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ABSTRACT

Recent emphasis on "academics only" in educational curriculum, with content influenced primarily by state-mandated tests, raises questions about the place of career education in the curriculum. It also leads to questions about how to reach nonacademic students, those whose interests and aptitudes lie in more practical knowledge outside the traditional academic curriculum. In addition, concerns can be voiced about individual student needs and over-reliance on multiple-choice testing which does not demonstrate students' use of multiple intelligences and precludes practical and hands-on projects and demonstrations as proof of mastery of learning. The academic emphasis has overshadowed the importance of career education, which is needed by all students. All students will eventually become workers, and most of them will work in more practical rather than academic fields. In addition, all workers need the same types of work attitudes and skills to succeed in life and careers, including dependability, perseverance, trustworthiness, goal orientation, interpersonal skills, a caring attitude, desire for continuous learning, decision-making skills, ethics, and self-actualization. Therefore, all students, K-12, should be involved in career education that will help them to determine and follow a career path during their lifetimes. (KC)

Vocational Education and the Nonacademic Student

Marlow Ediger

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE NONACADEMIC STUDENT

Many educators advocate focusing on the academics only in the school curriculum. There are selected questions here which need consideration and involve problem solving. These include the following:

1. What if a student just does not possess interest, purpose, or appropriate learning styles in pursuing the academic life, should he/she still pursue only a subject centered curriculum? "Focus upon the academics" has become a slogan in education, particularly with state mandated testing. The state level of instruction has then determined that an academic curriculum should then be the lot of all students in the public schools.

2. Should the academic and the vocational have equal value in the school curriculum? After all good automobile mechanics, plumbers, carpet installers, contractors and carpenters, management of movers of furniture, as well as computer technicians are very much needed.

3. With Multiple Intelligences Theory (Gardner, 1993), should all students be tested using multiple choice test items only, with standardized test directions, and with the same time limits for everyone in test taking? The nonacademic student with a utilitarian philosophy may do better showing achievement using other forms of intelligence. These intelligences may emphasize doing art projects, or projects involving construction work and physical endeavors to show accomplishment.

4. To what degree should individual differences play a role in an era of state mandated testing? Even in responding to multiple choice test items, there are selected students who, for example, need more time to respond to test items as compared to others. These same students may need additional time which corresponds to flexible scheduling during the regular school day.

5. Should units on careers in our community be emphasized on the elementary school level as well as the secondary school level with a kindergarten through grade twelve scope and sequence?

With state mandated testing, there are always chances that only what is tested on/in these tests will be taught in the classroom. If the 3rs are tested largely or only, then even science, social studies, art, music, and physical education will be slighted in instruction along with career education. The broader question pertains to, "Should state mandated testing dominate the school curriculum?"

6. What should be the role of career education versus the basics in the school curriculum? Further subdivisions of this question involve the following:

- a) should career education be taught as separate units of study?
- b) should career education be correlated, fused, and/or integrated into the regular curriculum involving the basics?

c) should career education in student achievement be assessed differently other than the use of multiple choice test items which are typically inherent in state mandated tests?

d) should the same objectives be stated for all to achieve on a specific grade level or should there be a developmentally appropriate career education program for learners within a specific grade?

e) should the teacher use direct methods of teaching or should there be considerable input from students into career education units?

f) should there be predetermined measurably stated objectives for teachers to implement or should there be flexible, open ended units of study in career education?

g) should career education emphasize a subject centered curriculum or should the stress be placed upon a learner orientated theory of instruction?

h) should there be a logical or a psychological sequential career education curriculum for students?

i) should there be teacher identified problems identified for students to solve or should the problems arise from students' own unique experiences in units of study in career education?

j) should the basis of teaching career education focus upon excursions taken to places of business and the work place, or can many learnings on careers be emphasized using AV aids including videos, CD ROMS, computer software, simulations, creative dramatics and role playing, among others. What should be the roles of reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities in ongoing units of study in career education? (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Fifteen)

There are a plethora of reasons why units on careers should be stressed in the curriculum. First, adequate emphasis should be placed upon what is practical in the curriculum. With state mandated testing, the subject matter inherent may become extremely abstract with stress being placed upon the academics. It is difficult to stress a hands on approach in learning with multiple choice test items. The more abstract something becomes, the more likely it is that students may misconstrue its meaning. Making use of something emphasizes the concreteness of a situation.

Second, learners tend to lose interest in what is being learned when the complete abstractness of a situation is inherent. Vocational education together with its career emphasis tends to make learnings more interesting since its relationship to life and living are in focus. Careers exist in the concrete in society. They are there and can be understood within a life and living context. The student, no doubt, since the beginning of existence, hears about careers from one or both parents. It takes involvement with a career to make a livelihood and the student hears about the world of work since his/her earliest time imaginable. The school curriculum may connect with the practical world

of work and broaden its scope in the minds of learners.

Third, a focus upon the academics may make the world less intelligible due to its isolation from the societal arena. Objectives in school should relate to reality and realness, not to the unreality of strict subject matter. Thus, the mathematics curriculum, for example, should stress the level of application and that which is useful. Mathematics is a useful subject matter area with its direct connections to the societal arena and the purchase of goods and services.

Fourth, when goods and services are needed by any one adult, the chances are people from the practical world are necessary, not the academic arena. Thus, if a tire is flat, the chances are that person from the utilitarian world is needed to provide the remedial services.

Fifth, careers emphasize that which is contextual, not isolated entities. With state mandated testing, the tendency is to stress subject matter multiple choice test items which are unrelated to each other. Instead, careers are in the societal arena and are there contextually. The worker in society needs to observe things holistically, rather than as segments of knowledge (See Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Sixteen).

All attending public schools presently will need to choose a career eventually. The school curriculum can make its many contributions toward meeting career plans. There are traits which may be emphasized presently in the school setting which will guide students presently as well as at the future work place as well as a citizen in society. These traits include

1. dependability. Individuals need to be those who can be relied upon to complete whatever is reasonable and necessary. Making promises and fulfilling them is a necessity!

2. perseverance. Each person needs to work at a task to completion. Difficulties may arise, tension accumulates, and worries come about, but tasks need to be worked at until they have been achieved and finalized.

3. trustworthy. A person needs to be honest to the best of his/her ability. He/she is one who can be trusted to keep agreements and to further the ideal of honesty.

4. goal orientated. Each person needs to possess a vision of what should be, rather than what is. However, one needs to start with what is and then sequentially move in the direction of what should be in the perceived vision. A few may be able to make the Kierkegaard leap rather than move sequentially to what should be. Much depends upon the self, other people, available materials and resources, and the supporting psychological environment.

5. quality human relationships. Being able to work together with others is a necessity. Individuals need to be able to work by the self as well as with others. Both are salient. Thus individuals do interact with

items and objects by the self as well as with other human beings.

6. a caring person. Caring individuals are needed all over the world. Human beings are vulnerable by the self when securing food, clothing, and shelter. There are so many things which can go wrong in life, even with the best of planning and intentions. A person may become a billionaire with a huge mansion, a fleet of luxury cars, and annual trips abroad with the best of accommodations, or in the free enterprise system one may be cold and hungry, living on the streets. Then to, health is a very fleeting item. It can be present, in degrees, or it may wane to being very minimal. My late mother was a witness to the long time illness syndrome; she had a bad stroke at age 50. From the age of 50 until she died 22 years later, she was a very paralyzed individual. My father, brother, and sister, along with the author took care of mother with very little outside assistance. No nursing home care! Teachers need to be caring individuals so that students achieve optimally. Student's social, emotional, and physical needs must be cared for. Teachers and administrators need to be caring individuals so that the welfare of all students is provided for. Hatred, rudeness, and dislike for others should be items of concern for the school's social environment and the mental health of human beings. Goals then need to be developed in reaching out to have a quality social and emotional environment for all.

7. desire for continuous learning. Each person needs to develop and possess interest and curiosity to learn from the natural and social environment. Lifelong learning is a definite goal for all. Thus, education, be it formal or informal, should be continuous in order to upgrade oneself, learn, and develop well cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially. There, perhaps, is nothing beyond more education as a person goes through life's challenges and endeavors.

8. assessing choices in life, among alternatives. There are numerous choices to be made in the societal arena. Each choice needs to be weighed, evaluated by noticing the possible consequences of each, and hold those made as being tentative and subject to change.

9. the ethical dimension. Ethics involves one's relationship to others in terms of being economical, societal, and personal. A system of ethnics provides guidance and direction for life and living. Ethics cannot be stated in terms of absolutes but must be viewed in an open ended manner. Ethical standards are not anarchical but must be held flexibly in a way which stresses change but holds true to ideals in terms of character development. Ethics here refers to one's calling in working toward a better world in which all individuals may reach optimal development.

10. realizing the optimal self. Whatever is desired in reaching goals provides an image or vision of what one would like to be. The closer one is to accomplishing that which one wishes, the better the self concept will tend to be. Each has a worthwhile niche in life and this

arena needs to be created, cultivated, and achieved. By reaching out to life's challenges, one grows, develops, and accomplishes. If challenges are not accepted, the chances are that opportunities in life will flee and optimal accomplishment is not possible. Knowing which challenges to accept and which to reject requires a creative person. The creative person has avenues of finding new ideas and resources which are not available to the rigid, formal person (See Ediger, 1987, 65-72).

Conclusion

Career education should be the lot of all students in a k-12 sequence. Each person will need to determine and follow a career during a life time. Retraining along the way may be necessary for many. School and society may cooperate here in developing the talents and abilities of each student to be successful now and at the future work place (Ediger, 1977, 120-126).

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