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## FACTS AND FANTASIES OF CAREER EDUCATION\*

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One of the paradoxes of the American scene is the extent to which we regard our education as an enormous success while at the same time we face the haunting reality that for many, education contributes rather minimally to any interpretation of success. It has affected the jargon of education resulting in such terms as "upward bound," "new horizons," "educational renewal," and "career education." These terms identify programs whose invested energy is somehow expected to redress the balance or tilt toward more advantage for those whose hope is vested in education.

Career education is one of the newly popular terms for designating the revival of some educational measures which have had many earlier advocates on the educational scene. It also contains some elements which are new to the current emphasis.

Career education is almost impossible to define and its implementation is subject to many interpretations and numerous compromises. It has been subjected to endless combinations of pressures and preferences to reflect the alternative views of its advocates and its sideline observers. It also exists in three forms, commonly called models, including a school-based form, an employer-based form, and a home-based form. More will be said about these later.

In the absence of a clean and tidy definition to which all can agree, it may be possible to describe some purposes of career education which describe its intent. The following purposes are given in the hope that the agreement which they summarize can be increasingly shared among alternative forms:

1. To provide students with an instructive environment and some learning goals which will allow them to relate their education to the world of work — its scope, its significance, and its opportunities.
2. To provide students with an opportunity to engage in occupational exploration including work experience, specialized instruction, and career decision-making leading toward a preferred life-style and career pattern.
3. To provide an opportunity for students to exit and reenter the educational system or the labor force or to be instructed in both, as needed, in order to make initial or subsequent progress toward specific career goals.

Purposes, such as those outlined above, are generally unacceptable in the American educational system. They require a system-wide commitment to compulsory education rather than a mere acquiescence to the statutory provisions of compulsory attendance. They require accountability and responsibility for the instructive *processes* of decision-making as well

as its *consequences* and its *training needs*. Finally, they are expensive; there is no way to embrace the purposes of career education without encountering significant additional costs.

And the concomitant requirements of career education are even more formidable than can be described by a mere exposition of purposes. They include some essential features without which career education could fail to serve the listed purposes. They are as follows:

1. Career education is for all students. It is not an approach to educational "streaming" nor is it an effort to deal more effectively with one dimension of the occupational hierarchy than another. This need to include all students is a feature considered essential to the goals of justice and equality of opportunity in education.
2. Career education must be included as an instructional objective at all grade levels — from kindergarten through adult and continuing education. It cannot be regarded as a postponable educational activity. Integrated into the regular curriculum, career education is an approach to enriching the traditional disciplines whose primary function is to describe a part of the world's reality, including the world of work.
3. Career education is intended to provide job-entry skills to all students prior to or upon completion of compulsory school attendance. Twenty percent of those who enter fifth grade drop out before the completion of twelfth grade. Fifty percent of those who enter fifth grade do not pursue post-high school training. Job-entry skills are needed by almost everyone at some stage in career progress — either as an earning opportunity for later stages or as an earning opportunity for an interim stage in career progress. Job-entry skills are an essential feature of career education.
4. One hundred percent placement is both a feature and a goal of career education. Placement may be in a job or in an educational program which is additionally preparatory. The placement feature has a double purpose: (1) to insure that career education is goal-oriented for all students and (2) to insure that the educational system is willing to accept the burden of its own casualties. Implied in the latter is the need for the educational system to engage in successive placements of the same individuals including those who drop out of post-high school educational programs and those who choose to intersperse adult education with work. Placement is a demanding feature of career education. It provides its most important basis for accountability.

The question of definition arises again. The purposes and features described above are not a description of means; they are a description of ends. Career education requires a careful delineation of ends and means. It is this need for delineation that prompts many of the advocates of career education to accept a quick and easy definition. If one accepts the foregoing pur-

poses and features of career education, the implied departure from tradition is revolutionary. No school system has fully embraced the purposes and features described above and no teacher education program is fully prepared to provide personnel for such a commitment.

The means needed to achieve career education are also difficult. Organizational and structural changes may be necessary in many communities, particularly those which are small or rural.

The description of career education in this paper is essentially the one advanced by the U. S. Office of Education and its Advisory Groups. As mentioned earlier, the U. S. Office of Education has proposed and committed public funds to three forms of career education, popularly called models — a school-based form, an employer-based form, and a home-based form. It is not known whether these are intended to be competitive alternatives or mutually supporting dimensions of an overall scheme. If it is intended that the three forms can complement each other, the overall strategy for this intent is not clear. The competitive intent was implied by the U. S. Commissioner of Education when he suggested that the employer-based form might be financed by the tax credits, a much-abused system of revenue and a most difficult finance plan to rely upon for publicly supervised education programs.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Revival of Earlier Emphases

At the outset of this paper it was observed that career education consisted of a revival of some earlier educational emphases and some which are new. What educational emphases have been revived by the current thrust toward career education? What education reforms of the past are revived in contemporary career education?

First, the arguments which prompted the Morrill Acts of the 1860's are alive again in career education. The Congressional intent of the Morrill Acts was to reform the occupational hierarchy and the access of working classes to it. An equally important intent was to expand educational opportunity for the lower socio-economic strata. The educational leadership prompting Morrill legislation did not come from universities. University leaders were the enemies rather than the friends of the Land Grant Movement.<sup>2</sup> But university leaders soon became the custodians of the Land Grant intent and the expected ambivalence prevented a full realization of the intent. The revolution which prompted the Land Grant legislation had a short life. As a substitute a number of grant-in-aid programs emerged whose accommodation in universities is now referred to as a "land grant movement."

Also revived in career education is the struggle to introduce vocational education into all education streams. This struggle is best identified with the careers of three men — David Snedden, an educational administrator; Charles Prosser, a lawyer; and John Dewey, a philosopher. Although they disagreed on details of implementation, all believed in vocational education as a means of liberalizing education. Snedden was an advocate of integrating occupational education into the general curriculum Prosser argued for social efficiency and the need for all students to prepare for useful employment. Dewey saw vocational education as a means of democratizing education. The careers of all three were instrumental in introducing vocational legislation in the early years of the century.<sup>3</sup>

A third focus revived by the current fashion of career education, notably the earlier work of the National Education Association through its Educational Policies Commission and the work of the American Vocational Association through its various resolutions and reports. The work of the Educational Policies Commission entitled *Education for All American Youth* published in 1944 was an early approximation to present views about career education. The continuous effort of the American Vocational Association to broaden the base of vocational education is likewise a revived focus of the current emphasis in career education.<sup>4</sup>

Even more central to the new emphasis is the prior work of the National Advisory Committees in vocational education. Of particular interest is the Report of the President's Panel of Consultants (1963) and the Reports of the now functioning National Advisory Council on Vocational Education. In their Reports No. 1 and 3, the latter has implored the federal government to exercise leadership in career education and it has proposed guidelines for implementation.

#### The New Dimensions of Career Education

These are a few of the educational emphases which have experienced a revival in the current interest in career education. But there are also some new dynamics and some new dimensions which add interest and concern for career education. What are some of these new dimensions?

The first involved the contributions of educational research over the past decade. Before identifying these contributions I would like to say that anyone should have considerable reserve about crediting educational research with generalizable truth. Most educational research yields conditional truth and it is extremely difficult to identify much which is generalizable. Yet it is a professional obligation to search for the generalizable truth emerging from research and to ask, "What does this have to say to us?" In spite of reserve noted above, an attempt shall be made to summarize the research of the last decade in the form of generalizations applicable to career education. They are as follows:

1. *Children have a higher capacity for learning and instruction at earlier ages than was heretofore understood.* This conclusion has been reinforced by numerous studies and it has resulted in an emphasis on early childhood education. The source of this discovery is world-wide. Early childhood education is practiced everywhere. It has important applicability to career education. As demonstrated in a number of exemplary programs, career education can be an important dimension of early childhood pro-

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grams. In fact, it is an essential aspect of many exemplary programs.

2. *The achievement of learning goals is in direct proportion to the amount of time invested in teaching and learning by students and teachers and to the effectiveness of such invested time.* This rather mundane observation appears to particularize the obvious. Yet it is the only generalizable truth which emerges from much of the research in reading, mathematics, science, languages, and other subjects. Gimmicks, gadgets, and games have been created, all useful in winning the interest of students, but the most important independent variable has been the additional time invested by students and teachers. This should lead to a further conclusion, namely, that the most valuable educational asset is student time and the most valuable educational methodologies are those which make most effective use of student time. If career education is an important educational goal, its importance must have a direct relationship to its investment of student and teacher time.

3. *Education is not culturally irrelevant; its subcultural variations are significant.* This conclusion, drawn from landmark studies of the equality of educational opportunity, has become an important educational force.<sup>5</sup> As observed by Goldhammer, students worth educating are not socially and culturally homogeneous.<sup>6</sup> Nor are they oriented to any particular segment of the occupational hierarchy. It is increasingly apparent that many of the success-related outcomes of the educational process are essentially non-cognitive; they relate to social relations, to the socialization process and to the status-transmitting influence of work roles.<sup>7</sup> The norm-referenced character of education is thus important in new ways and particularly as these norms relate a status-oriented hierarchy of occupations, to an implicit policy favoring widely differentiated incomes, and to the struggle to achieve equality of opportunity.

There are other conclusions which may be drawn from the research of the last decade to provide a new view of career education. Perhaps it would be useful to add the research in Adult Education or some of the developments in Vocational Education. Those cited above are so sharply relevant to career education that they cannot be omitted. They add substantially to the arguments of those who advocate career education.

A second new dimension to career education is provided by the frightening realization that there may be limits to growth.<sup>8</sup> The interacting consequences of continued exponential growth of population, food production, industrialization, pollution, and consumption of non-renewable resources will, it is argued, lead to calamities and the need for zero growth within 50 years. Discussions of this possibility have not had wide currency in the field of education even though the present crop of 10th graders will reach retirement age by that time.

What are the implications of zero growth or near zero growth for education? Unlike expansion, it means that the poor cannot become richer without the rich getting poorer. The ladder to success is a realistic hope as long as economic expansion permits the ladder to become longer so that those on the higher rungs may also climb. Zero growth restricts the length of the ladder. It invites a wholly new basis for

social conflict, a conflict which will more sharply divide the rich from the poor and one which may center on the educational system as its battleground.

A second implication will involve the educational assumptions surrounding student selectivity. Under conditions of expanding growth, the educational systems select and reward those individuals and institutions with a high capacity for expansion and it tends to discourage and diminish those quantities and attributes which maintain a static or declining role. This basis of selectivity and reward for expansionism will not continue to function as smoothly with an approach to zero growth.

Finally, full employment, even with a healthy commitment to the work ethic, may be impossible to sustain without a great deal of underutilized labor. The present inability to control inflation, which is fake expansion, is a symptom of this problem.

What then are the likely consequences to career education arising from zero growth or near zero growth? Certainly it will be difficult to accept and its difficulty will be greater for the poor than for the affluent. Education may get blamed (as it did for sputnik) and career education may be identified as a part of the problem rather than a part of its solution. If career education becomes identified with the least remunerative jobs in a community, the possibility of zero growth will add new hazards to the concept and to its implementation.

There are many other new elements of career education including cluster concepts, curriculum, and instructional management possibilities. These will not be mentioned here. Lets go on to the fantasies.

#### **Fallacies and Fantasies in Career Education**

The fallacies and fantasies surrounding career education must be discussed as matters of judgement and preference. There is no standard against which to measure them. Career education has been the subject of much exhortation but very little analysis; much rhetoric but little reflection. Yet it is an extremely complex concept and its implementation is still in stages of trial. The fallacies and fantasies listed hereunder are expressions of judgement and undoubtedly within limited boundaries of tolerance. They are as follows:

1. Except at a temporary stage of installation, career education cannot be implemented at a single level of education. The concept requires movement elements which expand and extend throughout and beyond the elementary and secondary years. The purposes of career education, as described in this paper, cannot be achieved by a partial program of career education.
2. The organizational and structural problems of American education are still too formidable to accommodate a majority of students in programs of career education. Schools which are too small to establish a comprehensive vocational program are also too small to implement the requisites of a career education program. The major cities of the North and the East have opted for specialized vocational high schools, thus leaving the remainder of the schools rather badly organized to provide for the job-entry skill requirements of career education. The skill center or the area vocational school concept is not well distributed across the country. The capacity of the educational establishment to accommodate career education is thus very limited, a problem which is not attacked by any of the forms of career education.

3. Career education which does not rely upon expanded vocational and adult education opportunities will be both a fallacy and a hoax. Career decision-making which is not followed by career training opportunities cannot survive as a part of programmed career education. Worse, if career education is followed by placement in the least remunerative jobs of the community with no opportunity for retraining or upgrading, then career education will be identified with sustained poverty rather than sustained opportunity. An expansion of vocational and adult education is essential to the survival of the concept of career education.
4. The costs of implementing career education have been grossly underestimated. Current appropriations are providing for some exemplary elements of a limited number of partial programs. Full implementation of career education for only its vocational training and placement aspects would cost from 10 to 15 multiples of current state and federal appropriations.
5. Career education is not an emphasis which is unique to the American scene. It is a statutory program in Sweden with an operational history of more than five years. It has functioned in the USSR for more than three years as a combined school and employer-based program. As an employer-based form it functions in England as a type of adult education. It is being advanced by UNESCO under the rubric of "Lifelong Education." With a variety of interpretations, career education is a world-wide movement.

#### Summary

The purposes and features of career education are more demanding and formidable than any which have been advanced by any system of education. It is unlikely that any school system has fully implemented it. The concept is not new, it is drawn from previous programs and previous advocates.

There are some elements which are new including a supportive research base, some economic relationships which require some changing assumptions, and its administrative

leadership at the highest levels.

The organizational, economic, and conceptual capacity of the American educational system to accept a commitment to career education is still grossly exaggerated. It is fallacious to assume that a system can accommodate career education in a framework which has not been able to fully accommodate one of its essential elements — vocational education.

#### FOOTNOTES

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