

CAREER EDUCATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper identifies some career education assumptions, describes the characteristics of experiential learning, and illustrates how experiential learning is suited to address the career education assumptions. These assumptions focus on work values; self understanding; personal, occupational and socio-economic information; academic, decision-making and job skills; and adaptability. Involvement, relevance and participant responsibility generated by experiential learning are compatible with the career education assumptions. An example is provided to illustrate this compatibility. Experiential learning is career education.

Résumé

Cet article met en relief certaines suppositions au sujet de l'éducation professionnelle, décrit les caractéristiques de l'apprentissage expérientiel et démontre comment cet apprentissage peut servir à répondre aux suppositions de l'éducation professionnelle. Ces suppositions sont reliées aux valeurs du travail, à la compréhension de soi, à l'information professionnelle, socio-économique et professionnelle, aux habiletés d'apprendre, de prendre des décisions et de travailler et enfin, à l'adaptabilité. La participation, la pertinence et la responsabilité qu'engendre l'apprentissage expérientiel s'accordent bien avec les suppositions de l'éducation professionnelle. On présente un exemple pour illustrer cette compatibilité. L'apprentissage expérientiel, c'est l'éducation professionnelle.

Currently, one of the major emphases in our educational system is to provide opportunities for young people to engage in career planning, in career development, and to acquire career decision-making strategies. During the past decade educators have labelled this emphasis career education.

Career education seeks to enable all persons to make personal, informed career choices as they proceed through life. To do this, they must learn to identify their strengths, weaknesses, interests and aversions (Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America, 1975, p. 3).

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the characteristics of experience based instruction address the widely accepted career education assumptions. An example is provided to illustrate how the career education/experiential learning linkage occurs.

Some Assumptions of Career Education

Career education assumptions address three major areas. The first deals with values related to

work; the second, with knowledge necessary to make effective career decisions; and the third, with skills required to handle changing career requirements. The following five assumptions address one or more of these three areas.

First, in our society, certain values are attached to work. From the career education perspective, work is seen as an integral part of life. To a large extent, people form their identities from the nature of the work they do. In addition to having a positive attitude towards work, learning effective work habits is also important. Qualities such as promptness, conscientiousness, completion of a task, and pride in the activities undertaken are attitudes and habits acquired long before people enter the work force. Work values learned while going to school will be taken directly to the job.

The second assumption concerns the need for people to understand themselves in a developmental context. Self understanding on the one hand encompasses an awareness of one's abilities, attitudes, limitations, preferences, in-

terests, personal characteristics, and energy; and, on the other hand, it addresses one's aspirations, directions, goals, life style, and contentment. The extent to which people can gain a sense of productivity and accomplishment from all work, see how these activities provide life with purpose and meaning, and are able to integrate work into their total life style is indicative of their position in the developmental sequence.

The third assumption is that people require three different kinds of information to grow and develop: personal, occupational, and socio-economic. Personal information includes potential, capabilities, interests, and comparison with others on these dimensions. Achievement in school, psychometric evaluation, counselling, and work experience provide this kind of information. In addition, participation and feedback from others in a variety of situations, such as hobbies, travel, and other social and recreational activities provide people with a sense of who they are and what they can do. Occupational information includes descriptions of occupational groupings and the characteristics of specific jobs within them. The Canadian Classification and Dictionary of Occupations (CCDO) contains 6,700 occupations which encompass 21,000 job titles. This is the major source of standardized occupational information across Canada. C.H.O.I.C.E.S., a computerized occupational retrieval system based on the CCDO, allows people to match their interests, preferences, abilities, and qualifications with jobs. Short term and long term forecasts of job needs are also available. Socio-economic information includes a knowledge of government at all levels, organized labour, public and private employment sectors, social and cultural characteristics of a community, and a basic understanding of fundamental economic principles.

The fourth assumption addresses the responsibility of education in providing young people with life skills. These include basic academic skills, decision-making skills, and job finding and holding skills. Educators have always been concerned about excellence in basic academic skills: reading, writing, and mathematics. Career education supports this position and provides people with a clear sense of how basic academic skills are linked to job demands.

People require decision-making skills to make career choices. The content of their decisions will vary with their developmental level. However, the quality of those decisions, at any level, is dependent upon an effective decision-making strategy. The following is a model decision-making sequence (Likert and Likert, 1976):

1. Define the real problem or issue and state it clearly.

2. Identify the essential conditions or criteria which must be contained in a solution. In addition, identify any other conditions which would be desirable, but not essential.
3. Seek out a variety of alternatives in approaching the problem. Use different perspectives from which to view the problem to provide a diversity of potential solutions.
4. Collect all relevant facts so that each potential solution can be assessed in terms of its suitability in meeting the criteria necessary for an acceptable solution.
5. Through comparison, evaluate the suggested solutions against the essential and desirable outcomes.
6. Choose the solution which meets all of the essential criteria and the largest number of desirable conditions.
7. Apply the solution to establish its validity in solving the problem.
8. Since career decisions are in a constant state of process, adjustments and fine tuning of the above processes are necessary.

This decision-making process is sufficiently flexible to accommodate a person's changing emphasis in striving to meet career needs and goals.

Job finding skills include having gathered the necessary information about the job and how one's abilities are related to it and being able to communicate this understanding clearly through speaking and writing. The essential conditions for maintaining a job are meeting the requirements of the job and having the interpersonal competence to get along with others.

The fifth career education assumption is adaptability. Because of the rapid rate of technological and social change, people are preparing themselves today for a way of life that might not exist five or ten years from now. One of the responsibilities of education is to provide people with experiences which will enable them to apply all of their learning to the inevitable change that will confront them.

Experiential Learning

Experience-based learning or experiential learning engages people directly in a learning process through activities which are designed to demonstrate, simulate, and emphasize the topic under consideration. This approach to instruction takes all aspects of the person into account during the learning process. The resulting focus on the total person is at once compatible with career education. Although the central quality of experiential learning is involvement, it has a

number of other important characteristics. These are relevance, responsibility, flexibility and scope.

Active involvement facilitates learning. The satisfaction gained from direct participation in a task is motivating and self reinforcing. Not only do most people find it more satisfying to be active than passive, but through activity, they are also provided with an opportunity to meet some of their mastery needs over the environment (Erikson, 1950). Involvement in the learning process builds commitment and results in people investing higher levels of energy in addressing the goals of the learning experience. People are rewarded by their participation in the learning process through cognitive and affective stimulation from the tasks through interactions and relationships with others as well as from the actual outcome of the learning experience.

By involving people in the experiences, the direct application of the material being covered can be clearly illustrated. This provides a sense of relevance which is often more difficult to achieve using only lectures, assigned readings, and written tasks. Consequently, people are in a better position to understand why certain material is being presented. The content, when addressed in this manner, has increased credibility since it is the application of the knowledge, rather than the knowledge itself, which gives that knowledge meaning. The interactional nature of many of the activities also contributes to its relevance since people know they are going to have to deal with others in most situations throughout the rest of their lives.

Experiential learning enables people to assume greater responsibility in establishing learning goals, and doing what is necessary to achieve these goals. The choice as to how much energy they invest in and what they hope to gain from this process is entirely up to them. Consequently, people experience the relationship between invested responsibility and outcome. Flexibility is another quality of experiential learning. People can pursue different needs simultaneously during the same learning experience. Not only can a wide variety of needs be addressed, but also a wide variety of topics can be presented. Finally, the experiential learning process has advantages in terms of its scope. Most traditional learning situations primarily address cognitive objectives. Experiential approaches integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of behaviour, which is the way people really are.

Integrating Career Education and Experiential Learning

The characteristics of experiential learning and the career education assumptions have three important areas of compatibility: an emphasis on

the whole person, a common value base, and agreement on the components of meaningful learning. Career education sees the individual as a complete person over time. This implies dealing with cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development continuously throughout the person's life. People's identities are a composite of all their life experiences. This identity process begins in early childhood and is developed, refined, and supported through schooling, recreational and leisure activities, employment, social relationships, family, and community interactions. The experiential learning process takes people as they see themselves and provides an opportunity for them to be more aware of how they are and, through feedback, how they might be. Experiential learning engages people in thinking, feeling, and doing through a variety of tasks which create an awareness for them that they must deal with themselves as complete human beings.

Career education values the person's uniqueness, competence, and potential for growth. Experiential learning permits people to be themselves in the pursuit of any learning objective. People fashion their own responses to the learning situation and learn from these responses. Learning evolves out of having the freedom to respond spontaneously. Experiential learning addresses competence squarely by requiring people to do specific tasks within the learning environment and be held accountable for those tasks. Underlying this request is a firm belief that people have the capability to perform the tasks and learn through the feedback they receive. Since people have a great deal of choice in how they might respond in any given situation, their innovativeness and creativity are tapped and challenged.

For career education learning must be relevant, build responsibility, and be seen as a process rather than as an event. Experiential learning, by its very nature, demonstrates the meaning or relevance of the topic under consideration. This demonstration is achieved by virtue of the experience. People are not left searching for abstract reasons why particular information is relevant or how that information might be applied. The success of an experiential learning activity rests heavily on people assuming responsibility for their behaviour within that context. When they are given clear choices around responsibility for their behaviour, they can experience the consequences of responsible versus irresponsible behaviour. A major part of taking responsibility is becoming involved in the activities. Involvement has a commitment building quality to it which results in people being invested in the learning process and in its effectiveness. Finally, the curriculum in experien-

tial learning is the process as well as the content and this focus underscores career education's emphasis on the ongoing nature of learning. The way people approach a particular learning task is as important or possibly more important than the task itself. An important component of this process is relationships with other people. Interpersonal relationships are a central career education emphasis and a core component of any experiential learning activity. Marshall McLuhan stated "the medium is the message" and if the message for career education is that learning is an ongoing process, experiential learning is a powerful medium through which that message can be transmitted.

Experiential Learning Methods

Experiential learning is comprised of a variety of instructional methods. The methods listed below were selected because they are readily accessible, do not require complex or sophisticated supporting hardware, and can be used without special talents or the development of an unreasonable number of new skills.

1. Simulations are models or representations of some facet of the human experience.
2. Exercises are activities used to get people directly engaged in the content under discussion.
3. Group and/or diad, trio, and quartet interactions are used as formats for people to discuss any of a wide variety of topics.
4. Role playing requires people to assume a prescribed perspective or orientation while performing a given task.
5. Tasks, projects, and field experiences use real problems as the focus of study, both in terms of the content of the particular task and the process taken by the person or group in addressing it.
6. Fantasy or guided imagery is an approach to help people explore their feelings and thoughts around different issues.
7. Audio-visual methods use photographs, films, and audio and video tapes to illustrate the content and stimulate discussion.
8. Process observation involves some people watching others in an activity and then providing feedback on their participation in that task.
9. Instrumentation provides people with information through the use of tests, questionnaires, and surveys or other means.
10. Alone time is simply the time people spend by themselves to collect their thoughts around a given issue or problem.

An Experiential Learning Activity

The following activity illustrates how different methods can be used to complement each other in addressing career education objectives. The activity simulates the interaction among various people in a community around the issue of the development of a certain parcel of land. People in the activity are assigned to each of the five groups. Each group is given the introduction to the task and one of the five roles. The groups then select representatives and prepare for the negotiations.

LAND DEVELOPMENT SIMULATION/ROLE PLAY

INTRODUCTION

You are all residents of a rapidly growing community. An unzoned parcel of Federal land, located across the road from a newly developed residential area within the community, has become available primarily through the efforts of Gotham Developments Ltd. The company wishes to construct an industrial park and already has spent a considerable amount of money on feasibility studies, plans, and interest payments on the land. Time is of the essence for them and they wish to move as soon as possible.

The city council has considered this proposal and alternative uses for the land but they were unable to reach a decision and referred the matter to the Mayor, giving him complete freedom and authority to act as he saw fit.

The Mayor has publicly promised to resolve the issue this week but unfortunately, he was called out of town on urgent family business. His instructions to you before he left town were:

"Will you please meet with representatives of the other four groups concerned with the Gotham land question and come to a decision as to how the land should be used and I'll ratify whatever position the five of you agree upon."

There is really no option but to move forward to solve the dilemma facing the community and so the five of you have found a time and place to meet. The first meeting will take place in 15 minutes.

ROLES

CITIZEN

Five years ago you moved to this area when the development of some other Federal land allowed the building of a limited number of homes. Naturally, you assumed that if and when more of the Federal land was freed up, it would be used for single family dwellings. The thought of shopping centers and high rise apartments, not to mention industrial parks, is enough to drive you right over the edge! The present situation is making you extremely angry. However, you are not

unreasonable and would not expect the municipality to make a park exclusively for the use of your neighbourhood but you are also not about to sit back and watch the new land become polluted by some chemical plant or have your back yard turned into a voyeur's target from the tenth floor of a nearby apartment building. You bought homes for privacy and quiet and the last thing that you want is thousands of cars storming around at all hours of the day or night. A park might sound good but what about all the problems associated with parks these days, rowdy kids, drugs, vandalism, traffic; a civic center would even be worse than a park in this regard.

Having received the Mayor's memo, an emergency meeting of your group has been called to review your position and generate any additional concerns or priorities which you feel will strengthen your presentation to the meeting.

DEVELOPER

You represent Gotham Developments Ltd. After spending extremely large amounts of time, money, energy, and exerting considerable personal influence, a key parcel of land has been freed up by the Federal Government for the use of the citizens of your community. Although you do not expect a great deal of public praise for your efforts, you are, nevertheless, proud of your accomplishment.

Growth trends in the new market area make the new land a perfect site for an industrial park. You have research evidence showing ideal population distributions, transportation availabilities, etc. and have even lined up many secondary industries as potential residents of the park.

By limiting your corporate operations in other realms, you have managed to generate adequate financing for the project and have freed up your best talent to make the project go as soon as you can remove the few remaining blocks such as resistance from the environmental freaks who have been trying to make trouble over the productive use of the land and the citizens' group from across the road who cannot see beyond their own noses in terms of what is really good for them. Of importance is the clear fact that employment opportunities are badly needed and that these needs could be met by the secondary industries interested in the park.

In response to the Mayor's memo, an emergency meeting of your board of directors has been called to review your position and generate any additional points which may be used to support your case in the upcoming meeting.

ENVIRONMENTALIST

Over the last four years, you have been able to mobilize a significant number of concerned, influential, and intelligent followers with the help of several other very prominent residents of the community with the objective of protesting and changing many of the deplorable practices in the community. For example, a recent oil spill was met head on by 4,000 of your supporters and your efforts forced city hall to provide equipment and manpower on an emergency basis leading to diminished damage of the eco-system.

Green belts have now been promised by the

politicians so your efforts have also aided the city planners in obtaining much of what they obviously want in way of community development. However, by and large you have been unsuccessful in influencing the direction of the development or use of new land.

Since the oil spill "success" you are increasingly confident that when you organize a protest on an issue, you can bring even the very powerful to a position seen as acceptable to you. Consistent with the green belt philosophy, the only sensible thing to do with the new land is to make a park area out of it and thus continue the trend towards eco-progress in the community. You are really clear on this point and there is no way you are willing to have your position comprised.

Having received the Mayor's memo, an emergency meeting has been called to review your position and generate any additional points or support which you feel will strengthen your presentation at the meeting and increase your probabilities of success.

PLANNER

You represent the planning department of the municipality. Your greatest source of pride is a recent decision by the Federal Government to free up some land which you have always felt would be ideal for moderate density living accommodations, a shopping center, and a senior citizens' facility. Your letters and trip to Ottawa regarding this land certainly have paid off.

Gotham Developments is trying to manoeuvre for an industrial park but the president of Gotham is more interested in money than in the community. Besides, the rationale for the industrial park is a prime example of 1960 thinking! The pressure for housing is crushing in the city and yet special interest groups continue to push for their own narrow payoffs, much to your dismay. Expertise must ultimately dominate over vested interests and parochialism if there is to be any hope for your municipality to become a 21st century habitat for people.

POLITICIAN

You are MLA's representing the municipality and know just about as much regarding the wishes of the community as anyone else in town. You figure you will have to make things happen in the upcoming meeting. However, you do not plan to run the meeting as the Mayor would have, had he been there because you do not have any real mandate to do so. But you do intend to see to it that the new land is developed for a cultural center for the municipality with a concert hall, playhouse, library and a museum since all of the above are presently nonexistent in or a total disgrace to the community. You know that you can mobilize a great deal of political support for new and better facilities and there is sufficient precedent for this position as exemplified by the actions taken in many other communities across North America.

Besides, you know that this is the direction that the powerful and influential citizens in the community want you to pursue and their support is vital to your political futures. However, obviously you have a genuine commitment to push for what you feel most of the people really want so you will certainly entertain options to your proposal but they better be good ones!

Having received the Mayor's memo, you have called a meeting to review your position and generate additional points which will support your case.

DISCUSSION

The activity incorporates many of the ten experiential learning methods. It is a *simulation* of the interaction of various groups on land development and provides people with an opportunity to *role play*. While interacting in planning groups and in the negotiation sessions, small and large *group* formats are used. Some people can be designated as *observers* to watch the others in their work groups and in negotiation sessions and then provide feedback. This observation process could be augmented through the use of *video tape recording and playback*. *Audio-visual aids* and *field trips* could be used to broaden awareness of the various roles. Field trips would also be real tasks. Finally, *fantasy* activities could be used as another way of helping people become familiar or comfortable with their designated roles and *alone time* could be used in a variety of ways to help them collect their thoughts around the various issues related to their participation.

The activity also addressed the outlined career education assumptions. *Self understanding* is fostered when people's values and attitudes are discussed as a function of choosing and playing roles. Feedback from observers highlights and clarifies those values as well as providing people with insights as to how they behaved in the activity. *Information* is provided through field trips and other methods which expands people's understanding of the characteristics of the various occupations and the people in them. People's attitudes towards this personal, occupational, and socio-economic information can be challenged and modified. Academic, decision-making, and interpersonal *skills* are addressed directly and/or indirectly. Decision-making and interpersonal skills are indispensable in the planning and negotiation parts of the activity. People receive practice in working in small task groups, gain insight into how groups operate, and learn how to identify specific procedures and processes which occur in groups. *Academic skills* are directly involved when people are required to

organize, evaluate and present their thoughts. They are also indirectly addressed through the activity's relationship with curriculum areas such as: social studies, science, mathematics, language arts, drama, political science, law, business education, and journalism. The choice of content area would be determined by the objectives of the instructor and/or the requirements and needs of the participants. *Work values* can be discussed since the experience provides people with the opportunity to manage and to be responsible for their own learning. Field trips and other methods could be used to illustrate how other people value work. Finally, *adaptability* is vividly portrayed throughout the simulation.

The purpose of this paper was to show how experiential learning characteristics and methods could be used to address career education assumptions. Gathering information on the different roles in the activity heightens career awareness. Through playing a role, from discussions with others in the group around the values and attitudes associated with choosing a particular role, and from observer feedback, people acquire insights into the relationship of that information to themselves. After a variety of similar experiences addressing different content, people would be in a position to make better informed career decisions. Experiential learning is career education.

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