

The 2006 ACTER Presidential Address: The Premier Educational Delivery System

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The public's perception of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is one of confusion. Most people, including educators, expect that public schools should be accountable and should have high standards. Yet, when thoroughly investigated, NCLB goals are statistically impossible to achieve and actually punish schools with high percentages of minorities and underrepresented populations. In addition, school systems in low socioeconomic status (SES) areas are destined for failure as well. Students attracted to Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs generally favor hands-on learning methods called kinesthetic learning style, which is not easily or usually tested on high stakes tests that are required by NCLB. Therefore, across the country, school districts are narrowing their educational delivery methods and replacing CTE classes with remedial education classes. Interestingly though, not one positive effect on learning and retention was found in 144 studies that evaluated remedial education efforts. Further, by limiting course offerings (that is replacing CTE which can address all learning styles with remediation courses), schools are inadvertently destining their students for more failures because students who learn kinesthetically will become even more disenfranchised with school. There is hope. A historical look at the educational process embedded within CTE, versus only focusing on CTE outcomes, is the answer for American education.

Figure 1 illustrates "Determinates of Excellence in Vocational Education" since the 1900s (Rosenfeld, 1987). Specifically, the chart highlights over time what attributes (i.e., basic competencies or academics, job-specific skills, or economic development) were associated with good and effective vocational education programs. At the turn of the last century, education in the public schools was boring, entailing mostly memorization of facts and regurgitation of those facts on tests. However, most young people did not complete grade school education, much less high school. Regardless, education was becoming more important in the United States and there were numerous outcries for educational reform from all sectors of society.

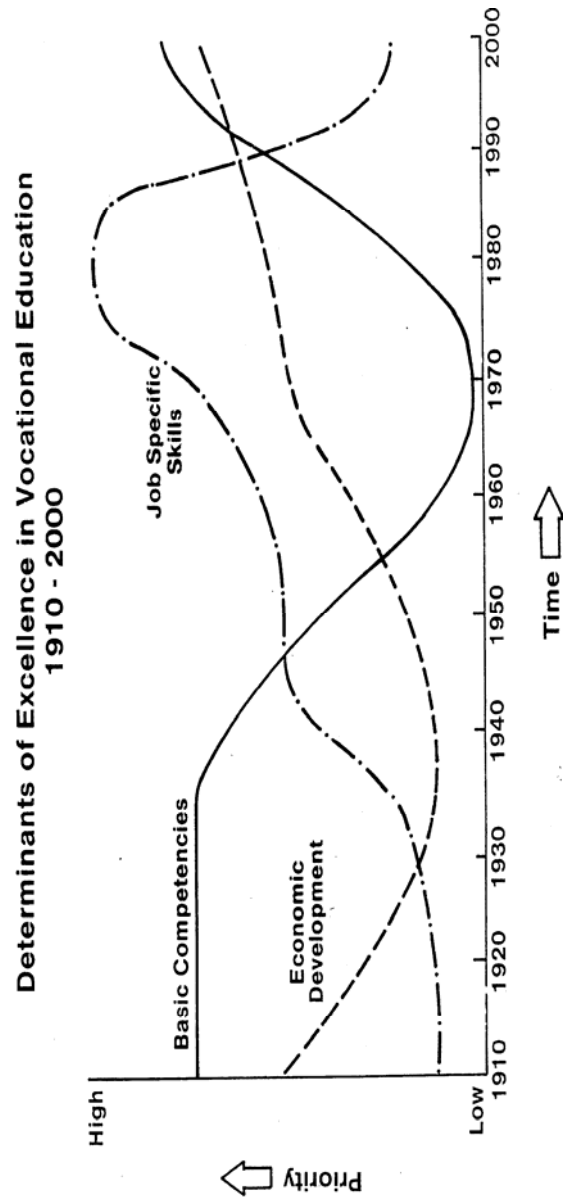


Figure 1. Determinants of Excellence in Vocational Education: 1910-2000¹

¹ From "Determinants of excellence in vocational education," by S. Rosenfeld, 1987. In *Design Papers for the National Assessment of Vocational Education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Rufus Stimson, President of the Connecticut Agricultural College (now the University of Connecticut), quit his job to become a high school teacher. He did so to test his theory of education which was to see if academics could learn better in an applied setting. His high school students in Northampton, Massachusetts came from the agrarian countryside with hundreds of unanswered questions about their farms. Professor Stimson used this natural curiosity in his classes and fine-tuned the problem solving approach to teaching, which became the beginnings of vocational education and was the impetus for including experiential education activities within vocational legislation. The important point of this era was that good and effective vocational education programs were reinforcing academics through applied and relevant activities.

This interesting and usually forgotten CTE origin is the essence of being a premier educational delivery system. Figure 2 identifies from research, various educational and developmental delivery systems and their relationship with effective education. Effective education is defined as a delivery system that focuses on retention of content and skills by addressing the learning styles of all students, in every class everyday. As clearly shown in Figure 2, Career and Technical Education is poised to be the best or premier educational delivery system in the country. The chart emphasizes the relationships among CTE and other well-known educational and developmental efforts. What went wrong? Why is CTE often left out of discussions about improving our educational situation? Looking back at Figure 1 and the era that began in the 1930s gives us that answer.

Because of the World Wars and the country coming out of the depression, funds were tight and early vocational education leaders marketed “Voc Ed” as the answer to improving economic development by training people for specific jobs in the workplace. As the chart shows, “job-specific skills” became the dominant attribute of the time and slowly academics became non-existent in our delivery system. In fact, the non-emphasis on academics became so pervasive that during the time when most of our current legislators, administrators, and voters came through high school in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s vocational education was, in many cases, viewed as the dumping ground and oftentimes regarded as the equivalent of special education. This phenomena is why many people today still view CTE as a place for other people’s children. Many vocational education articles of that era centered on training-related placement. The irony was that business and industry quit looking to vocational education graduates as a first choice for new employees because many of them lacked the basic competencies that were needed in the workplace. It was also during these three decades that many university vocational teacher education departments were downsized and eliminated because the tie to academics and scholarship was forgotten. Our emphasis on our product, a trained student, and not on our original comprehensive educational process evolved into an educational delivery system that was not even mentioned in “A Nation At Risk.”

Delivery Efforts	Content	Application	Motivation
Career & Technical Education	Technical Instruction (Classroom)	Experiential Development (Laboratory & Work-Based Learning including educational home visits)	Personal & Leadership Development [Intra-curricular] (CTE Student Organization)
Domains of Learning	Cognitive	Psychomotor	Affective
7-Habits of Highly Effective People (Covey, 1989)	Knowledge	Skill	Desire
Center for Occupational Research & Development (CORD)	Academics	Skill Building Hands-on	Character Building
National Governor's Association Educational Plan	Rigor	Relevance	Relationship
Academic Class	Content Delivered	Not Applicable Usually	Not Applicable Usually

Figure 2. Educational and Developmental Delivery System

The vocational education world was in an uproar in the 1980s because of the educational reform movements that were spawned by the emergency situation within our public schools and emphasized in “A Nation At Risk.” The crossing of lines in Figure 1 in the 1990s shows that vocational educators received the message that unless we change, we will not even be considered as a viable component in today’s educational world. A return to the past was prominent throughout the country. Research began documenting the positive academic effects of vocational education graduates. Workshops centered on integrating academics within vocational programs. A dual emphasis on graduates emerged, one that touted entering the workforce and continuing education. The more the educational community questioned the value of vocational education, the more it became apparent that the new “Voc Ed,” now called Career and Technical Education was actually more relevant today than ever. In the turbulent educational reform world, other educational delivery systems have mirrored CTE, focusing on rigor, relevance, and relationships. The ultimate irony is that we have had the best and most effective teaching strategies since our beginnings. However, because of what we emphasized as “Determinants of Excellence” throughout our history, we have a ways to go to get others to believe that CTE has a place in today’s educational settings for all students.

Career and Technical Education is the premier educational delivery system in the world. It addresses all learning styles by employing pedagogical strategies that embrace all of the multiple intelligence areas and incorporate the current knowledge in brain-based research. In fact, CTE educational strategies are utilized in the top 30 academic schools in America. In summary, Career and Technical Education employs the best teaching strategies to reach all students, in all classes, everyday, if learning and retention are the outcomes.

References

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