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# THE READING-CAREER EDUCATION CONNECTION

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The forecasted career education quake has yet to shake our national educational landscape with cataclysmic force. Its tremors, however, are felt everywhere. The curriculum “faults” underlying the present educational scene portend the dynamic role that career education will play in marshalling educational change, so say leaders of the career education movement. Kenneth Hoyt (1975), for example, sees career education as a response to a call for educational reform. Sydney Marland (1973) speaks of career education not as a placebo or substitute for the “old curriculum,” but as a new context of learning. Within this context, Marland asserts,

The academic skills are still the school's *raison d'être*. But we believe young people . . . will learn them better, with more ease and interest, because their mathematics, language arts, science and social studies have been related to purposes which students perceive as important to their own future lives. (p. 903)

If this be the case, reading—the basic tool that embraces all the academic and vocational areas in one way or another—has a definitive role in the curriculum reformation implicit in career education.

One of the “why’s” of reading-career education is quickly discernible. Henry Brickell (1975) says:

It is one thing . . . to declare that every student has the right to read; it is another to declare that every student has a reason to read. Career choice, career entry, career continuation, career progress are all good reasons to read—reasons every student can understand. (p. 6)

Career education thus provides a framework that can make reading experiences vital and meaningful. Reading, as Brickell (1975) suggests, is “the only skill that will be used in every job, the only skill that can free the mind and put bread on the table” (p. 6). If his comments appear to be zealously stated, they nevertheless serve to amplify the reading-career education connection. For the vast majority of students reading is and will continue to be the most efficient vehicle for learning. It can serve as the prime tool for exploring the world of work and in sharpening the thinking skills needed to cope in a highly technological society. The reading curriculum, within a career education context, therefore, must be carefully articulated if students are to experience the full benefits of the reading-career education connection.

Reading's role in career education should be mainly functional once students have acquired basic reading skills for learning. As career education specialists attempt to develop competent practitioners and independent learners of various careers, they must assume the responsibility for guiding students not only in *what* to learn, but also in *how* to learn it successfully. To the extent that reading serves as an essential tool in this process, career education programs can provide natural contexts for students to develop reading skills as needed—functionally—in the pursuit of occupational choices.

### *The Reading Curriculum in Career Education*

There is consensus among reading people that students not only learn and refine reading skills *directly*, but need also be shown how to apply these skills *functionally* as dictated by the nature of the content in various subject areas. One-half of the reading curriculum in career education can be explained readily by visualizing a cone-shaped spiral, illustrative of "direct reading instruction" in basic skills. At the base of this cone in the elementary grades during career awareness, the spiral is wide and tight to represent heavy emphasis (Early, 1964; Vacca, 1976). As direct reading instruction continues through the grades into career exploration and career entry, the cone gradually tapers off as it spirals upward. Instruction is not as heavy as it is selective and appropriate to the specific needs of diverse learners. Complete a mental picture of the total reading curriculum in career education by overlaying the cone-shaped spiral with another one, "one that begins narrowly in the primary grades and becomes broader as it reaches the upper grades" (Early, 1964, p. 25). This spiral represents "functional reading instruction" where emphasis is on the adaptation of basic skills needed to learn content from a variety of sources and reading situations.

Operationally, then, direct instruction centers around a set of basic reading skills, arranged in a logical sequence and taught in a prescribed manner. Reading material is selected for its value in teaching the skills and providing practice once they are taught. The *New Rochester Occupational Reading Series: The Job Ahead* (SRA, 1963) is an example of an early program that proposes to develop basic skills directly through career-centered reading materials. *Careers: A Supplemental Reading Program* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1975) is a recent example of career-centered materials which also attempt to teach reading skills directly. *Careers* contains three levels for use in the intermediate grades. Each level is housed in a box and provides a sound filmstrip for orientation or motivation, story folders covering thirty-two careers, activity cards correlated to the story folders, and a set of management folders for the students.

Functional reading instruction, on the other hand, allows classroom teachers to guide those reading skills required to learn their subject matter. A functional emphasis, therefore, shows students how to apply basic reading skills that are actually needed to read a particular subject-centered

selection. Skills are not taught for the sake of teaching skills; nor are reading skills practiced in isolated drill. A functional reading approach does not come prepackaged in a box, a workbook, or a teacher's manual. It arises out of a teacher's own sense of structure and an ability to adapt instruction to materials actually read as part of class assignments. Herber (1970), Herber and Sanders (1971), Herber and Barron (1973), and Herber and Vacca (in press) have combined classroom-tested procedures and strategies with an extended research effort to develop a system of functional reading instruction in content areas.

*The Reading-Career Education Connection:  
A Whole Staff Responsibility*

If reading instruction is to be incorporated into career education programs, a conscious effort must be made to develop its direct and functional components as students progress from stages of career awareness into various facets of career exploration and entry. During the career awareness years of a child's educational experience, direct reading instruction should be stressed as it is currently under present curriculum strategies. This means a systematic approach to the development of word recognition skills, basic comprehension, locational skills and versatility in reading where rate is adjusted to student purposes for reading. Whenever appropriate, reading materials should reflect the career interests and aspirations of children. Career education programs have the potential to infuse real-life situations into the direct reading instructional program. Children have the opportunity to develop reading power on materials that make sense; that unlock the world of work and create awareness and interest in the occupational possibilities that lie ahead.

As pupils move out of the awareness stage and into career exploration, teachers' responsibilities should shift accordingly. They should be prepared to "sneak" reading instruction into regular occupational settings and situations. If reading skills become an integral aspect of job success in certain career areas, a teacher must be trained to show students how to apply basic skills to job-related materials. Functional reading training, however, need not be solely task oriented. Students preparing for professional careers must be shown how to read a variety of content-specific material in an efficient and effective manner. Where reading skills are not particularly needed to function successfully in a career, a teacher probably would not incorporate reading skill training into his regular instructional routines.

There is no doubt that the reading development of young people will be facilitated through career education programs. Reading growth can be attained through direct and functional reading strategies. During early educational experiences, direct reading instruction should go hand-in-hand with career awareness activities. By teaching reading skills directly in a career-oriented atmosphere, educators will have the opportunity to capitalize on children's real-life interests and aspirations.

Moreover, a functional emphasis on reading instruction in the upper

grade levels will extend the reading development of students who view reading as a necessary tool for occupational success. Such an emphasis makes reading instruction a valuable process-centered activity to students who view reading as useful—a means to an end, never an end in itself. Career education thus becomes, in the words of Theodore Harris (1975), a “curriculum reformation that makes reading a more functional part of the educative process” (p. 113).

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