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ABSTRACT

As a part of research designed to determine how labor leaders perceive the current relationship between labor and education and to identify activities that could promote greater collaboration in education and work, an advisory committee composed of labor leaders met to analyze labor's role in planning educational activities. Central issues for the advisory group were (1) students' needing more adequate preparation, including considerable career exploration, in order to make a successful and efficient transition between education and work and (2) at a time of high unemployment, students' threatening the work security of adult workers. Among the findings of the work session was that the group favored increased involvement of organized labor in education. Group members believed that labor could provide significant input because of its expertise, and they recognized that it was important for labor to participate so that its view could help shape the direction of work-education policy. The committee also believed that career awareness could be expanded through improved guidance counseling and infusion of labor studies into the curriculum. Responsibility for providing work experiences, in the judgement of the advisory group, should rest with the joint collaboration of labor, education, and business and industry. (LRA)

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REPORT OF ADVISORY GROUP ON  
ASSESSING MEANS FOR STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF LABOR  
IN EDUCATION AND WORK PLANNING

May 1978

Education and Work Program  
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory  
Portland, Oregon

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## BACKGROUND

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) has been engaged in research aimed at assessing means for strengthening the role of labor in planning educational activities designed to help young people make the transition from school to work.

The Laboratory has recognized that basic problems have impeded the interchange between educators and organized labor. Foremost among these, in its assessment, are:

- Education and work programs value collaboration among many diverse elements including labor, while sometimes ignoring the reality of conflicts in many specific areas (e.g., wage policies).
- Educators and organized labor leaders at times distrust one another's understanding of the real problems and differing definitions of the concept of work; with educators often asserting that work, in and of itself, always has value for the individual and labor spokesmen pointing out that, in too many instances, it does not—at least has not—until unions have given workers a means for influencing its nature.
- Labor is concerned that education and work activities have not yet produced enough evidence that they really increase rather than decrease the options of the individual, especially in terms of a broad liberal education. It is felt that attempts to infuse career-related investigations into the curriculum may influence students in the direction of premature career selection.
- Many education and work programs have been planned and implemented without the labor movement being invited to participate.
- A great many unions have no official information or position on education and work as an area of collaborative activity.
- There are several incompletely resolved debates over the economic implications of work experience, including remuneration, potential impact on labor laws, productivity, unemployment and apprenticeship.

- Education and work activities have not done enough to infuse the story of labor into the curriculum.

## INTRODUCTION

The Laboratory believes that many, if not most, of these problems could be alleviated if means could be found to enhance the participation of labor in education and work programs. Furthermore, specific means could be assessed through which established programs could effectively merge labor's agenda with their existing emphasis on such areas as providing work experience for all students, reducing worker alienation and achieving community participation in policy formation.

Therefore, the Laboratory has undertaken research designed to determine how labor leaders in the Northwest perceive the current relationship between labor and education and to identify activities that could be undertaken to promote greater collaboration in education and work policy by 1) increasing labor participation in the program development, reconsideration and revision of work experience and 2) increasing infusion of labor studies into education and work programs.

## Advisory Group

To facilitate this research, appropriate resource persons from the labor movement were contacted, made familiar with the project's goals, and formed into an advisory group. These members and their affiliations included:

Ms. Susan C. Pisha, President, Communications Workers of America, Portland, Oregon

Mr. James O. Manley, Area Representative, Human Resources Development Institute, AFL-CIO, Portland, Oregon

Mr. John Cantrell, Idaho State AFL-CIO

Mr. Sam Gillespie, President, Public Employee's Union, Portland, Oregon

Mr. Pat Randall, Oregon AFL-CIO

Mr. Lloyd Knudsen, Metal Trades Council, Oregon AFL-CIO

### Work Session

On May 25, 1978, the advisory group met for a one-day working session devoted to analyzing labor's role in planning educational activities. In addition to advisory group members, participants included program staff and interested observers.

#### Program Staff:

Dr. Rex Hagans, Director, Education and Work Program, NWREL

Ms. Iris Bell, Research Assistant, Education and Work Program, NWREL

Ms. Merry Lowe, Technical Assistant, Education and Work Program, NWREL

Randy Roberson, Consultant, Education and Work Program, NWREL

#### Observers:

Mr. Norman Malbin, Director, Greater Portland Work-Education Council, Portland, Oregon

The work session activities included a discussion of written materials on the subject of labor's role in educational planning. Advisory group members were asked to participate in discussions concerning:

- Career education policies
- Increasing labor's role in career education
- What labor organizations can do to promote a more positive role in career education
- What regional laboratories and other R&D institutions can do to assist in developing collaborative efforts between labor and education

The basis for discussion was Mark Schulman's paper, "Issues and Strategies for Enhancing the Participation of Labor in the Implementation of Career Education." The participants had been issued this paper and asked to review it because of its comprehensive and clearly stated treatment of the topic. In this paper, Schulman identified some issues and strategies bearing upon the relationship of organized labor to the implementation of career education. The research encompassed three levels of issue considerations: theoretical, conceptual and operational, then considered two aspects of strategic planning: short-range implementation and long-range implementation.

In their assessment of Schulman's work, participants were encouraged to consider the following questions:

- What might possibly be in error?
- What might possibly have been left out?
- What might possibly be inaccurate?
- Can you add to his list?
- Considering his recommendations, are they
  - correct or off target?
  - good, but not enough?
  - off base entirely?
- If the recommendations are either wrong or incomplete, what else needs to be done?
- Personally, what do you know that's being done to enhance labor's participation in education?
- What are you doing in your state?
- What do you think an R&D institution might or ought to do?

For our advisory group, the central issues were:

- Students need more adequate preparation, including considerable career exploration, in order to make a successful and efficient transition between education and work.
- At a time of high unemployment, putting students on the job can threaten the work security of adult workers.

The course of the discussion revolved around ways of maximizing student preparation for work without jeopardizing present workers.

Our advisory group members felt that labor's contribution is important on both sides of the issue. On the one hand, they felt that as experts on the world of work, labor leaders can provide timely input in program planning and implementation of work education programs.

On the other hand, they need to be involved so their perspective will be considered. As one aptly said, "...and if we're not in the decision making, then we're going to find we're going to have things we can't live with."

By common consent of our group, exploratory work experience is vital in the process of making career choices. The reasons they gave included:

- It allows students to learn by trial and error and the process of elimination so they can find what jobs they prefer.
- It provides hands-on experience in working.
- It gives a sense of direction; students can find what is out there for them at the end of the road.
- It makes youngsters begin to think about the fact that they are going to have to do something with their lives.
- It enables students to learn essential requirements of the work place: being on time, doing what you are told, receiving rewards.

While they agreed upon the value of work experience, they debated several related issues, including whether it should be voluntary or mandatory, whether the type of work makes a difference, and to what extent it can be accomplished without threatening adult workers.

The issue concerning voluntary or mandatory experience was not resolved. Some felt so strongly that real learning occurs through doing that they wished to make job experience a requirement. Others took the position that if students want to learn from work, they will, so it should be voluntary. Still others opted for voluntary programs on the assumption that not enough work places could be found for everybody.

What kind of work should be done also provoked discussion. Our group did not adopt a "labor" as opposed to an "education" definition of work, which Schulman had found to be a fundamental area of conflict. Some members of our group designated certain work as meaningless or unsuitable and others contended that any job is good, if it's a job.

Those who opposed meaningless work contended that it merely leads to apathy. Some who denied all work has value just because it is work cited specific instances of bad learning situations, for example:

- One project took six guys out to do the work of two. In this kind of situation, the advisory member said, "You teach them they can make a living without working and that's counterproductive."
- Work experiences which function under laboratory conditions may build false expectations. For example, one reported, "They learned all the necessary mechanical functions of being

a carpenter under laboratory conditions. When they got up there clear above the knees in mud, it was different. They decided then maybe that wasn't for them."

- Learning under laboratory conditions may have to be undone because it is inappropriate to the real work place. One member cited the example of a worker who was fired when he painstakingly measured and cut a piece of wood after being asked merely to chop off a piece and pitch it over.

Since career education is to provide direction, some advisory group members felt it must be the right direction.

Those who supported the worth of any job argued that it teaches students the basic things all workers need to learn--being on time, performing a task, getting along with others, receiving a reward, etc. Moreover, if career education students took the jobs they could get--such as at McDonald's--they would not replace adult workers.

Certainly the most frequent concern mentioned by our advisory group was the danger of replacing present workers with students. They agreed with Schulman that labor must remain committed to the best interests of current union members. While some felt that steps had to be taken to assure students of finding jobs, others accepted the reality of present or continuing unemployment. While as parents our advisory group members could see the value of student work experiences, as union members they could see the possibility of those in their ranks being forced out by a flooded market. As one explained, "I'm here representing the people that I represent, and I don't want the shipyards flooded with a whole bunch of high school kids when we've got 600 boilers out of work."

One possible way around this dilemma, as mentioned, would be to make work students could get (and adults didn't want) a part of career education. Another possibility our advisory group considered 'feasible' would be for high schools to collaborate more with community colleges. Some students now spend part of their senior year or more at community colleges. One advisory group member remarked, "It's been a tremendous program. They get some hands-on experience; they get to go out and sand down an old car body and paint it and these sorts of things-- repair all sorts of things like that in the classroom under supervision, and it's very good."

Actual work experience, therefore, was seen as a very important part of career exploration--but by no means the only part. Our advisory group identified two other means of expanding career awareness, both of which require the input of labor:

- Improved guidance counseling
- Infusion of labor studies into the curriculum

Our advisory group recognized that schools try to assist students in career exploration, but felt their unfamiliarity (and frequent lack of sympathy) with organized labor limits the service they can offer students needing to know all their options. As one of our labor representatives explained, "There are jobs that they haven't even looked at. Well, it's pretty hard for a school counselor to know-- who's never been out there, doing the job, working in the field--to be able to tell a kid what all is out there." This is very much the case with regard to recent social developments in the world of work.

Counselors are often outdated in their perspective. For example, one advisory group member remarked, "If a girl comes in and wants to be a brick layer, the counselors can't deal with it." Consequently, our advisory group felt that labor has some responsibility for educating the educators.

To make matters worse, counselors and teachers may have a bias against careers in labor and consequently steer students toward some other route, often college. The primary problem, said one advisory group member, is "We are all proud of what we have done in our lives, so these teachers have all gone to college, so they naturally feel that is the right thing to do, because that's what they did."

The focus of our advisory group differed from that of Schulman. He emphasized that labor did not want students to be channeled into career choices too early and thus be deprived of the option of going to college. This, of course, could restrict the social advancement of working class and poor children. Our advisory group recognized the need for equal opportunity but also considered another aspect of restricted career choice: that too many counselors and teachers urge students to go to college and fail to acquaint them with the opportunities afforded by organized labor. Thus, both Schulman and our group agreed on the importance of expanding students' career options; they differed in emphasis.

Awareness of the world of work needs to be increased in the schools directly through infusion of labor studies into the curriculum. On

this point our advisory group emphatically supported Schulman. The reasons they gave were multiple:

- Students who will join organized labor need to know about this movement, since it will affect their lives.
- The union movement has had a profound effect on modern society and our social studies and economic classes are incomplete if they fail to treat it.
- The whole story of the labor movement needs to be told to offset the essentially negative image of workers broadcast by the media, especially television.

With regard to the influence of television and its depiction of workers, our advisory group agreed fully with Schulman that it is a powerful and biased teacher.

Labor unions have a rich heritage and our advisory group felt their whole story should be told: the heroes, the sacrifices, the fights for a minimum wage, the contributions to public education and so forth. In the absence of accurate historical and sociological information about labor in the schools, unfair, media-produced stereotypes have gone unchecked and workers have been denied respect. Our advisory group believed that infusion of labor studies into the curriculum could help alleviate this problem.

In addition to discussing career exploration experiences, our advisory group considered what kinds of skills students need in order to be prepared to enter the world of work. They agreed that students need basic skills. It should be noted that the term "basic skills" was not seen to be any different from the term "basic job skills."

Thus, the two terms were used interchangeably. The advisory group suggested that basic skills include:

- Reading
- Communication
  - listening
  - writing
  - speaking
- Computing
- Social amenities
- Getting along with others

They also pointed out the advantage of learning to use such instruments as calculators and slide rules, and of being able to practice problem solving techniques. They saw particular value in students being able to apply these skills in their working situations.

The point of contention was whether students should also be taught specific job skills. Schulman included in his work a "management agenda" prepared by Sidney Marland, Jr. The item on this list which attracted most attention was #9: "Every student leaving school equipped with a marketable job skill." Some advisory group members disapproved of students leaving high school unemployable; they felt there should be jobs for them at the end of programs. Others resisted the idea of giving specific training for several reasons:

- It could flood the market and take jobs from existing workers.
- It could interfere with apprenticeship training programs.
- It is the responsibility of management, not the schools, to give specific training.

- It is not feasible for the schools to duplicate skills training; the equipment is very expensive and becomes obsolete soon.

In general, it was agreed that students should be taught basic skills but that specific job skills should come later. High school was perceived primarily as a time for exploring career options rather than training specifically for one job.

Responsibility for planning these work experiences should rest, according to our advisory group, in the joint collaboration of education, labor and business. One member of our group speculated that labor's contribution would be enhanced if national leaders got behind the effort and encouraged members to be more active in their schools. And while our group wanted labor to maintain its turf, as Schulman described, by contributing its own educational materials, it did recognize that an important part of education's contribution should be curriculum design and instruction as well as teaching basic skills. Our group saw business and industry as necessary collaborators to provide funding.

The range of topics covered by our group was broad. At one point there was an opportunity to rank concerns in terms of priorities. As part of his action-oriented summary, Schulman offered five recommendations as methods for enhancing labor's participation in the implementation of career education. They were:

- Provide research support and investigate demonstration projects to analyze the uses of the mass media, particularly television, in modifying negative images of workers and unions and educating viewers on career-development topics.

- Encourage the quick elimination of class, sex and race bias in career education materials, classroom instruction and guidance.
- Appoint labor representatives, with full participation rights, to career education decision-making agencies at the federal, state and local levels; and, particularly and specifically, on the National Advisory Council on Career Education.
- Resolve the quandry of divergent viewpoints on work-experience, primarily by following union recommendations and procedures where feasible, and secondarily, by ensuring consensus via negotiated compromise in all other situations.
- Incorporate in all future discussions of and plans for comprehensive career education programs a component oriented toward labor studies and history for which union and labor education input is solicited.

Our advisory group rearranged these to make them conform with their own priorities, producing the following list:

- Incorporate in all future discussions of and plans for comprehensive career education programs a component oriented toward labor studies and history for which union and labor education input is solicited.
- Provide research support and investigate demonstration projects to analyze the uses of the mass media, particularly television, in modifying the negative images of workers and unions and educating viewers on career development topics.
- Encourage the quick elimination of class, sex and race bias in career education materials, classroom instruction, and guidance.
- Appoint labor representatives, with full participation rights, to career decision-making agencies at the federal, state and local levels; and, particularly and specifically, on the National Advisory Council on Career Education.
- Resolve the quandry of divergent viewpoints on work experience, primarily by following union recommendations and procedures where feasible, and secondarily by ensuring consensus via negotiated compromise in all other situations.

Item number 5 on Schulman's agenda became number 1 for our advisory group, indicating a considerable shift in emphasis. Item number 1 for Schulman became number 2 for our group. The rearrangement revealed

the extent to which labor leaders in the Northwest feel that their story has not been told and that they have been denied the visibility and respect they deserve. Their first two priorities were clearly concerned with the problems of acknowledgement and image.

After surveying the issues involved in career education and labor's involvement in it, then arranging priorities to reflect their perspective, the advisory group made their own suggestions of ways to enhance the involvement of labor.

When asked what they as labor representatives would teach if they had a part in curriculum planning, the advisory group came up with these suggestions:

- History--labor history
- Modern problems--youth unemployment
- Sociology
- Small group behavior
- Economics

The advisory group members were also asked to review the career education policy statements of several labor organizations and, after reviewing this literature, were asked what they felt need to be done, or could be done by labor organizations to assist in enhancing the role of labor in educational development. They responded by giving several suggestions. They felt that labor organizations could:

- Develop materials for use in school districts, i.e., filmstrips, videos

- Plan and develop labor units to be taught in school districts
- Do a study of textbooks and make recommendations concerning input on labor history
- Publicize programs which are viewed as positive representations of the labor movement
- Offer internships

The group was then asked to make recommendations as to what they felt regional laboratories or other R&D institutions could do to assist in strengthening relations between labor organizations and educational institutions. The advisory group suggested that R&D institutions could:

- Establish a clearinghouse for information pertaining to the role of labor in education and work
- Assist in gathering and disseminating materials related to strengthening labor's role in education and work planning
- Assemble a coalition of people who could identify good labor materials for the clearinghouse

The advisory group listed specific resources, i.e., names, films and events which could assist an R&D institution with its research. They saw potential value in:

- Contacting the acting director of the Labor Education and Research Center at the University of Oregon
- Contacting the Oregon Board of Education for information about a resolution calling for a labor history curriculum in public schools (1977 session)
- Attending the Rocky Mountain Labor School to be held in New Mexico in July 1978
- Viewing the following films:
  - "Harlem County"--centers around recent coal strike
  - "Amalgamated Clothing Workers"--J.P. Stevens film centering around labor law reform
  - "Hubert Humphrey"--contains labor law legislation

## SUMMARY

Our advisory group favored increased involvement of organized labor in education. On the one hand, they believed labor could provide significant input because of its expertise; on the other hand, they recognized that it was important for labor to participate so that its view could help shape the direction of work-education policy.

The central issues for our group were:

- Students need more adequate preparation, including considerable career exploration, in order to make a successful and efficient transition between education and work.
- At a time of high unemployment, putting students on the job can threaten the work security of adult workers.

Advisory group members thus considered ways of maximizing student preparation for work without jeopardizing present workers.

The value of work experience was accepted, but several issues related to it received considerable debate. Among the points raised were:

- Real learning occurs best through actual work experience; therefore, it should be mandatory for all students.
- Those who want to learn from work will, so work experience should be voluntary.
- Not enough work places could be found for everyone, so work experience should not be mandatory.
- Any job is good, if it is a job.
- Meaningless work leads to apathy.
- Work experiences can be counterproductive if they teach students they can make a living without really working, or if they give false expectations or inappropriate training.

- Students could learn essential work skills without threatening adult workers if their career education placements included jobs readily available to them--such as at McDonald's.
- Students could get more experience through greater collaboration between high schools and community colleges.

The advisory committee also believed that career awareness could be expanded through improved guidance counseling and infusion of labor studies into the curriculum. They pointed out that:

- Teachers and counselors too often provide limited career information because of their unfamiliarity (and frequent lack of sympathy) with organized labor.
- Teachers and counselors are often unaware of changed social developments in labor--such as the increased participation of women in nontraditional careers.
- Teachers and counselors often encourage students to go to college because that was their personal choice.
- Schools need to tell the whole story of labor by infusing labor studies into the curriculum.
- The negative stereotype perpetuated by the media must be offset.

Successful transition between education and work not only involves adequate career exploration, but also adequate preparation. Our advisory group stressed the importance of basic skills and the value of being able to apply these skills in actual work situations. They had some disagreement over whether specific job skills should be taught. Some felt students should be prepared to take a job after high school. Others argued that students should not acquire specific job skills until after graduation. They opposed providing specific skills for these reasons:

- It could interfere with apprenticeship programs.
- It could flood the market and take jobs from existing workers.

- It is the responsibility of management, not the schools, to give specific training.
- It is not feasible for the schools to duplicate skills training; the equipment is very expensive and becomes obsolete soon.

Responsibility for providing providing work experiences, in the judgment of our advisory group, should rest with the joint collaboration of labor, education and business and industry.

The value of Mark Schulman's research was acknowledged by our advisory group and they agreed with him on important points, especially the need for labor studies in the curriculum. However, important differences were also noted. They were not so concerned with definitions--in fact, different members expressed a wide range of understandings of work. But they were much more concerned than Schulman with the visibility and improved image of labor. They believed that students should know the whole story of labor, and be made much more aware of the career opportunities available through organized labor. And they believed steps should be taken to overcome the negative picture of workers broadcast through the media, especially television.

The group was quite interested in labor's potential contribution and listed several specific resources. Members also expressed interest in having an R&D institution participate in the process of involving labor in education. They felt it could provide valuable service as a clearinghouse.

## CONCLUSION

The meeting of the advisory committee was constructive: knowledgeable representatives of the labor movement were able to articulate the range of their concerns and specify their priorities. On the basis of their interaction, the following conclusions may be considered.

Our labor leaders recognized that they were concerned with education on many levels.

- As parents, they wanted their children to benefit from their educations and be prepared for adult life. They wanted them to be aware of all their options and to have a sense of direction.
- As citizens, they wanted all students to be aware of their opportunities so they could realize their individual potential. They attributed dropouts to lack of direction and interest in school, and they considered this a serious social problem.
- As labor leaders, they wanted future workers to be well prepared (with basic skills and a good attitude). They wanted students to make a successful transition between education and work without replacing adult workers.
- As persons, they wanted acknowledgment and respect. They were proud of their heritage and wanted the education system to make students aware of it.

Because of their varied roles and perspectives they believed they could make important contributions. The education system has devised successful methods for transmitting knowledge, but its knowledge base has fallen out of date--at least with regard to organized labor. Consequently, the education system could benefit from the expertise and perspective of labor leaders to increase student awareness of career opportunities and overcome biases against blue collar work.

Labor has traditionally favored broad public education which promotes democracy and equal opportunity. While this goal has remained steady, changing conditions require changing means of implementation. Our group has identified one important shift. For many years the primary route for social advancement has been college. This being the case, labor has vigorously supported the public system of higher education.

Because labor has wanted all students to have the opportunity of going to college, it has opposed channeling them too early into vocational programs or tracks. With the huge expansion of public higher education and the current "college for everyone" sentiment, the problem has changed, and teachers and counselors may encourage most of their students to continue their schooling. Labor leaders still believe the option of going to college should be open, but they also believe that work experiences and career exploration would be valuable for all students. And, since some choose not to further their education, labor leaders believe they should be made aware that organized labor also offers career opportunities.

Because of the information lag, labor is often nearly invisible in the public schools. But it is on regular display--in a highly stereotyped way--through television and other media. In the place of accurate historical and sociological information, students absorb negative images of workers. Because of this, they are deprived of information which could help them make career choices and workers are denied respect.

Almost everyone will eventually find work. The related questions are:

- How long will it take?
- Will the work be suitable for the particular person?
- How will the worker feel about himself or herself?

People have to make the transition between education and work, but the process can be very long and difficult if it does not begin until education has been completed or if there is no guidance or opportunity to explore careers all along. Many life decisions (marriage, children, buying a home, etc.) soon compete for time and attention, so career exploration should not be postponed. Moreover, if people have no opportunity to experiment, will they make the best career choices?

So much learning occurs through adopting models; if models are restricted, so are opportunities. And even if people find work they enjoy, they need a positive self image. This is harder to maintain if the cultural stereotypes constantly bombard and belittle them. For these reasons, students need considerable exposure to opportunities and to accurate depictions of labor.

Our labor leaders' proposed solutions to problems in career education followed the most time-honored American traditions: participation and education. They felt that labor could contribute necessary information and expertise and they were convinced that their aims could best be met through education, as their reordering of priorities clearly indicated. They believed that if labor studies were infused into the curriculum students would be more aware of their options and that workers would be more respected.

## PLAN FOR ACTION.

Our advisory group recommended a plan for action to address its concerns:

- Career exploration
- Labor studies
- Depiction of labor in the media.

Northwest labor leaders concluded that most, if not all, students would benefit from greater career exploration. Thus they would encourage the schools to promote the program for all. Since problems of worker security could arise, schools should consult with labor in making work experience placements. Some students might be offered internships. Labor leaders should familiarize teachers and counselors with the world of work to broaden their perspective and gain their support for exploratory work experiences.

Infusion of labor studies into the curriculum could help give organized labor recognition proportionate to its social significance. Our advisory group recommended that steps be taken to implement a pilot program, which could then be adapted by other schools. They also felt labor should recommend to the DOE that labor studies be added to school curricula. Labor has prepared educational materials which the schools could use.

In order to overcome the negative image of workers on television, our group recommended analyzing current representations and urging the media to be more accurate and informative.

Each stage of this plan would involve the joint collaboration of education and labor. Our advisory group recommended that this process be expedited.