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Functional Context Education (FCE) Part 2: Toward Policies and Practices for Contextualized Teaching and Learning in Community Colleges and High Schools

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After examining fifty years of research in the military on how the services had been able to take young adults without any real work experience, many of whom were almost functionally illiterate, and rapidly train them to become competent workers in a wide variety of jobs, several Functional Context Education (FCE) principles for program design were formulated. These principles were first reported in a 1987 book colleagues and I wrote entitled *Cast-off youth: Policy and Training Methods from the Military Experience* (Sticht et al, NY: Praeger). Three years later, in 1990, I was appointed to the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and I gave the opening presentation at the first meeting of the SCANS. In this presentation I discussed the research on FCE reviewed in the *Cast-off* book. The next year, in 1991, the SCANS issued a report entitled *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000* (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Labor) which recommended that our nation's schools should be redirected to teach in a "contextualized" manner.

FCE In Community Colleges

A January 2003 report by C. Mazzeo et al. entitled *Building Bridges to College and Careers: Contextualized Basic Skills Programs at Community Colleges* is available from the Workforce Strategy Center on the web at http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/Contextualized_basic_ed_report.pdf

Citing the work on FCE reported in *Cast-off Youth* and other work stimulated by the SCANS work on contextualized teaching and learning (CTL) , the report's authors describe their research in five community colleges that are committed to CTL, The authors of the report state that, "Research suggests that contextualized basic skills instruction is often more successful than traditional models of adult education in engaging disadvantaged individuals and linking them to work."

In developing their CTL programs, the five colleges: Integrated developmental (basic skills) and academic content Developed new curricular materials and professional development for CTL faculty. Maintained links with employers and industry associations. Found resources to fund the programs, at least in the short-term.

The authors state that, "While none of these colleges profiled in this study have been able to serve more than 20% of their developmental, English as a Second Language (ESL) and adult education population, they all seek the resources and capacity to go to scale."

FCE In High Schools

Over the years a number of organizations have taken up the banner of FCE under the label of "contextualized teaching." For instance, for more than a decade, the Center for Occupational Research & Development (CORD) Web site: www.cord.org located in Waco, Texas has been involved in developing contextualized courses for students in the K-12 system. Dale Parnell, former President of the American Association for Community Colleges in the United States and a past member of the SCANS published a book with CORD entitled Contextual Teaching Works. In a chapter on What Research Says About Contextual Teaching he presents a review of the research on FCE that colleagues and I reported in Cast-off Youth and notes that this research offers a scientific base for contextualized teaching. The book provides examples of FCE programs in various high schools in the U.S. and Canada.

In September 2003, the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) produced a report edited by Betsy Brand entitled Essentials of High School Reform: New Forms of Assessment and Contextual Teaching and Learning. (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum www.aypf.org). The report includes two papers that discuss issues related to the development of contextualized teaching and learning (CTL) curricula in high schools and developing assessments that will provide a more accurate indication of student learning in CTL classrooms. The report also presents summaries of the discussions in two roundtables convened by AYPF to discuss the ideas and issues presented in the two papers.

In addition to presenting discussions of the issues and challenges that face those who wish to move toward CTL, the report appendix offers examples of CTL using problem-based learning, service-learning, project-based learning, curriculum integration, work-based learning and collaborative/cooperative learning. It also provides some cases of CTL in high schools.

Somewhat surprisingly, the AYPF report does not cite work by the CORD by Dale Parnell in developing contextualized programs in high schools, nor does the report cite the original work in Cast-off Youth that stimulated the SCANS to recommend contextualized teaching and learning in the public schools and adult education. However, the report does raise many issues and challenges for doing CTL in our nation's high schools, and readers desiring further information about FCE/CTL can consult the CORD web page given above and additional information about FCE can be obtained in the following report downloadable from the cited web site:

Functional Context Education (FCE): Making Learning Relevant www.nald.ca Full Text Documents Search under authors names under the letter S for Sticht. This notebook provides FCE principles and examples of adult education FCE programs that integrate job skills and basic skills.