate career development by contributing to one's understanding of 'self' (being) and 'self-in-situation' (behaving)" (p. 136). A career education program incorporating the notion that "school is work" is based on the following beliefs.

1. Work is a lifespan endeavor--a significant part of an individual's everyday existence.
2. Since schoolwork is a significant part of a young person's existence, it has a "here and now" character (as opposed to the more common and conventional career education emphasis on the future).
3. In processing their everyday experiences, individuals can experience and learn about the factors and judgments that are involved in their choices and behaviors.
4. The experiential aspects of learning to work can be more meaningful to an individual's growth and development than the informational aspects of learning about work.

5. Helping individuals identify, think about, and assess their work experiences in the classroom makes career education an integral part of the teaching-learning process, clearly indicating the primary involvement of the classroom teacher.
6. A creative school staff, imbued with the significance of their classroom contributions to an individual's career development, can generate ideas, materials, and techniques that will move career education in many directions with minimal cost to the school budget for hardware or software.

AN IN-SERVICE PROGRAM FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

An in-service program is one way of encouraging and helping teachers to identify how they can use their subject matter content and classroom activities as a way of contributing to the career evolution of their students. An in-service program can involve teachers in examining their own beliefs and behaviors about career evolution. It can help them use their instructional methods and materials so that students can experience meaning and relevancy in their classroom learning-living.

A fifteen-hour program for educators based on the "school is work" approach to career education was initiated in a large suburban school system in upstate New York. The instructors (a director of guidance, an assistant principal, and a social studies teacher) were committed to the infusion of career education in the curriculum, using experiential rather than informational exposures.

The In-Service Program Objectives

Objectives of the in-service program were formulated to enable teachers...

1. to differentiate between career education as learning about work and learning to work by understanding how career education can become an integral and motivating part of the ongoing classroom teaching-learning process.
2. to identify their own classroom activities that involve significant work task exposures.
3. to identify the 24 data-people-things work functions and to relate these functions to the various work tasks

performed by students in the production of classroom learning.

4. to communicate to students how the ongoing classroom work task experiences and decisions relate to their evolving self and career development.
5. to develop classroom assessment devices that will help students to assess their interest and involvement in classroom work tasks and their work task traits and behaviors as workers.
6. to develop lesson plans that infuse career education concepts with everyday work activities in the classroom.

The Progression of the Learning Experience

The sessions were constructed to develop and thread simultaneously two distinct lines of participant thinking. The first line of thinking was concerned with classroom curricula, providing teachers with a familiar base for reviewing and analyzing their classroom activities. The second line of thinking originated with the introduction of the data-people-things work functions elaborated by the United States Department of Labor in the coding of job titles in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (D.O.T.). This schema, based on functional job analysis and utilized first in the Third Edition of the D.O.T., constitutes the bridge that relates the everyday work tasks of the school curriculum with the work functions performed by workers in over 20,000 identified jobs in the American labor market.

The program leaders introduced the first line of thinking at the outset by relating the "school is work" philosophy to various components of the school curriculum. The participants recognized that the curriculum is divided into units and that the units are taught from lesson plans. The lesson plans, in turn, encompass class activities in which students are involved as workers in a variety of work functions. Each work function contains many work tasks, and those tasks represent specific units of work expressed by action verbs. The compiling work function, for example, includes tasks associated with gathering and classifying information. Every task has requirements of the worker which can be expressed as worker traits such as interests, aptitudes, and personal characteristics. Through the process of analyzing the various components of the school curriculum, the participants become more cognizant of the school as a workplace, the student as a learner, and the learner as a worker.

The participants were then introduced to the second line of thinking, the data-people-things work function concepts, emphasizing that all work can be identified with reference to data, people, or things and further classified into 24 associated work functions. As the work functions were defined and discussed, the participants considered how work tasks related to those that existed in their classroom settings. For example, they were able to specify the comparing work tasks being performed when students were proofreading or determining differences in the size, shape, or shading of an object. As a follow-up assignment, the participants were asked to identify work tasks in their own classrooms during the next week. In the following session, they shared examples with the group, reinforcing the connection between work functions in the labor market and work tasks in the school.

As the teachers were assimilating the idea that daily classroom curriculum contained opportunities for analyzing work activities, videotapes of jobs were used to identify work functions in the "outside" world of work. With the permission of local businesses, the instructors developed two videotapes showing employees engaged in a variety of work tasks at a supermarket and a bank. Each participant was assigned to one of three groups focusing on data, people, and things respectively. Each instructor worked with one group as they watched the tapes. Members of the data group listed the work tasks they observed involving data, and the people and things groups made similar observations in their respective areas. Each instructor facilitated a small group discussion as the participants identified work functions and tasks from the videotapes.

The participants then reconvened where they shared their data-people-things work function videotape observations. Participants were given a comprehensive list of action verbs categorized according to the 24 work functions. For example, 20 action verbs such as examining, estimating, investigating, reporting, and testing were listed under the work function analyzing. Every teacher was then directed to choose one work function and design his or her own lesson plan during the following week. At this point the participants were involved in analyzing their existing classroom activities, using their new knowledge of work functions in the data-people-things orientation.

At the next session all participants shared their lesson plans. Each plan included a description of the classroom activity and the work tasks which would be performed. Two lesson plans were chosen to be diagrammed in detail on the blackboard. These two lessons were taught during the following week and videotaped by one of the instructors. The videotapes

were used as a teaching vehicle to emphasize the relationship between the newly learned work functions and the existing classroom curriculum.

All participants prepared and taught a lesson during the next week, emphasizing a work function selected by the group. At the conclusion of the lesson, each teacher had the students complete a work task appraisal sheet. Students assessed their own performance of the work task in three areas: interest (like-dislike), involvement (seek-avoid), and performance (level of skill). The students were asked to identify their degree of interest and involvement and their strengths and weaknesses in performing the skills needed to accomplish the task. This activity was accompanied by a discussion of different worker traits (interests, aptitudes, and personal characteristics) that were associated with completion of the task.

When the participants were able to develop their own "infused" lessons, attention was directed to the importance of student awareness and assessment. In indicating the nature of the work tasks being performed in the classroom, teachers are able to make students aware of the different ways of working and of the different traits and behaviors needed to perform different tasks. Once aware of these different work tasks and the traits needed to accomplish them, students can proceed to assess their own work task preferences and worker traits in a wide variety of work situations, both in and out of school. Through classroom activities and discussions, teachers encourage the investigation of skills, traits, and attitudes experienced by students as workers in school, as workers in the home, and as workers in the community.

At the beginning of the program, all participants completed a pre-course inventory assessing their attitudes toward career education. The results of this initial inventory revealed beliefs reflecting the more traditional career education approaches that emphasize providing information about the world of work. At the conclusion of the program, participant views were more consistent with a developmental approach to career education emphasizing learning to work and the "here and now" aspects of an experiential perspective.

The group leaders recognized the importance of providing follow-up for the teachers after the final session. Support for teachers was provided throughout the remainder of the school year in several ways. First, group leaders met from time to time with participants on an individual basis. Second, group leaders assisted in the teaching of infusion lessons and shared

their perceptions with the teachers. Third, the entire group reconvened periodically throughout the remainder of the year to share their experiences.

Significant Operational Concerns

Initially the instructors were concerned about the tendency of teachers to resist the concept of career education. Teacher resistance to the infusion of career education in classroom activities is a common experience. Many view the integration of career education in subject matter classes as interference with subject matter learning. Classroom instruction is considered prime time and any activity that interferes with the primary learning process is suspect. Activities that take students out of the classroom are likewise considered unnecessary. Some teachers are quick to point out that they simply don't have the knowledge, experience, or time to deal with the occupational implications of their course of study. Hence, the oft-used phrase that career education is an "add-on."

Participating teachers, however, readily accepted the concept of "school is work." Although they questioned the use of the term "career education" (evidencing the intensity with which the concept has been internalized), teachers recognized the career education nature of infusing these activities in their classrooms. One teacher stated, "I don't feel I am qualified to handle the traditional career education approach of teaching jobs, but I do feel qualified to use the 'school is work' approach." As the in-service program concluded, teachers were identifying with the career education concept as this comment indicates: "I realize I was already doing career education, but now I'm expanding."

Related to this attitudinal concern on the part of teachers was their initial reluctance to think of themselves as career educators. Although they accepted the concept of "school is work," it was necessary to increase their confidence that they were, in fact, contributing to career education. As one teacher stated, "I understand how this is career education, but I don't feel comfortable using the term 'career education'."

The teachers needed a great deal of encouragement, especially in the beginning, to share ideas and lesson plans. They felt insecure and, at first, exhibited a general reluctance to be videotaped. By the end of the course, however, teacher-produced videotapes proved to be the most powerful instructional method used. The analysis of firsthand experiences made possible by the tapes was clearly beneficial in assessing the benefits of infusion activities.

A further indication of how strongly the teachers felt about the relevancy of schoolwork activity to future "world of work" activity was their continual concern with demonstrating how the course material (or classroom activity) related to jobs. In counteracting this valid concern, it was necessary to provide specific support and direction that a "here and now" awareness and assessment of the work tasks students were performing in the classroom were primary. Rather than emphasizing the types of jobs in the world of work where these classroom tasks might be employed, teachers were encouraged to emphasize "transferability" by helping students to identify home and community life experiences, past and present, in which these same work tasks had been (or were being) utilized in different settings or under different conditions.

Another problem concerned work function terminology. Although teachers understood the meaning of the various work functions such as "manipulating," "operating-controlling," or "synthesizing," several indicated they were not comfortable with these terms. As the course progressed, those who were uncomfortable with the work function terminology seemed to have fewer concerns about nomenclature. Others were at ease with the terms from the outset and used the terminology daily in analyzing their classroom tasks.

Teachers consistently recognized that the program offered opportunities to improve student attitudes through its emphasis on work task and worker trait assessment. As students are stimulated to think about their activities and to identify the work tasks in which they are engaged and the worker trait behaviors they display, they become involved in regular (ongoing) self-analysis. This experiential characteristic distinguishes the developmental aspects of this approach from more conventional approaches to career education (career days, career talks) that focus on the future.

Teachers had students complete work task appraisal sheets at the end of the infusion activities. They were enthusiastic about having students assess their own work tasks and worker traits. Student responses, they reported, reflected a generally high degree of self-analysis and serious thinking about the tasks they performed.

As students analyzed their work tasks, the motivational element of this approach became apparent. Teachers realized that assessment was natural for students. Self-analysis tended to provide motivation for students in completing their work tasks. Teachers cited this attitudinal-motivational component as an important feature.

This group of teachers will become the nucleus of a district-wide support group for the further involvement of other teachers promoted by additional in-service sessions. Supplementing these plans will be the formation of a district-wide Career Advisory Council consisting of parents, board members, teachers, administrators, students, guidance counselors, and community representatives.

Looking to the future, the "school is work" concept will become the central focus of a K-12 district-wide developmental career education program. Conventional career education activities such as the use of outside career speakers, shadowing, work-study, and intern projects will be used as support activities to enhance student information about the world of work and about community resources through which they can obtain needed occupational information. This combination of experiential and informational experiences promises a strong and vital career education program that students, teachers, and community leaders can actively support.

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