

Career education is no "fly-by-night" passing fad. Teachers are recognizing this and making a serious commitment to the movement.

Career education's weak link: teacher education

By Gary Green



Gary Green, assistant professor, Kansas State University holds a B.S. in education from Southwestern Oklahoma State University, a master's in economics from the University of Missouri, and an Ed.D. in education from Oklahoma State University. Dr. Green has teaching experience at the secondary and junior college level. In addition, he spent one year with the Oklahoma State Department of Vocational and Technical Education conducting research and developing a management information system involving statistical census profiles.

In 1970 career education made its formal debut on the educational scene under the sponsorship of United States Office of Education (USOE) Commissioner Sidney Marland. At that time it was a singular new term for a montage of old educational and societal ideas, thus its properties and objectives were vague and confusing. People were not sure who it was for, and it was an ominous threat to teachers who were charged with the implementation of something they did not understand. Metaphorically speaking, career education was a weak chain made of many weak links.

Now, six years later, there has been much improvement and progressive growth throughout the career education movement. The concept definition has been narrowed and clearly stated. Dr. Kenneth Hoyt, Commissioner of Career Education, has done much to clarify the reasons for career education and put the concept into the mainstream of American education. Hoyt's advocacy of career education as a means to "bring the world of work to the classroom at all levels" and to make work a "more meaningful part of one's life by formulating means to cope with a mass society . . ." has helped make the career education movement more relevant to the general public as well as professional educators. Career education is finding new, strong endorsement at the "grass roots" levels, in state and federal government, in numerous educational organizations and agencies as well as in business and industry. By developing the **Awareness—Exploration—Specialization** model, the USDE has supplied the K-12 classroom teacher with methods and materials to infuse career education into the existing curriculum at all levels. The links in the chain of career education grow stronger each year. Still, as the old adage goes, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and career education still has one great and obvious weak link, teacher education.

Evidence points to the fact that, while teachers on the "grass roots" levels have endorsed and are implementing career education in K-12 curriculum, the teacher educators have not been so positive, knowledgeable or active in the realm of career education. Career education must have the teacher education support because a significant educational movement cannot result in long-term change and will eventually flounder unless the call is heard and endorsed by teacher education.² However, it is obvious that teacher education in its existing form cannot be relied upon to present adequate philosophy, program development and methods of implementation.

What is the problem with teacher educators and career education? The problem in general is a lack of centrality, responsibility and direction. There are very few, if any, teacher education programs which contain career education as part of the basic structure. There are rarely any undergraduate courses in career education at all. Each teacher is simply expected to infuse career education concepts into his or her subject matter. This results in the students getting a bit of information here and there and having no basic framework within which to set those bits and pieces. Those bits and pieces also come in varying degrees of understanding and accuracy because the teacher educators in general are not that familiar with the objectives and importance of career education. Career education is working on the K-12 level because teachers, with the help of programs like the USOE K-12 models, are putting career education within the framework of their subjects. Teacher educators have no USOE models, and if they did it is doubtful if models could be developed that would be practical on the university level. Instead of trying to give the education student a smattering of information on career education in each course, why not give that student a good, sound, basic understanding of career education and let him apply it to different areas? It seems to be more practical to give the student the basics and let him apply the theory than to give him the application and expect him to figure out the basics, as we are doing now. Teacher educators are the key to a successful, long-term career education program in the schools. They are in a unique position to involve themselves in a movement that would help facilitate greater worker happiness and satisfaction. However, the present methods used in teacher education institutions are not going to get the job done. The problem is by no means irreversible. There are steps that can be taken to overcome the difficulties.

The first step concerns the administration. Movement toward change does not necessarily have to be initiated by the administration, but administrative commitment is necessary for a successful program. In addition, the administrative personnel must be fully committed to an operational concept of career education. This operational concept must be founded upon a clearly defined philosophical base. Special responsibilities of administration include: (1) designation of an individual to coordinate the career education effort, (2) allocation of resources, and (3) initiation of a career education task force composed of faculty. It has been illustrated by leading institutions with effective career education programs that the career education task force or committee is the basic foundation of a successful program. That task force should be representative of each department or program area and its responsibilities should include:

1. Processing a separate course in career education through the appropriate committee and developing an acceptable course outline. (Course for education majors)
2. Establishing an operational definition of career education which is acceptable to the teacher education faculty.
3. Ascertaining resources within the college which are available for use in implementing career education.

4. Insuring the competence of the instructor in his knowledge of the functions of guidance and counseling, world of work reality program development and methods of implementing career education.
5. Making short and long term plans for a career education inservice program.
6. Developing a program to sensitize the faculty to the merits of career education. (Recent programs have shown that involvement with the concept is the best way to convince education faculty of the values and needs of career education.)

A program cannot get off the ground without administrative support, but the faculty can initiate change and lead in the change once administrative support is obtained. Some steps teacher educators might consider are:

1. To take leadership in facilitating educational experiences (workshops, seminars, modules, etc.) which will qualify future teachers to assume leadership roles in the implementation of career education K-12.
2. To develop a career education resource center in conjunction with various departments throughout the university or college.
3. To initiate inservice educational opportunities for teachers and prepare to give assistance in curriculum revision.
4. To develop a significant thrust in research and services.
5. To provide data about career education projects.

Of course there are many other considerations to be reviewed in developing a good career education core but the above suggestions are an adequate outline of how to begin.

And begin we must because when one examines the activities of an individual in a 24 hour period, it is found that work, paid and non-paid, dominates. Work is important, yet there seems to be an artificial barrier between the working world and the public school classroom. This barrier presents an obstacle to the linking of two elements which are necessary for a person to function positively in our complex industrial-service economy.

Society demands a great deal from our schools. Presently, specific elements of that society are asking for schools to recognize that there is a need to prepare an individual to function in the world of work (both as an individual person and as a worker). It is becoming more evident that career education can assist in meeting the challenge. Career education is spreading rapidly among K-12 teachers. Many teachers are now seeing career education as a tool to provide students with skills, to help students explore careers, to help students establish their identity in the working world, to prepare students for transition from school to jobs. Career education is no "fly-by-night" passing fad. "Grass roots" level teachers have recognized this and made a serious commitment to the movement. The time is long past for teacher-educators to do the same. It is a humiliation that higher education is the link that weakens the entire chain.

References

¹ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. An Introduction to Career Education, Washington, D.C.: Office of Career Education, 1974

² Ibid.