A PERSPECTIVE ON THE INTEGRATION OF ACADEMICS AND CTE

By
Dan Segebarth, Retired Dean of Career Education-South Suburban College; Consultant-Workforce Solutions-Homewood, Illinois

In 1917 - Municipally owned street cars begin to operate in San Francisco; The first Jazz record, “Dark Town Strutters Ball” is released; Seattle becomes the first U. S. team to win the Stanley Cup; The first Pulitzer Prize was awarded; The Raggedy Ann doll is invented; Boys Town is founded; U. S. Enters World War I; The Chicago White Sox beat the New York Giants to win the World Series.

During that same year, Congress passes the Smith Hughes Act to develop vocational education and it became one of the most successful curricular movements of the 20th century. John Dewey (1944) argued however for designing curricula so that students could be educated through the occupations rather than for the occupations. Grubb et al. (1991) stated: Vocational and academic education have been growing apart at least since 1890; the split between the two is a deep one-one which affects content and purpose, teaching methods, teacher training and philosophy, the kinds of students in vocational and academic programs, and status. Healing this division is a difficult and time-consuming process.

The image of vocational education has sometimes been viewed as an inferior educational option for some students. Students who experience difficulty in academic subjects were prescribed to “vocational courses”. This image remains to some extent. In community colleges we often refer to the silos of CTE and Liberal Arts.

In recent years we have heard from organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers that public schools are not providing employees qualified for entry level positions. National and International student achievement data reveal that on a variety of STEM indicators, many high school graduates are not prepared for post-secondary education and work.

Today, in an attempt to improve student outcomes, we have the updated Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act, sometimes referred to as Perkins IV. The legislation requires the integration of rigorous and challenging academic and CTE. The term “Curriculum Integration” is not used in Perkins IV. This lack of definition has made it difficult to reach a common understanding of terminology and concepts.

Recognizing the need for a common vision, the Illinois Community College Board, working with Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCR) surveyed Illinois Community Colleges in 1997 and produced a report, Integration of Academics and Occupational Education in Illinois Community College System. A White Paper, Blurring the Lines: Integrating Academic and Occupational Instruction at the Community College was prepared based on the work of the Illinois Task Force on Academic/Occupational Education. The strategies or models for academic and occupational education integration discussed in the report are: 1) Infused academic and occupational content; 2) linked or cluster courses: 3) interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary courses; 4) learning communities; 5) work based learning and 6) technology-enhanced instruction.

Grubb et al. (1991) based on observation of integration efforts at schools across the country, identified eight models of curriculum integration efforts. 1. Incorporating more academic content in vocational courses: The CTE teacher incorporates more academic content into their instructional lessons; 2. Combining vocational and academic teachers to enhance academic competencies in vocational programs: The academic and CTE teachers collectively combine academic and CTE content into both subject areas; 3. Making academic courses more vocationally relevant: The academic teachers incorporate CTE subject matter into their lessons; 4. Curricular “alignment:” The modification of both CTE and academic courses; 5. Senior projects: The collective efforts of the academic and CTE teachers in organizing curriculum around student projects; 6. Academy model: School-within-a school concept in which a team of teachers collaborate using a team teaching method to the same group of students; 7. Occupational high schools and magnet schools: A collaboration process between academic and CTE teachers in aligning courses in specific occupational areas; and 8. Occupational clusters, career paths and occupational majors: Academic and CTE teachers usually belong to occupational clusters rather than departments, thus encouraging collaboration.

The National Research Center for Career and Technical Education in its report, Capitalizing on Context: Curriculum Integration in Career and Technical Education, (2010) proposed two classifications of curriculum integration that emerged from a review of
the literature: a.) Context based approach (applied academics is an example) and b.) Contextualized approach. Through the review and development of several research studies, including Math in CTE (2006), NRCCTE identified five core principles essential to successful integration. These principles are found on page 6 of the Research Snapshot - Capitalizing on Context: Curriculum Integration in Career and Technical Education.

Dolores Perin, Facilitating Student Learning through Contextualization (Community College Research Center Working Paper #29 (2011) reviewed 27 studies that looked at basic skills and contextualization in community colleges. She concluded “There is support in the literature for two forms of contextualization identified in this review, contextualized instruction, which is taught by developmental education instructors and English and English language arts teachers, and integrated instruction which is provided by discipline area instructors.

Finally, what is meant by the integration of academics and CTE? Many believe the definition should consist of Integration=interdisciplinary; collaboration and connections. The NRCCTE research identifies the need to develop a “community of practice among teachers”. Perin recommends “create conditions for interdisciplinary collaboration so that basic skills and content area instructors can familiarize each other with their curricula, assessments, standards and techniques”.

Bragg et al. (1997) concluded that “If the goal of helping students learn more and better is a priority to Illinois’ community colleges, then, curriculum integration is a necessity. And, if the commitment to stopping the isolation of academic and occupational education is real, stronger linkages must be created. Quoting from the closing statement of the Illinois Task Force on Integration report: Changing how education is provided does not come without cost...The cost of collaboration for release time and possibly increased staffing, the cost of reformulating existing systems, and the cost of engaging reluctant instructors and administrators can pose a burden. Leadership and commitment from community college administrators is critical, and resources and support from local, state, and national sources is essential to ease the transition.” (Task Force on Integration, p23.)

Throughout the Summit you will hear several best practices to promote the integration of academics and CTE. The question we need to ask ourselves is what actions have we taken to react to the above statement of the Task Force on Integration? What models of Curriculum Integration is your institution currently implementing? How has your institution promoted collaboration between academic and CTE faculty?

1917 Historical Information; www.historyorb.com

Bragg et al. (1997) Integration of Academic and Occupational Education in the Illinois Community College System. Office of Community College Research and Leadership; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


