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## ABSTRACT

The Skyline Center in Dallas, Texas, a high school which provides career development in professional fields, offers students a solid knowledge background in addition to some firsthand work experience. The school is organized on a cluster basis, with three hours per day spent on one of the 28 career clusters and the remainder in regular class schedule. The Advanced Social Studies Career Program serves as an example of an academic cluster for students interested in a social science career in areas such as psychology, political science, or social science education. Approximately 100 grade 10-12 students participate in the two-year program. The first year introduces students to a broad base of psychological and sociological concepts. Specialization begins in the second year when a specific career area is chosen and a self-directed curriculum is designed. Most students elect to do field work and spend one to four days a week at their position. Work placements have included the police and planning departments, creative learning centers, mental health clinics, social welfare agencies, schools and law-related agencies. Evaluation includes letter grades as well as a subjective judgement by the learning directors. Staff and students testify to the value of this type of learning experience.

(Author/KSM)

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# profiles of promise 28 ERIC/CHES SSEC

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by

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Writer  
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PROFILES OF PROMISE are descriptive brochures that highlight innovative social studies and social education practices which teachers and administrators can easily adapt to their own classrooms or schools.

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# Careers in Social Studies

Many high schools today have programs which prepare students for vocational careers in various manual and technical fields. At Skyline Center in Dallas, Texas, they have taken career development a step further by providing a program which introduces students to professional careers in fields such as law, education, psychology, and religion. Unlike the cosmetology student who leaves high school with a license and begins work immediately, the student who seeks a professional career is not qualified to start working in his field when he graduates from Skyline; most of the professional careers require college degrees. However, he does leave the center with a solid knowledge background and some firsthand experience in the area he plans to pursue.

At Skyline Center students prepare for professional careers in two ways. First, through carefully designed curriculum and activities, students are helped to develop human relations skills that will be necessary in professional job settings. Secondly, Skyline provides opportunities for students to explore their career interests by working alongside professionals in their offices, agencies, and classrooms. In preparing students for future careers, Skyline considers social skills as important as technical skills.

## SKYLINE CLUSTER PROGRAM

All the 4,400 students at Skyline are there by choice. Any student eligible for a Dallas high school may apply for admission to Skyline; each year there have been nearly twice as many applications as openings. Minimum requirements for admission are flexible, with only two stipulations closely adhered to: (1) a student must not have an "excessive" number of absences in his school record, and (2) a student must not have failed a subject in the previous semester. Students apply to Skyline primarily because they are interested in career preparation, but Skyline students must complete all requirements necessary for graduation from a Texas secondary school.

The idea for Skyline Center originated from community interest. Local citizens were concerned that high schools were not producing qualified personnel to fill shortages in various career fields in the Dallas area. Thus the community supported, conceptually and financially, a new school which could help fulfill these needs. The cost of the physical plant which was built exceeded that for a traditional high school, because special facilities were required for teaching certain skills. The operating cost for Skyline is more per pupil than at other schools, partly because of the more costly facility and partly because of a better teacher/pupil ratio, but the Dallas School District considers the program very valuable and supports the additional expense.

The school is organized on a cluster basis with students having 28 career clusters from which to choose. A student spends three hours per day working in his cluster. The three-hour time block is obtained by combining the traditional hours devoted to study hall, physical education, and an elective. The remainder of the day the student takes a regular class schedule.

Many of the career clusters are of a vocational nature, although Skyline likes to avoid the distinction between "vocational" and "professional," considering all the clusters as career development. Some of the technical clusters are diesel mechanics, medical technology, photography, television, arts, cosmetology, construction, and aviation mechanics.

The remaining clusters involve career development in the more academic areas of math, science, English, and social studies. In these clusters, as in the technical clusters, students are given firsthand experience working in a career area. By providing programs for both the vocationally and professionally oriented students, Skyline has managed to avoid the image of a student "dumping ground." Skyline is a school where students want to go, not a school where they are sent without choice.

## SOCIAL STUDIES CAREER PROGRAM

The Advanced Social Studies Career Program is the cluster for students interested in a social science career in areas such as psychology, political science, or social science education. There are approximately 100 sophomores, juniors, and seniors enrolled each year in the social studies cluster.

CLUSTER ACTIVITIES

John Tudor, coordinator of social studies, reports that about 70 openings become available each year and that teachers screen over twice that many applications in making their admission decisions.

In addition to Skyline's general entrance requirements, the social studies teachers have noted five criteria which they use in accepting students into the social studies cluster:

1. The student should have had some previous exposure to independent study; this is often quite limited.
2. A letter of recommendation is helpful, especially when the teacher writing the recommendation can comment on probable student success in an independent study situation.
3. Reading scores are looked at closely: students whose reading level is below grade level are rarely accepted.
4. Verbal communication scores on the Iowa Test of Educational Development are also viewed as indicators of possible student success.
5. Finally, and probably the most important element in the selection, is an interview held with the prospective applicant. At the time of the interview, the staff attempts to identify motivation levels, enthusiasm, and the student's self-concept.

Teachers find judging students by grades or I.Q. scores can be deceiving. Many students with straight As need a highly structured environment to function at that level, and that is not the Skyline approach. Jane Robinson, a social studies learning director, has said, "It takes a special kind of student to take part in a course like this. Not every student is capable of studying independently, and a student who needs a great deal of direction finds this class very frustrating."

The social studies career program is basically a two-year program. In the first year students follow a curriculum which introduces them to a broad base of psychological and sociological concepts. They also take some initial field trips into the community to observe professionals in agencies and businesses.

Students begin to specialize in the second year. They choose the career area of most interest to them, study a curriculum designed for that area, and, if they choose, do field work in a related agency, school, or office. Although the program is designed for a two-year period, there is enough flexibility to allow seniors to take the entire program in one year or to permit students beginning as sophomores to enroll a third year.

MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT - FIRST YEAR

The broad goal of the first year program, as expressed by Tudor, is "...to bring the student to a point where he can operate more effectively as an individual and as a member of society." To do this, the staff has developed a curriculum, *Man and His Environment*, which is sociology-psychology based, behaviorally oriented, and self-directed. The curriculum allows the staff to function as "learning directors" rather than as "teachers." Constant revision and updating is done on the curriculum, with major rewriting undertaken in summers by a specially hired staff.

The *Man and His Environment* curriculum is based on 19 study objectives. In condensed statement the objectives are as follows:

Man lives in groups to survive; he is shaped by the life style of the groups:

- Symbolizing helps man to adapt to his environment
- Biological limitations are overcome in societies
- Society shapes perception of how to meet psychological needs

Cultures consist of elements that are transmitted from old to new members:

- To assure an orderly life style, behavioral deviation is limited
- Social structures are formalized to preserve social order
- Differing value systems produce cultural diversity
- Cultural transmission is affected by individual genetic inheritance

Continuous interaction between preservation and change maintains a culture:

- Change depends on presentation and acceptance of new ideas
- Stability depends on accommodations among technology, behavior, and ideas
- As new elements are incorporated, cultures become more complex

The objectives of *Man and His Environment* are achieved through a series of varied activities including reading and research, going into the community to interview people, self-analysis by students, and making field trips to visit organizations of interest. Each student proceeds at his own pace and sets his own timetable. The following examples illustrate the variety of activities in the curriculum:

Read "The Prediction of Marital Success." The questionnaire is 20 years old. Do you think it was valid in 1953? If so, do you think it is still valid? Construct a 1973 version of the questionnaire and give it to 3 to 10 couples. Be sure to control for factors such as economic level, length of time married, sex of individual, age, and success or failure of the marriage.



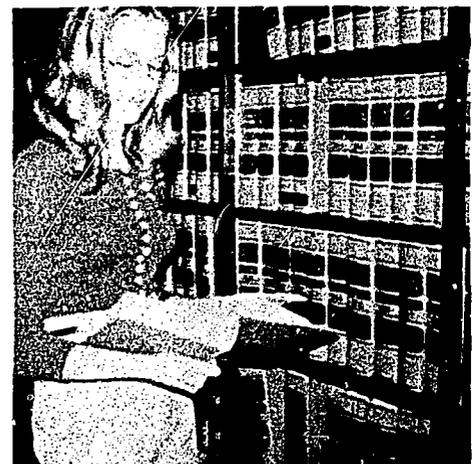
Playing simulation game called "Black and White"

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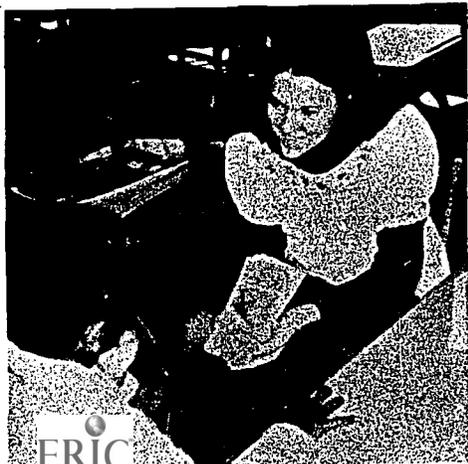
Make two collages, one each to illustrate five possessions or behavior patterns which are status symbols for the following groups: (1) your teenage group and (2) adults in your community.



Working on group project



Research on individual project



Teaching assistant at City Park

Students cannot be expected to spend 15 hours per week working on curriculum activities, so the learning directors schedule a continuing series of films, guest speakers from the community, and an occasional lecture of general interest. Students also spend time out of the classroom observing and interviewing professionals in the community. All students are expected to be in class on Mondays, but they may arrange for individual outings by simply discussing their plans with one of the learning directors.

Periodic check tests, used to evaluate cognitive learning, are built into the curriculum. The learning directors also heavily weigh the interest and diligence shown by a student in doing the curriculum activities. Originally, Skyline Center eliminated letter grades, giving students summaries of skills and concepts mastered in the place of grades. However, because college admission policies made it necessary to give more explicit evaluation, students now receive letter grades twice a year. Even now there is no failing grade. If a student's work is unsatisfactory, he is given an "incomplete" and is encouraged to complete his work and receive a grade. Tudor states, "We have no failures--only students who have not yet succeeded."

#### SECOND YEAR PROGRAM

In the second year of the social studies career program, students begin to specialize. After consultation with learning directors, each student decides which of eight programs he will pursue: criminal justice, psychology, political science, sociology, education, law, philosophy, anthropology, or religion.

Each of the specialized programs has a self-directed curriculum. In the first year, students work through the material at their own rates. The curriculum in each area is designed to give the students a basic knowledge of the field. In psychology, for example, students are directed to classic readings in psychology as well as to current magazine articles and popular books such as *Future Shock* (Toffler, 1971) and *In Cold Blood* (Capote, 1971). Along with readings, students are given suggestions for research studies and interview projects which they may undertake.

While the self-directed curriculum learning is important, teachers believe that, to truly understand a profession, it is important to have firsthand experience in the field, so Skyline provides an extensive field training program for its social studies students. Field placement is not required, but some 70% to 80% of the students do choose a work alternative. If they elect to work in a community agency or business, they must spend a minimum of one day per week and a maximum of four days per week at their placement. They use cluster time for at least part of their placement hours.

There are two requirements for a student who seeks a work placement. First, the student must go to the learning director and express his desire to work in a particular placement. Second, the student must have sufficient background in the career area to be able to serve the agency and be of some use to the organization. Second year placements are not intended to be observation times, but periods of learning by doing. The following list illustrates some of the work placement positions which have been available to students.

- Criminal Justice - Dallas Police Dept., in headquarters and on patrol
- Psychology - creative learning centers, mental health clinics
- Political Science - Dallas City Planning Department
- Sociology - social welfare agencies
- Education - elementary schools
- Law - offices of attorneys and judges
- Philosophy - audit relevant courses in local colleges
- Anthropology - audit relevant courses in local colleges
- Religion - instruction in subjects such as Sufi meditation

Every student's experience in work placement is unique. One example of a particularly successful placement involves a student who chose to work in the Dallas City Planning Department. During his first year of work placement, he became involved with planning for greenbelt areas around the city. The department professionals valued his contribution enough to hire him during the summer to continue working on proposals to be presented to the Dallas City Council. This fall he signed up for a second year of work with the department and was rewarded by the agency with an all-expense paid trip to the national city planners' meeting in Los Angeles.

The number and variety of placements available to students has grown considerably in the past three years. Each program area has an advisory committee composed of local citizens who are professionals in the field. Although the learning directors actually arrange placements, advisory committee members often open doors and give the staff references which facilitate arrangements. Tudor recalls that the first year of placements were difficult, because the staff did not know the agency needs and consequently did not know how to best prepare students to work in the agencies. Experience has lessened many of these problems, and now agencies are calling Skyline to request student placements.

Students who do not choose a work placement assignment often substitute independent research on a subject of interest to them. Last year a girl in the psychology program wanted to determine if good nutrition contributes to intelligence. She used her cluster time to breed four generations of rats with varied standards of nutrition, then tested their motor abilities against a control group. Summing up the second year program, one student wrote, "All in all, I guess the best thing about the second year curriculum is that it gives you a choice."

All second year students, like first year students, receive letter grades. Though there are objective measures used to evaluate their curriculum work, much of the final evaluation is a subjective judgment by the learning directors as to how much interest and work the student put into his study. Ann Schuessler, the third learning director, believes, "The real measure of what these kids in this class are doing is really measured in how they begin to look at their work in a new perspective."

Students who have been involved in the social studies career development program have been enthusiastic. The dropout rate has been low, and several students have remained in the program a third year to continue their field work. Nearing the end of his second year in the program, one young man drew this conclusion:

I feel that this psychology curriculum is possibly as informative and human oriented as you could ask for. Three days ago I looked through the work which I had completed, and found that I had truly learned a great deal and enjoyed it at the same time.

#### AFTER SKYLINE--THEN WHAT?

What happens to the students who participate in the career development program? Do they go on to become teachers, lawyers, and psychologists? Unfortunately, the Skyline program has not been in operation long enough to give statistical answers to these questions. However, it is possible to assess the students' feelings about their experiences as they leave Skyline Center.

Many students, reports Tudor, are quite excited about the field in which they have studied and worked. As they leave high school, they plan to major in that area in college and go into the field professionally after college graduation. Other students, however, have had opposite experiences. After studying a career, and especially after working in the field, some young people have decided they just do not like the work and do not want to pursue it as a career.

What about the students who have a negative experience? Have they wasted two years? The staff thinks not. They believe it is better that a student find out his interests and abilities while in high school, rather than after years of college study. Whether the students' experiences prove positive or negative, the staff feels the social studies careers development program provides a valuable learning experience for the young people.

#### ERIC DOCUMENTS

- ED 080 780 - Career Education: An ERIC Bibliography. 360 pp. Available from Macmillan Information Service, New York, New York. This bibliographical guide to career education materials contains a compilation of all the references on file at ERIC on career education.
- ED 080 763 - Career Education: A Curriculum Design and Instructional Objectives Catalog. 375 pp. MF-\$ .65, HC-available from Dr. James A. Dunn, Developmental Systems, Department I, American Institutes for Research, P.O. Box 1113, Palo Alto, California 94302, \$8.50. This catalog presents a suggested curriculum design and detailed instructional objectives for career education for grades K through 9.
- ED 080 711 - Senior High Learning Resources for Career Education. 32 pp. MF-\$ .65, HC-\$3.29. This resource guide provides a record of resources available to school media centers for the support of career education at the senior high level.
- ED 074 304 - Career, Culture and Consciousness: A Study of the Social and Theoretical Bases of Career Education. 66 pp. MF-\$ .65, HC-\$3.29. Jack C. Willers presents a philosophical base for career education. He calls for a new career education sequencing in which learning becomes a form of continuing growth and life, not just achieving some marketable skill.

For further information, write:

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Read:

Skyline Career Development Center Bulletin  
Available from the above address. The bulletin includes the philosophy of the Center, information and selection and admission of applicants, and a description of the various career development clusters.

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