

Motivating (Demotivated) 14-16 Learners Through Vocational Education: Policy and Practice in the United States

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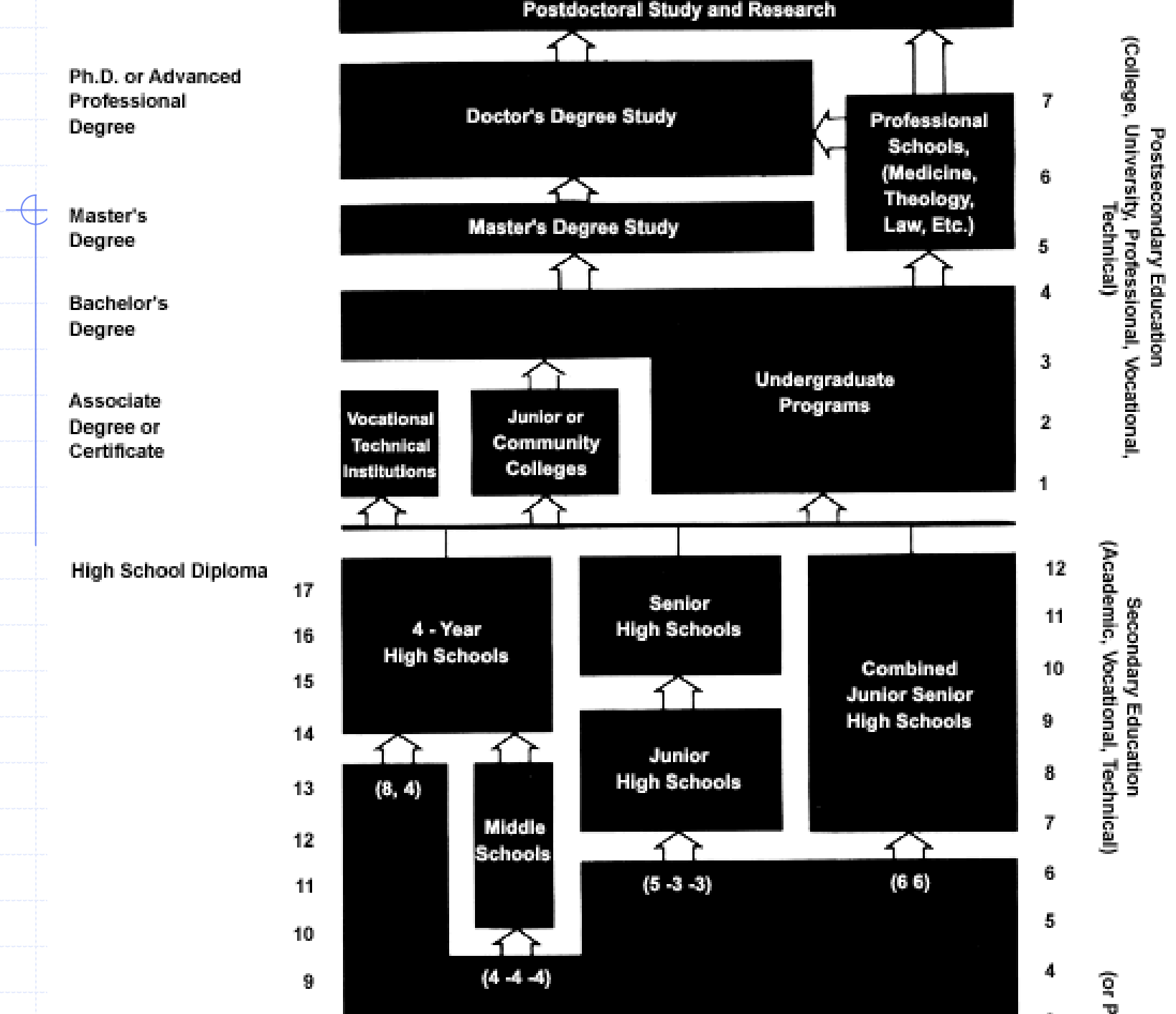
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Overview

- ◆ Some historical background
- ◆ The vocational education system
- ◆ A new vision for vocational education
 - Education through occupational themes
 - Practices enhancing motivation and engagement
 - Evidence of success
- ◆ A view to the future

Overview of Vocational Education Policy

- ◆ Federal role since 1917 Smith-Hughes Act
- ◆ Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 (Perkins III)
- ◆ School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (now ended)
- ◆ Since 1980, funding for VE declined from 6% to 3% of total federal education appropriations
 - But is still largest source of federal education funds spent on high schools (\$773 million in 2001)
- ◆ Federal monies contribute only about one-tenth of total state expenditures on VE
- ◆ U.S. “system” is decentralized—education in domain of states and localities so VET has no uniform curriculum, standards or accountability measures



Some Facts About Secondary Vocational Education

- ◆ Vocational education participation rates have been stable over the last decade
 - 45% of all high school graduates earned 3 or more occupational credits
 - 25% of all graduates 'concentrated' their courses in a single program area (e.g., health occupations or business)
- ◆ 25% of American youth enter labour market directly after secondary school
 - But labour market projections suggest that good jobs will require at least some postsecondary education

The “New” Vocationalism

- ◆ Education through occupational themes
 - Roots in policy and in scholarly literature, especially John Dewey
- ◆ Four common elements
 - Integration of academic and vocational curriculum
 - Preparation for work *and* further education
 - Learning experiences outside of school
 - Small schools or schools within schools

Three common organizational forms

◆ Career academies

- School within school, small group of teachers and students, multi-year programme

◆ High schools with majors or clusters

- Students must choose a focus from a roster of choices

◆ High schools with themes

- School adopts theme or focus for all students

Benefits of thematic approach

- ◆ All forms offer alternative to traditional high school, dominated by college prep and academic curriculum
- ◆ Provides more choice and links school learning with experiences out of school
- ◆ Has potential to enhance engagement and motivation, as well as its correlates

Six practices that can enhance motivation and engagement

1. Students have close relationships with adults
2. Students have autonomy and engage in active learning
3. Students have multiple paths to competence

Six practices that can enhance motivation and achievement

4. Educational environment is well structured, with clear purpose
5. High expectations and a strong emphasis on achievement
6. Development of both educational and career pathways

Research on “Education through Occupations”

Empirical research somewhat sketchy

- ◆ Mostly descriptive studies providing anecdotal evidence
- ◆ A few studies incorporate control or comparison groups
 - Longitudinal study of California career academies (Stern et al., UC Berkeley)
 - Quasi-experimental study of Career Magnet Schools in New York City (Crain et al., Teachers College)
 - Randomized experimental study of career academies (Kemple et al., MDRC)

Higher levels of student and teacher satisfaction

- ◆ Randomly assigned career academy students consistently ranked schools and teachers higher than non-academy students
 - More personalized attention and help with personal problems
 - Higher expectations by teachers
 - More concern about their futures
 - Peers more engaged
- ◆ Teachers reported higher levels of efficacy, job satisfaction, collaboration

Reduces risk of dropping out of high school

- ◆ California academy students
 - 2-4% dropout rate
 - 94% graduation rate
- ◆ Randomly assigned 'high risk' students
 - 81.5% average attendance
 - 21.3% dropout rate
 - 10% dropout for all

- ◆ Comparison group students
 - 10-11% dropout rate
 - 79% graduation rate
- ◆ Control group
 - 76% average attendance
 - 32.2% dropout rate
 - 12% dropout for all

Promotes postsecondary enrollment

◆ California Career Academy students

- 62% college attendance

◆ Randomly assigned 'high risk' students

- 51% applied to college
- 41% enrolled in college

◆ Comparison group students

- 47% college attendance

◆ Control group students

- 35% applied to college
- 37% enrolled

Promotes occupational identity

◆ Lottery 'winners' in career magnet schools

- More active in college and career planning and explored more options
- Earned more college credits and made earlier choices of college major

Promotes student course taking

- ◆ In comparison to control group, randomly assigned academy students
 - Earned more credits overall and in core academic courses
 - Earned more vocational credits – 58.3% earned 3 or more
 - But no differences in math and reading test scores

Evidence of Success

- ◆ Evidence suggests that various forms of 'education through occupations' have many potential benefits and few negative affects
- ◆ Programmes can motivate and re-engage students and enhance its correlates – persistence, course-taking, graduation, occupational identity
- ◆ Little evidence that participation increases student achievement

A view of the future

- ◆ Federal and state reforms emphasize academic learning and achievement
- ◆ Vocational education lacks parity of esteem
 - Elective subject or programme of study
 - Poor reputation as lower-quality
 - Over-enrollment of students from disadvantaged groups
- ◆ Federal legislation may not be reauthorized by Bush Administration