Restructuring and Vocational Education. Trends and Issues Alerts.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.

Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

96

RR93002001

4p.

Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

Curriculum Development; Educational Change; *Educational Innovation; Futures (of Society); *Integrated Curriculum; Labor Force Development; Organizational Change; Postsecondary Education; *School Restructuring; Secondary Education; *Vocational Education

Educational restructuring is influencing the change in names of vocational education specialty areas as well as the change in course offerings for the specialties. In some schools, the name "vocational education" has been replaced with new names more reflective of the school's restructuring efforts. Within a given area, new courses are being added to reflect the advent of new technologies and management practices in the workplace. Guiding school restructuring efforts is the knowledge that skills required for employment should be taught in courses in which the content is allied with real-world living and working. Spearheading the restructuring of courses and course requirements for vocational education is the integration of academic and vocational programs. School organizational and vocational education restructuring efforts have resulted in the initiation of a number of innovative instructional practices besides the integration of academic and vocational education. For example, Connecticut educators have introduced several such practices: interdisciplinary curriculum, chemistry with computers, principles of technology, authentic assessment - mathematics, science - math - technical curriculum, portfolio assessment, total quality management techniques, "green wave" enterprises, and multilevel classes. (Contains 14 annotated print resources on restructuring in vocational education for adult, career, and vocational educators.) (YLB)
Restructuring and Vocational Education
Trends and Issues Alerts

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Restructuring and Vocational Education

Look in the course catalog of any high school or postsecondary institution today and you will be hard pressed to find some of the familiar vocational education specialties you knew in the past. Agriculture education is now called food and agricultural sciences. Home economics has disappeared into human ecology or family and consumer sciences. In some schools, the name vocational education has been replaced with new names that are more reflective of the school's restructuring efforts. For example, the Jefferson County Public Schools have adopted the name "career and technical education" to replace "vocational education" (Kyle 1995). Educational restructuring is influencing the change in course offerings for the specialties as well. Within a given area, new courses are being added to reflect the advent of new technologies and management practices in the workplace.

Guiding school restructuring efforts is the knowledge that skills required for employment should be taught in courses in which the content is allied with real world living and working. Kyle (1995) reports on one major effort of the Jefferson County Public Schools, "the restructuring of vocational education—with an emphasis on work force preparation and school-to-work and postsecondary educational transitions" (p. 9). The former system of part-time, 2-year vocational education centers was phased out and replaced with 4-year magnet career academies, based on the identified needs of companies in the region and projected growth industries. The identified areas of focus for these career academies include public safety, aviation, and advanced manufacturing technologies, health services, and construction technology. According to Kyle (1995), "each academy is developing an integrated academic and technical curriculum, requires a demonstration of advanced proficiencies for graduation, and offers students a variety of transition and student support services. All students will have some form of internship, apprenticeship, or cooperative education experience" (p. 12).

Spearheading the restructuring of courses and course requirements for vocational education is the integration of academic and vocational programs. According to Bragg (1994), "the predominant curriculum reform strategy underway is to add applied academics (commercially or locally developed) to existing curricula or replace existing courses with applied academics" (p. 5). Business, industry, and school leaders are working together to develop curriculum standards to upgrade the quality of vocational courses. For example, in the Craftsman 2000 Apprenticeship Program in Tulsa, the public schools, seven industries, Tulsa Technology Center, and Tulsa Junior College collaboratively design and deliver an integrated program for metalworking apprentices (Bottoms 1993).

School organizational and vocational education restructuring efforts have resulted in the initiation of a number of innovative instructional practices besides the integration of academic and vocational education. Connecticut educators, for example, have introduced several such practices: interdisciplinary curriculum, chemistry with computers, principles of technology, authentic assessment—mathematics, science-math-technical curriculum, portfolio assessment, total quality management techniques, "green wave" enterprises, and multilevel classes (Educating for High Performance 1993). The following resources contain relevant information about restructuring in vocational education that will be of interest to adult, career, and vocational educators.

Print Resources


Describes how an integrated program to ensure four provisions for all learners transformed a vocational-technical center in Michigan. The four provisions described are (1) involvement in applying academic skills with occupational skills; (2) expanded opportunities to develop employability skills; (3) linkages with business and industry, and (4) career guidance.


Presents insights about the changing nature of the workplace and the need for upgraded standards of what to teach and what to expect of students in high school vocational courses.


Describes the fundamental components of tech prep and the main emerging tech prep models: pre-tech prep, adult tech prep, integrated tech prep, work-based tech prep, and the tech prep baccalaureate degree.


Presents a list of the greatest challenges facing career educators today: (1) engaging the employment community within a formal, broad-based structure such as an industry-education council or alliance; (2) involving industry in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of career education staff development/inservice programs, and curriculum...
development; and (3) stressing curriculum relevance to work and leisure.


Describes 46 change efforts undertaken to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn at high levels and succeed in a high performance economy.


Provides information on tech prep education programs that prepare students with technological competencies to work in a field such as engineering technology, agriculture, health, or business.


Examines Jefferson County Public School’s approach toward school-to-work transition as part of educational reform. Describes several models of career/technical education restructuring and magnet career academies.


Examines teachers’ opportunities to learn and describes ways in which the workplace context of teaching supports impedes curriculum integration between vocational and academic education.


Identifies eight themes: guaranteed access to education, training, and employment; meaningful participation; orientation to work; academic-vocational integration; employer and community responsibility for employability development; assessment; policy guidance; and improved teacher training and staff development.


Describes the Tech Prep Mapping process and the structural changes that need to occur with the school district’s board and central office administration, the school principal’s office, and among teaching staff to use the process for school restructuring.


Highlights the current focus on integration of academic skills and vocational skills as a response to educational reform movements.


Discusses the environmental changes moving vocational education reform to the center of general education reform. Highlights the mutual adaptive results between organizational reforms, such as theme schools, and vocational reforms such as curricular integration. Presents lessons for advancing vocational reforms in urban settings.


Describes school-to-work transition program and presents the main ideas for improving the school-to-work system: integrating occupational and academic curricula, linking school with structured work experience, and creating formal connections between secondary and postsecondary education.


Describes the British government’s Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and evaluates its effectiveness in managing curriculum change.

Developed with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RR93002001. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department. *Trends and Issues Alerts* may be freely reproduced.