

CAREER EXPLORATION FAIR

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Abstract

The career exploration fair is a collaborative community project designed to promote career exploration. The fair provides students with direct exposure to a variety of occupations and brings the notion of career development into focus. In addition to its educational benefits the fair is a vehicle for the school and the community to work together as equal partners in the development of the community and its youth.

Résumé

La foire visant l'exploration de carrières est un projet communautaire qui témoigne de beaucoup de collaboration. Elle fournit aux étudiants un contact direct avec une variété de carrières et met en relief le processus de choisir une carrière. Une telle foire comporte non seulement de précieux bienfaits éducatifs mais s'avère un outil précieux pour l'école et la communauté afin de collaborer dans le développement de la communauté et de la jeunesse.

CAREER EXPLORATION

Career education is increasingly being emphasized within the total educational process as a response to the need for more competent people.

Career education is the total effort of public education and the community to help all individuals become familiar with the values of a work-oriented society, to integrate these values into their personal value systems, and to implement these values in their lives in such a way that work becomes possible, meaningful, and satisfying to each individual (Chamber of Commerce of the United States, 1975, p. 4).

Unlike earlier educational concepts, career education is not something that the schools can do by themselves. Rather, at its basic-roots, the career education movement is a collaborative effort of the formal educational system and the business-labour-industrial community. One of the best examples of this collaborative effort is the career exploration fair. This paper considers the fair within the context of career education. Some major career education parameters are discussed and then the career exploration fair is described.

Career Education Goals

The career education goals are a response to the presence of some very real shortcomings in

the preparation of young people for work. Instead of developing readiness for entry into an occupation, education has become, for many students, simply a stepping stone to more education. Consequently many school experiences are focussed on what happens in the classroom rather than outside. Approximately 75% of secondary school students are enrolled in courses of study which have as a major emphasis preparation for university. However, when looking at the world of work, only about 20% of job titles require a university degree. In addition, many young people are not provided with the skill and knowledge to help them adjust to changes in employment opportunities. Youth unemployment is consistently four times greater than adult unemployment and turnover is also higher. An individual in our society normally changes occupational emphasis three to five times during his or her work life. Finally, career exploration, for many students begins after they leave school rather than their early learning years when there is ample time for them to develop areas of work interest and competence.

The general goals of career education are to prepare all students for a successful life of work by increasing their options for occupational choice and by enhancing learning achievement in all subject areas at all levels. Some of the specific goals are:

- (1) To develop favorable attitudes toward the personal, psychological, social, and economic significance of work;
- (2) To develop appreciation for all types and levels of work;
- (3) To develop career decision-making skills;
- (4) To develop capabilities for establishing career goals consistent with individual desires, needs, and opportunities; and
- (5) To develop knowledge, skill, and attitudes necessary for entry and success in a career.

Career exploration is a means for enhancing students' opportunities to attain these goals.

Career Exploration Fairs

The career exploration fair is a broad spectrum of occupations. The displays are staffed by workers engaged directly in the job titles within that occupational grouping. The displays have an experiential emphasis so that in a short time students can get a real feeling for what the job/s are like. The career exploration fair provides students/visitors with an opportunity during several hours to have a direct encounter with a wide range of different jobs and workers.

The career exploration fair has had many predecessors such as career days, business education days, and career fairs. The focus of the career exploration fair is on career exploration, rather than on job-finding; its basic nature is educational rather than entertainment; its need is established through assessment rather than through the wishes of some interest groups; and its planning and organization is carried out by a total community effort rather than being left solely to the energies and resources of the educational system. The fair concept addresses the awareness and exploration phases of career development (Jordaan, 1974; Tuckman, 1974; Super, 1957).

The basic objective of a career exploration fair is to present the broadest possible representation of the sixty-seven hundred occupations (21,000 job titles) which comprise the Canadian work force. In order to achieve this in a physical setting, some organizational grouping of these thousands of job titles is necessary. Therefore a clustering of these categories is essential. These are: Agri-Business and Natural Resources, Business and Office, Environment, Public Service, Health Services, Communication and Media, Hospitality and Recreation, Manufacturing, Marketing and Distribution, Construction, Personal Services, Transportation, and Fine Arts and Humanities. The clustering organizes the occupations and the career education curriculum materials for the fair. The fair requires a large, centrally located convention

complex with participative exhibits suitable for an elementary and junior secondary age group.

Partners in the Career Exploration Fair

Three cooperating groups are required to make the fair a reality: an organization of professional volunteers whose primary function is to act as a catalyst; the educational community; and private and public business and industry, organized labour, and trade and professional organizations. The professional volunteers' goal is to bring together the educational institutions who prepare youth for work and the business-labour-industrial community who provide youth with work. It is essential that this group has an understanding and a commitment to the basic philosophical assumptions of career education; a high level of motivation since a great amount of personal time and energy is required; a history of effective public service; and a wide variety of expertise including fund raising skills, experience in public relations, and the ability to teach and train others.

Schools and school districts have to be committed to the philosophical assumptions of career education, the career exploration fair, and its program implications; conduct needs assessments with students and teaching staffs; and provide personnel for planning, organizing, and staging the career exploration fair. This would include the provision of time for student preparation and follow-up, supervision during the fair, transportation for students to the fair, and the preparation of curriculum materials prior to and following the fair.

The business-labour-industrial community makes the greatest investment in dollars and personnel for the project. This group must have an understanding and acceptance of the career education assumptions and the objectives of the career exploration fair; provide personnel and budget for planning, organizing, and staging the career exploration fair; and have a commitment to follow-up activities such as industrial plant tours, field trips, internships, and other related work experience and pre-employment activities.

Benefits from the Career Exploration Fair

The fair has payoffs for everyone involved. Students have an opportunity to experience hundreds of occupations, interact with people actually performing those jobs, and engage in real or simulated job functions. They can compare their interests and capabilities with job demands, employer expectations and worker experience and see how their school learning relates to work. The educational community benefits in knowing that it has provided a significant learning experience for students in

career awareness and career exploration. Teachers are provided with resources that are not normally available and become aware that the business-labour-industrial community is vitally interested in and capable of making significant contributions to the educational process. Finally, the fair provides educators with a means of helping students develop career decision making skills. The business-labour-industrial community starts to build a better informed labour pool by demonstrating the kind of person it takes to work including personal qualities, work attitudes and habits, training and skills, and job performance requirements. Through participating in the planning, preparation, and staging of the fair, they become full partners in the educational process.

The career exploration fair is a viable approach for providing students with career awareness and exploration activities. These are essential steps in the career developmental process. The efforts required for its implementation are balanced by its unique contribution. It provides a broad and realistic introduction for students to the world of work, an experience that

is otherwise not available. It simultaneously addresses many of the career education goals and is a model of a collaborative community relationship that has many potential applications. The career exploration fair gives the quality and extent of exposure to the world of work that is required for the preparation for work to be seen as an integral part of the educational process.

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