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ABSTRACT

This brief suggests that vocational educators may be unclear as to whether they have accomplished integration of vocational and academic education because of the multistage nature of the process. The three stages suggest a continuum of professional growth, as vocational and academic educators first become aware of limitations of the status quo, begin to explore ways to enhance their own curriculum content, and finally move into integrated planning and teaching. Although academic educators are applauded for working through the first two stages, vocational educators must begin exploring the process to be ready for collaborative efforts at the same time as the academic educators. The first stage of integration is one of awareness. Vocational teachers must begin to recognize the limitations of teaching only a trade skill, when workplace needs have changed. In the second stage, teachers begin to experiment with curriculum-enhancement techniques. Vocational teachers must begin expanding their trade-specific content to include academic content and process skills. Stage three involves collaboration and planning between vocational and academic teachers. Vocational educators must initiate this process, since vocational programs are most at risk. This stage can be accomplished by following three steps: become familiar with the materials the academic teachers use; reach out to the academic teachers; and begin building partnerships with academic teachers by offering materials, demonstrations, and student exchanges. (YLB)

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The Stages of Vocational/Academic Integration for Vocational Educators

The integration of vocational and academic education has been identified as an important goal for high schools in the United States to achieve. This integration will benefit all students, but especially that group of students not likely to pursue, or succeed in, a four-year college program. Unfortunately, the details of vocational and academic integration are not clearly described, often leaving educators unclear as to whether they have indeed accomplished "integration". One of the causes of this confusion is the multi-stage nature of the integration process. Educators in the beginning stages may feel they have adequately succeeded at integration and may not move on to the complete integration that would truly benefit the targeted students.

The three stages of integration suggest a continuum of professional growth, as vocational and academic educators first become aware of the limitations of the status quo, begin to explore ways to enhance their own curriculum content, and finally move into integrated planning and teaching. While academic educators are often applauded for working through the first two stages, vocational educators have not realized that they have an equal responsibility to participate in the process of integration.

There is some concern that academic educators, with the assistance of curriculum developers and textbook publishers, will claim to be using integrated curriculum—without input from vocational educators at all. It is entirely possible for schools to continue their push toward applied academics courses, while phasing out trade-specific vocational programs. These programs may be encouraged to become postsecondary education options only. Vocational educators must begin exploring the process of integration so they are ready for collaborative efforts at the same time as the academic educators.

Stage One: Awareness

The first stage of integration is one of awareness. In this stage, academic teachers begin to recognize the limitations of their one-sided approach to education. With their focus on academic content, especially the emphasis on test scores, lecture method, and college prep students, they may feel frustrated as they recognize the inadequacy of this focus for many students. They begin to consider the problem that traditional approaches do not meet the needs of all students. As vocational teachers, you must also begin to recognize the limitations of teaching only a trade skill, when the needs of the workplace have changed. Many trade skills no longer lead to secure employment. Workers of the future must have better communication skills, be able to work in teams, and make decisions on their own. You must consider the challenge of changing a curriculum you are very comfortable teaching.

The awareness of the need to change in this first stage may come about individually, as you keep in touch with your students' needs and the changing needs of the workplace; or it may be imposed from the administration, your colleagues and the community. Some of you more willingly adapt to changes in your field, while others resist attempts to consider the problem. In this awareness stage, you must consider not only the changing world but also your own willingness to change.

Stage Two: Curriculum-enhancement techniques

In the second stage of integration, teachers begin to experiment with curriculum-enhancement techniques, such as applied academics, and academically-enhanced vocational programs. Math teachers may, as an example, explore the new applied academics textbooks to attempt to capture the interest of students who do not relate well to straight lecture method. These students need a more hands-on approach to succeed. As vocational teachers, you should begin identifying the mathematical principles you are using in your trade area. This is a big step, but a critical one. You must begin expanding your trade-specific content to include academically-related content and process skills.

As you know, vocational programs are a natural combination of academic content with an applied learning context. Most young people respond well to the hands-on approach to learning, even college-prep stu-

dents. However, many students—academic and vocational—who could benefit from our programs do not choose to enroll. These students may be influenced by peers, academic teachers, guidance counselors and parents who fear choosing our vocational programs will close doors to future opportunities in postsecondary education. It is critical to our survival that teachers, students and parents see us as a viable option at the secondary level. Vocational educators must take the lead and help move secondary education into stage three of the integration process.

Stage Three: Collaboration and Planning

Stage three involves collaboration and planning between vocational and academic teachers. Vocational educators must initiate this process, since it is vocational programs that are most at risk. This third stage can be accomplished by following three simple steps.

Step One

The first step is to take time to become familiar with the materials being used by your academic teachers. You may need to borrow these materials, go to the academic classroom to see them, or suggest that a set be purchased for your vocational school. As you explore the materials, you will discover many academic concepts you use every day and many activities related to your trade area. Make a note of where these concepts and activities can be found and who might be teaching them.

Step Two

The second step is to reach out to the academic teachers. Often, the academic teacher must collect materials to conduct experiments and demonstrations. These activities are sometimes new, and unfamiliar, methods for academic teachers. Recognize that you can be a valuable resource for them, but only if you let the teacher know what you have to offer. You can reach out in person at the next faculty meeting. You could phone or write a note to a specific teacher who is teaching a concept using an example related to your trade. If you are familiar with the materials being used in the academic classrooms, you will know what you have to offer.

Step Three

The third step in this process is to begin building partnerships with academic teachers. You could offer materials, demonstrations and student exchanges. You should also enhance the academic component of your curriculum. For example...

Did you know...when students learn about ratios and proportions in math class, they may refer to an illustration of roof pitch? Do you use the correct terminology of proportions when you teach the concept? Could your carpentry class offer to demonstrate these principles? Or share equipment with the math class? Or invite the math students (and teacher) to come to your classroom to do some hands-on construction? Could your students' carpentry projects be accepted for a math grade?

Did you know...in biology class students may learn about microorganisms and do a small experiment with yeast? Do you describe the science concepts taking place when you teach about yeast in your food service class? Could your class plan a demonstration for the science class? Or could you supply the science class with the materials to do the experiment? Or invite the science students (and teacher) to your class for a hands-on activity of bread baking? Could a written description of the bread baking process, using science terminology, count as a science project grade and/or an English grade?

Did you know...in English, students may learn about following directions, reading charts and illustrations? Doesn't any vocational curriculum involve these skills? Do you take the time to explain how an effective illustration is made? Check how these skills are taught in the academic classroom and reinforce them by using a similar process to teach them. Your vocational program provides the perfect context for these communication skills. Could directions and charts created in your program count for an English grade?

Did you know...in physics class the basics of an electrical circuit are introduced? Are you explaining the scientific principles with the same terminology in your electrical shop? The academic students need equipment or they must learn by looking at the pictures in the book. Could your shop provide a demonstration for the physics class? Or help build the equipment? Or invite the class (and teacher) to your vocational shop to work on the project?

The opportunities are endless for integration activities. The benefits to vocational education are enormous. You will enhance the professional image of vocational educators by showing you are in touch with the academic content of your profession and the academic and vocational needs of your students. You will enhance the image of vocational education with students. They will begin to see the value of the discipline you teach. They will also benefit by watching your intercollegial cooperation with the academic teachers. And most importantly, you will help build effective meaning for students . . . and that's why we're in this business. Right? Right!

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