



Classroom without Walls

Written by Gayle Marchica, President – Eduscape Associates

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Hildenbrand contends that employees should focus not just on experience but also on their soft skills. Four of the top soft skills are: the ability to **communicate** both verbally and written, an ability to get along with others and work collaboratively, building trust and offering support, thus developing an environment with **teamwork** written all over it. Additionally, **project management** means employees are capable of organizing and managing their work load as well as managing others. Finally, the ability to **problem solve** tends to be a sign of a creative individual with critical thinking skills and the ability to develop solutions rather than just identify problems. The difficulty is not defining them as much as it is developing them.

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So here is the \$100,000 question. How can we possibly do all of these nice things to help students to come into their own and simultaneously prepare them for standardized tests and regents exams? The solution isn't an easy one, however, it is not impossible either.

As you read on, here are some investment tips guaranteed to fatten your yields. It is incumbent upon us as school administrators to create or receive help in creating a school schedule that works for students and teachers alike. The schedule should make allowances for Academic Intervention Services (extended instruction or doubling), core courses, elective courses, physical education, art, music, honors and AP courses where applicable, and of course, lunch. A 4x4 block schedule can accommodate and support these courses as well as a Career Development course or component, including a Capstone Project and/or a career exploration internship, as well as both university and business partnerships.

The Career Development course would include “real life” skills such as interviewing for a job, preparing for a career, resume writing, time management and job etiquette, including appropriate dress and work ethic to name a few. Thus, helping to prepare students for college and the workforce with their “soft skills” fired up and a greater chance to compete in the global market.

Other suggestions are, embedded technology across the curriculum, Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS), including instructional strategies that integrate Career Development and Occupational studies with the Learning Standards of English Language Arts, Math, Science and Technology, Social Studies, Languages Other Than English, Health and Physical Education as well as the Arts and Humanities. In 1998, Nassau BOCES published a wonderful “how to” with suggestions and a workable model entitled “Activities That Work, Connecting CDOS With All Curricula”. Interdisciplinary Instruction, Project Based Learning, industry related guest speakers and field trips, a Capstone Project, a Career and Technical Education Program (where applicable) as well as college preparation, should also be components of a well rounded global curriculum.

Lack of connectedness between school, the workforce, the economy and technology can lead to an increased dropout rate ultimately yielding a negative return both socially and economically within the global work force. According to the US Department of Labor, dropouts are less likely to become part of the labor force than those with a high school diploma. Additionally, dropouts make up a disproportionately higher percentage of the nation's prison and death row inmates. The Gates Foundation 2006 annual study reports, one million high school students drop out every year in the United States. This is a staggering statistic, if these numbers were in reference to stocks and every investor lost at least one million dollars in their portfolio each year that certainly would raise some eyebrows.

Reportedly, the average Freshman Graduation Rate in the United States is 75%. This number would include diploma recipients who graduate on time with their respective cohort group. (US Dept of Education, 2004). My questions are, where did the other 25% go? and as dropouts, what competitive skills could they possibly have?

In a recent Education Week article entitled, A New Day for Learning, the authors Chen, Chung and Johnson, report that half our dropouts contend they left because school no longer seemed relevant or important to their lives, not because the work was so difficult. This certainly is a reality check. I question, in their early high school years, had these students experienced a Career Exploration Program and exposure to available and real opportunities as well as the skills to make money and the ability to support themselves, would they have become part of a nationwide statistic? Cha-ching.

A high school in New York City, The Bronx Aerospace Academy has proven to understand the connection between education in the millennium and success. The new high school opened within an existing school that reported a meager 31% graduation rate. As entering 9 th graders, 6% of the students at the school scored at grade level on standardized tests. Four years later, the school boasted a 90% graduation rate among the same cohort of students. I think we could label this one as a bountiful investment opportunity.

According to the Gates Foundation, this impressive progress was attributed to tougher coursework, relevancy by connecting material to contemporary issues and student's career aspirations (math does have something to do with carpentry), strong relationships and intensive career and college counseling as well as alignment of high school standards with the demands of college and the labor force.

(Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2006, Annual Report)

There is an important message imbedded in the Bronx Aerospace Academy's story; a strange whisper saying, "if you build it they will come". If we make the real connection with career and school the relevancy would be as bright and blaring as a meteorite entering the surface of the earth. Some of us might need to get hit in the head with fallout to get the real message.

The United States Department of Labor Statistics reports, careers anticipated with the largest growth are in Healthcare and will be driven upward because of an aging population with longer life expectancies. Also, increase in student enrollment at all levels of education will create demand for educational services, especially pre-school and post-secondary education.

When choosing to explore a career of interest, consideration should be given to the impact of industry and job trends on the economy and workforce. Some careers may be more lucrative and attractive than others for the simple reason of supply and demand. Students should be cognizant of these trends and use them as a springboard for making informed decisions about their future entrance into the labor market. It is incumbent upon us to peak student interest about these trends and their application to college and career. The charts below tell an accurate story of days to come.

Top 10 Industries with the Highest Projected Job Growth Rate (2004-2014)

Industry	%
Home Health Care Services	69.5
Management Consulting Services	60.5
Employment Services	45.5

Offices of Physicians	37.0
Private Colleges, Universities and Professional Schools	34.3
Full-Service Restaurants	16.6
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals, <i>Private</i>	16.0
Limited Service Eating Places	15.9
Local Government, excluding Education and Hospitals	13.9
Local Gov't Educational Services	10.1

(Tracey Drake, Future Employment Trends, Suite101.com)

Top 10 Occupations with Highest Job Growth Rate Projections (2004-2014)

Job	%
Postsecondary Teacher	32
Registered Nurse	29
Customer Service Representative	23
Nursing Aide, Orderly	22
General and Operations Manager	21
Janitor and Cleaner	19
Retail Salesperson	17
Waiter and Waitress	17
Food Preparation and Serving Worker	17

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Even though students should be exposed to Career Awareness Programs as early as kindergarten, Ninth Grade is a prime time to introduce them to the reality of industry through effective guest speakers, mentors in the workforce and Career Interest Inventories.

A wonderful website www.nyscareerzone.com is available for student use and is free of charge. Career Zone provides curious visitors with information about careers based upon a simple interest inventory the student takes right there on line. They also provide college information related to their career of interest. This is an effective tool to begin the conversation about “what do I want to be when I grow- up.” In the Junior and Senior Year of High School, opportunities should be available to make school relevant to what David Thornburg, author of *The New Basics: Education and the Future of Work in the Telematic Age*, refers to as the “World Curriculum”.

Manny Stein, Retired Director of Technology and Career Programs in the East Ramapo School District, recommends the following opportunities, which reinforce the need for job skills to help achieve professional success in “real time” prior to entering the workforce.

School-to-Work Career Programs offer Career Exploration Internship. Through this program, students have an opportunity to explore a specific career or careers of interest. They develop communication and skills related to their industry of choice. While most of the internships are

non-paid, students gain experience that is priceless. To keep the integrity of the program intact, Stein suggests certain student requirements. Students earn credits when meeting specific criteria that includes completion of 54 internship hours (.5 credits) or 108 hours (1.0) credit, documented and signed time sheets, completion of specific essays on what was learned during placement and a positive employer evaluation.

Another effective program is Cooperative Work Experience. Students have an opportunity to work part-time and earn a salary during the school day. Age requirements are set by the NYS Department of Labor and must be monitored. Students 16 or younger may work 3 hours during the school day, while those 17 years of age may work up to 4 hours. Students are able to work up to 8 hours each weekend and during a Holiday. Credit is given to students meeting specific criteria. As part of the program requirements, 150 work hours (.5 credit) or 300 work hours (1.0 credits) must be completed. Positive employer evaluations and specific essays on what was learned during placement are also expected.

Mentoring has proven to be an effective program that builds both job skills as well as relationships. The design of the program is for a student to interact with a professional in private industry or the workforce. The interaction is related to the student's specific career(s) of interest. The mentor/student partnership may take place in person or via cyber communication. Students are required to keep a journal on their experiences.

A one-day Job Shadow Program is also recommended by Mr. Stein and is designed as a special day, in which students have the opportunity to spend the day and interact with a profit or non-profit organization of their choice. A handout sheet with specific questions is distributed to students for completion. Over time, these programs have stimulated student learning in a classroom without walls.

Truth be told, we are building the ship while sailing, in recognition of the urgency of supporting students while they navigate the sometimes wavy and volatile waters into their future. With learning there isn't a finish line, providing skills for life are as essential as the cognitive realm we are often consumed by. If nothing else, I hope this article has raised awareness about the important balance we need to maintain when educating our youngsters.

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