



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **Skill Building for Educational and Vocational Advancement**

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Occupational choice, career advancement, and education initiative become paramount items of concern for an individual who leaves school either by graduating, personal preference or by necessity. These choices are potentially foreboding for the departed student who does not possess the necessary literate or communicative skills to compete in an increasingly crowded job market. This unit will attempt to sharpen the low-to-average eighth grader's awareness of the World of Work by increasing and improving the literacy skills he will need to enable him to utilize more effectively his potential in the work force.

The eighth-grade student is ready to explore career development for a variety of reasons. Initially, almost every eighth grader has some conception of the value, and sometimes, necessity of work. In those families whose structure has remained intact, the student realizes that one or both parents leave the household at a particular time during the day in order to earn money for the purpose of providing for the family's well-being. Or, in those families where the structure has not remained consistent, the student is exposed to one parent and his or her struggle both to provide for the family and to maintain the household. Even in families where no parent is working—an increasingly commonplace situation in New Haven and other urban areas—the student gains some appreciation for the World of Work and its advantages since the absence of a money flow into the house has, no doubt, provided some hardship in the household and, in turn, affected the student.

Secondly, eighth graders have a conception of what they would like to do once they complete their schooling. This conception may be in no way commensurate with the student's mental or academic capacities, but the student, by making a vocational choice, has demonstrated an awareness of what Singer and others have termed a "future-focused or role-image." <sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, in eighth grade, the student is formalizing the elementary preparation of basic skills obtained thus far in school in readiness for his journey into high school. Here the student may be faced with a decision to enter either the public high school in his district, a private high school, or a vocational-technical school. Frequently, the student, upon choosing an option, will have to make a formal application to the institution. Such applications are often regarded as a mirror of the student; too often an ill-prepared application may inhibit the student's acceptance into the program of his choice.

Finally, towards the end of the eighth grade year, many students apply for federally funded summer jobs. For many of these fourteen-year-olds these applications become monsters which are either incorrectly completed or never completed; thus, the dream of a much-needed summer job may be lost. It is important that these

applicants be sufficiently literate to understand these applications which are keys that can open new doors in their lives.

The “future-focused role-image” mentioned above is a person’s image of himself in the future; this projection gives meaning to his present. FFRI is central to education, since education itself is a preparation for the future. If a student is genuinely interested in pursuing a particular occupational choice, if the student is given the opportunity to research this choice openly, he will commit himself more seriously to the mastery of skills essential to this choice. The skills central to any attempt to explore FFRI are oral and written skills, reading skills, and vocabulary development. These skills are generally taught in an English class, but I hope they will meet with more academic zeal if taught in the context of career development. I hope this unit will help achieve this purpose through the integration of literacy skills with an exploration of career development.

Oral communication skills are of the utmost importance when interviewing for a job. It is important that we give the student a clear understanding of interview techniques in order that he may adequately develop his speaking skills. All interviews, whether for securing information or for attaining a job, must have a clearly defined purpose known to both participants. The language in an interview should be courteous. Above all, the student, as a potential participant in an interview, must realize that successful self-promotion will affect the interviewer favorably.

One of the most important facets of the interview is the ability of both the interviewee and the interviewer to listen to one another. Too often a prospective employee has been denied a job because of his inability to listen to the interviewer. Lines of communication become confused, and the result is that the employer gains a poor impression of the individual. We must stress at all times that being a good listener is just as important as being a coherent speaker in an interview.

Although public speaking on the stage or the rostrum affords the speaker a great freedom to express himself with bodily movement and gestures, it is also important that the participants in an interview be unafraid to initiate gestures while speaking or listening. The handshake both before and after the interview is one example of how interview participants can strike a common bond and open lines of communication with bodily movements. Clarity of questions and specific sequence of ideas which make a good interview can be readily aided by such courtesies as listening and body language.

Every English teacher hopes to build composition skills and there are many methods available to us. How many ex-students are asked to write about their summer experiences or the purpose of a particular character in a novel they have just read? It seems that there are four instances in which most ex-students need to exhibit composition skills: the application, the resume, the business letter, and the personal letter. This unit will deal with all but the last since the first three mentioned play an integral role in career development.

We can readily notice that the application, the resume, and the business letter rely upon form rather than literary content. I do not mean to demean creativity in written expression, for creativity does serve its purpose in the fulfillment of the whole person, and creative people are often sought in the job market. There is little need, however, for creatively written language in the attainment of most jobs. A career may certainly be initiated by creative expression in thought and oral communication, but adherence to form in written language is usually more important.

The student’s preparation of an application necessitates adherence to the form of the application; its content is the purest factual form of writing. The job application, the education application, and even credit card and social security applications serve the same purpose—to collect data about the applicant in an orderly and

sequential manner. We should make this orderly and sequential process clear to our students in order that they may feel more comfortable with applications, as a child would feel comfortable with a pegboard he has used continuously.

The resumé is no more than an application without lines to guide the applicant. There are various types of resumes, and there are just as many publishers of guides on how to write them. Distinctions are usually made according to the type of employment sought. Anyone who decides to teach this unit ought to carefully scan one of the guides for writing resúmes, and should choose several forms to present to his class.

The business letter remains a restricted form of composition. Business letters are clear, concise, and to the point—in contrast to the friendly letter, which is prone to be a bit more creative and imaginative. A typical business letter has six sequential ingredients. This pattern generally expounded in most language textbooks includes: heading, inside address, salutation, body (which should be clear and purposeful), closing, and signature. Once again we have the application without lines, but with definite constraints and limitations for the sake of clarity.

Reading comprehension skills and vocabulary skills are closely related, and we can help improve both if reading and vocabulary are explored from an occupational point of view. Occupational literature, job descriptions, and classified advertisements provide interesting subject matter for students interested in career development. These three modes of written expression can be read with reasonable comprehension if we construct several guiding questions for the student. Such questions might include:

1. What is the position? (Title)
2. What does the position involve?
3. What are the requirements for the position?
4. What is the availability of the position?
5. What may I expect to earn with the position?
6. What are some special characteristics and/or problems confronting the position?

The student's self-awareness might also be strengthened from the reading of occupational literature. The student might ask: Can I do the job? Admittedly, this question may be premature for some eighth graders, but if it is asked in a general manner the student might be able to answer.

An examination of jargon is necessary in vocabulary development, and will often benefit a student's reading skill. Jargon is the vocabulary uniquely used by any structured institution. Applications have their own jargon, and each individual occupation has its jargon. Students should be encouraged to pursue a knowledge of the jargon consistent with and related to their occupational choice. Advertisements also use jargon, and these newspaper-originated terms should not go unnoticed.

There are still thousands of jobs that do not require a college diploma or preparatory courses in order for an

individual to perform the work satisfactorily. The instructor is cautioned not to stress a collegiate experience, for such pressure might discourage the student. Should a student be interested in a career which necessitates a college education, the teacher can aid the student with various information about colleges and the different degrees offered. If, however, a student chooses an occupation which does not require schooling beyond high school, there is no reason that he be coerced into researching an occupation which necessitates such preparatory measures. The rationale is quite simple: the average eighth grader will undoubtedly change his or her mind a number of times before he leaves school, and there are too many fathers, mothers, and other relatives of the student who are providing nicely for their families without the benefit of a formal education.

The concept of futurism is important for the student who is immersed in a thematic unit of career development. As science and technology continue making great gains and contributions to society, there will be most likely an influx of new jobs. Many of the jobs today were either unimaginable or only theoretical possibilities ten to fifteen years ago. Each student should realize that the list of occupations is not a constant and stable indicator of the working world, but rather, a very changeable one which will continue to change as the young student progresses toward his occupational goal.

There are also many occupations of which students are unaware. Once the students' initial occupational interests have been polled in class, each student could ask himself if the career interest has chosen is one that is readily visible to the public. Most of the occupations they choose are probably ones which the student meets in his everyday existence or sees on television. Doctors, nurses, auto mechanics, pharmacists, police persons, grocers, and lawyers would be examples of these visible occupations. Students should then be initiated into the idea of occupational clusters—those jobs related to their occupational choice which are not as visible. Paramedics, court stenographers, and welders are just some of the many "invisible" occupations which a student might find more to his liking or equal to his potential. Throughout the unit students should be encouraged to explore not only their initial career choices but also several of the related professions. In future years when the student is more capable of assessing his potential, this exploration could be very beneficial.

Throughout the implementation of this unit, it is important that the student's positive self-image be stressed. The attitudes a student maintains toward work, the preparation necessary to obtain jobs, the appreciation of what work is, and the goals that a student may or may not set for himself in the future all contribute to the formulation of his character. The thematic portion of the unit is designed to have the student concentrate on his own goals and expectation—not the expectations of the instructor. Disappointment or discouragement do not enter into thematic discussions and should not be deterrents in the student's initial exploration of career development.

The concept of literacy is, indeed, important for everyone, and the value of being literate cannot be overestimated in the schemes of career development or educational advancement. The primary expectation of the instructor and implementor of this unit is that the student be made aware of the importance of literacy in this respect. Speaking well and confidently in an interview, knowing how to complete any type of an application, being able to write a resumé or business letter, and having a positive self-image of oneself are all conventions of literacy which will aid the student in the future. Once the student realizes the value of being literate, he or she will understand that literacy can be a tool implemented in the future in order to attain a goal.

## ***Sequence of Lessons***

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(This unit was originally intended to span a ten-week period in a low average to average academically oriented eighth grade class. Reading levels would probably range from grade three to grade five. Several colleagues have suggested it would not be at all inappropriate for the unit to extend throughout the entire eighth grade year. The plans presented here reflect the basic ten-week course of study. Several ideas for extending the unit are also included. I hope that anyone using this unit will feel free to modify any plans discussed and add any new ideas for extending the program. The user should make every attempt to work with the unit in a comfortable manner.)

### ***Week I. The World of Work—Awareness***

Motivation and awareness are essential at the onset of the unit.

Students' awareness of the working world will be inventoried through lists and discussions of occupations known to them through their families and acquaintances. The student himself will then list five occupations that he might want to work at sometime in his future. A slide presentation will be shown with an emphasis in the following discussion placed on career clusters and "invisible" jobs. The *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* will be circulated as a prime reference tool for the unit. The concept clusters and "invisible" jobs. The *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* of future-focused role-image will be introduced and students should begin to visualize themselves as contributing members of society.

*Extension* : Examination of jobs more prominent in the past (ie. blacksmith). Jobs that may develop in the future (bionic repairman). Jobs in the media (What does Fonzie do?) Movies detailing occupations. Occupations in literature. Occupation in songs. Daily log of facts learned outside of school concerning occupations.

### ***Weeks II—III. Reading Skills***

All reading done in these weeks should be occupation-related. Job descriptions and advertisements for jobs will provide the fundamental basis of reading. Students will read material that will help them answer the guiding questions proposed in the thematic portion of the unit. Sources such as *All in A Day's Work* and the *Yellow Pages Career Library* will be used. A detailed examination and explication of the newspaper want ads will also be brought to the students' attention. Vocabulary development through occupational, newspaper, and application jargon should also occur at this time.

*Extension* : Book reports, book talks concerning people at work. Spelling and vocabulary lists for study from reading.

### ***Weeks IV—VI. Writing Skills***

These three weeks should be spent strengthening the necessary writing skills to be used in the future. A detailed examination of an application form and practice in completing such forms should begin this portion of the unit. Job applications from various companies should be introduced as well as applications to Eli Whitney Technical School and other private high schools. Social Security card applications and summer employment applications should also be introduced. Time should be spent discussing the purpose and importance of the resumé. Several types of resúmes will be discussed and practice in writing these will follow. Students are urged to write and mail business letters to any organizations responsible for dispensing free occupational literature pertinent to their future-focused role-image.

*Extension:* Complete application and resumé packet for desired job.

### **Weeks VII–IX. Oral Communication**

These three weeks are devoted to the importance of oral communication as a necessary tool for the future. Primarily, students will study the interviewing process. Students will gain experience as both the interviewer and the interviewee in role-playing sessions which eventually will be taped. Typical do's and don'ts of interviews will be examined, and the importance of speaking clearly and coherently will become paramount. Body language in an interview will also be discussed.

*Extension :* Guest speakers can be interviewed about their jobs. Videotaping of interviewing sessions role-played by students. Student talks about their job interests.

### **Week X. Summation**

The last part of the unit is designed to allow students full license to reflect upon the work done in previous weeks. Students will openly discuss the job choice of their future and detail for the class the nature of their position, the educational requirements, the demand for the position, earnings, and any other special considerations involved in doing the job. Each student will also hand in a job information packet containing a sample job application, a description of the job applied for, a list of terms used on the job, a resumé, and a sample business letter, all of which have been compiled throughout the length of the unit.

*Extension :* Examination of banking. Establishment of mini-society whereby students assume roles of occupational choices. Unionism and contractual agreements.

### **Lesson I—Job Awareness**

This lesson would be best taught the first or second day of the unit as it will immediately call for student response and involvement which is one of the key ingredients for a successful unit.

Give each student a piece of paper and a pencil. On one side of the paper have students list the five jobs that they think they would most like to do in the future. (If a student does not have five occupational interests, two or three will suffice.) After students have completed this occupational inventory, have them turn the paper over and list the occupations of all their relatives and acquaintances using the person's first name or initials as a check to guard against confusion. Allow students no more than ten minutes for this exercise.

Teacher: Today we are going to check our awareness of the different types of jobs known to us. First let us see how many of us know people who are doing the type of work we might want to do in the future. How Many of us know at least one person that is doing one of the jobs on our original list?

Allow time for discussion if any students do fall into this category. Make sure all students realize that their families and friends can be resources. After this discussion has progressed sufficiently list on the blackboard all the jobs from students' second lists. An easy way to accomplish this would be to call for jobs beginning with the different letters of the alphabet so as to avoid repetition. At the end of the class or when all student lists have been exhausted count up the number of jobs on the blackboard and compare the total to the total number of entries in a resource such as the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* . As a preparation for the next day, have students take their original list of five occupations and list one responsibility or task for each different job.

## **Lesson II. Oral Communication—Interview Techniques**

This lesson should be done only after extensive training in interviewing has taken place. Secure a cassette recorder and ask for one volunteer from the class to participate in a role-playing exercise where the teacher is the employer and the student is the prospective employee. The role can be either a mythical occupation (bubble gum tester for Bazooka) or one in which the student is genuinely interested. At the conclusion of the interview have students comment about poise and character of the employee and employer. Point out different techniques in body language that may have occurred in the interview. Follow this discussion with a playback of the tape so the employee can hear himself and perhaps contribute a self-evaluation of his efforts. This lesson may be repeated several days and throughout the unit with students playing both roles.

## **Lesson III. Writing Skills—The Business Letter**

Explain to students the many uses of a business letter: its value in applying for a job, a tool for praising and/or complaining about goods received, a request for information and/or products. Stress the importance of the six basic parts of the business letter: heading, inside address, salutation, body, closing, and signature. An overhead projector may be invaluable for this exercise as a tool to easily demonstrate some examples of business letters. One student seems to understand the mechanics of the business letter, pass out dittoes with the six parts labeled (see following example). Have students fill in the blocks of this outline by writing a letter to a mythical company in order to praise its products. As students receive more practice in writing business letters, eliminate the lines. Students eventually will write business letters on their own to real companies praising their products and to various organizations in search of free occupational literature.

A sample business letter form is detailed on the following page.

\_\_\_\_\_

(1) Heading \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (2) Inside Address

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (3) Salutation

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(4) Body

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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(5) Closing \_\_\_\_\_

(6) Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes

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1. Benjamin D. Singer, "The Future-Focused Role-Image", *Learning for Tomorrow : The Role of the Future in Education* , Alvin Toffler, ed. (New York, 1974), p.21.

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