

## WHAT IS THE STATE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL TRAINING IN AMERICA?

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The vocationalization of the American curriculum has been evolving over the last century, and the causal association of education and economic production has arguably shaped every facet of the American educational system (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004; Kantor, 1988; Kliebard 1999, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The American community college in particular has been central in the debate over both the substance and scope of vocationalization (Bragg, 2001; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 2001; Levin, 2001). Does vocationalization lead to a more personally relevant, socially practical, and economically valuable education? Or does vocationalization detour underprivileged, subaltern classes into low paid work and second class citizenship? The debate over vocationalization has evolved, unresolved, over the last century.

We at C4 are currently researching and writing a paper called “The State of Vocational Education in 2007: Trends, Issues, and Best Practices in Community College Career Pathway Programs.” We have distilled some questions below, which we believe represent some of the most important vocational education issues that are currently unresolved. We would like to engage some of these questions as a group in order to deliberate and debate the current practices and future possibilities of post-secondary vocational education programs.

### Possible Questions for Discussion (Group Should Pick One or Two):

(1) What historical relationships have been developed between higher education and vocational education and training (VET) in America during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (in complex socio-cultural-political-economical terms)? How has the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century America (populist revolts, social caste systems, corporate capitalism, rise of professions and a managerial technocracy, social and educational policy reforms, war, globalization, reactionary conservatism...) affected 21<sup>st</sup> century American VET practices, programs, and purposes?

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(2) Has the debate between John Dewey (1916) and David Snedden (1920) been resolved over the last century, or has the basic structure of their debate been folded into the comprehensive and contradictory fabric of current VET programs and curriculums (Grubb 1985, 1996, 2004; Kliebard 1986, 1999)?

(3) Has the issue of gender segregation and gendered economic inequality been adequately addressed by VET administrators and educators (Lakes & Carter 2004)? Has the community college and VET programs helped close the “gender gap” (Goldin 1990)? What has the last decade of research discovered on the issue of gender and VET (Lester 2007)? What needs to be studied further?

(4) What is the relationship between current VET practices, programs and purposes and the condition of national, state, and local economies? Is VET more dependent upon national, state, or local conditions? Are VET awards and degrees equally effective in national, state, and local labor markets? What is the state of the “mid-skilled” or “sub-baccalaureate” labor market (Grubb 1996) in America? How is globalization changing/affecting this labor market? How has the so-called “new vocationalism” and mid-skilled labor market focus (Jacobs & Dougherty 2006) impacted VET programs for low-skilled workers?

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(5) Have postsecondary educational “pathways” leading into the labor market become better articulated? What institutions have begun to develop vertically and horizontally integrated VET systems (Grubb 1996a, 1996b; Jacobs & Dougherty 2006)? What recent studies have evaluated successfully articulated/integrated programs? What still needs to be evaluated?

(6) How has globalization (Levin 2001) and academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie 1997) further transformed community colleges and VET programs over the last decade? What new entrepreneurial governing or programming practices have proven effective or problematic? Have for-profit institutions increased their overall competitiveness over the last decade, and if so in what VET areas?

(7) How is “success” to be measured in VET programs? What have been traditional markers of “success?” Do VET and higher education in general have control over the ultimate marker of success, which is often rhetorically framed as the “Educational gospel” of economic opportunity, mobility, and security (Kantor 1988; Grubb 1985, 2004; Liddicoat 2006; California Community College Office of the Chancellor 2007)? What are the ethical parameters for VET programs in terms of articulating and developing program outcomes vs. life-long learning outcomes for students?

(8) To circle back to the beginning questions, how much “equality” and “opportunity” actually exists in the American socio-economic and educational systems (Brint & Karabel 1989; Dougherty 1994; Hochschild 1995; Cohen & Brawer 1996; Oakes et. al. 2006)? Despite a rhetoric of increased opportunity, does the American system of higher education still structure and reward excellence over equity (Douglass 2000)? If the widening inequality, deepening class lines, and declining economic mobility continue in their present form or intensify, what will this do to the mission and outcomes of the community college in general and VET programs in particular (Hertz 2006; Jacobs 2007; Mishel, Bernstein & Allegretto 2007)?

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**Deleted:** This is too much for a roundtable discussion. I suggest you pick out three question areas for discussion. People also drop in and out of these discussions. I would put the other question areas on a separate sheet that people can have when they are done (take aways).¶  
 One of our goals is to learn from the one or two experts who might show up and from the few people who have been working in this area. So we need to have this somewhat open ended and not dominate the discussion.¶  
 John¶  
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