

## Career Management Success: A Freshman Orientation Class for Career/Technical Students

*CMS gives students a personal understanding of life after high school. Students begin to have a better understanding and appreciation of academics and the benefit of having a career plan. Students gain insight that encourages them to set higher expectations regarding personal success. CMS gives students a can-do attitude.*

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Prompted by a need to transform unfocused, sometimes frightened, 12- or 14-year-old freshmen into motivated, goal-setting learners, the Tennessee Department of Education unveiled a new course in the fall of 2002 called Career Management Success (CMS). Mandatory for all career/technical students in ninth grade, CMS provides the type of guidance experience young people entering high school career/technical programs need to take full advantage of their educational opportunities during their four-year high school career.

In designing CMS, members of the Department wisely began at the end -- by first considering the desired outcomes. They asked the business/industry community what specific career development skills and attitudes toward work students needed in that critical first year of high school and decided on ten key competencies that students would need to demonstrate by the end of the course.

Districts then decided how best to meet the standards, as the state did not want to mandate a specific text. It did, however, research and review available texts for possible use. Drafts of the standards were circulated in the spring of 2002, along with the list of resources that the state felt met the criteria for a successful completion of the new course. Among the state-recommended materials was the *Career Choices* curriculum. The 2002-2003 school year would be a transitional year, with full implementation required by 2003-2004.

At Anderson County Career and Technical Center in Clinton, Tennessee, where approximately 300 freshmen would be enrolled in CMS, career/technical instructors chose *Career Choices* as their foundation curriculum.

Jerry Anderson, residential construction technology instructor, was selected as one of four to teach CMS beginning in August 2002. As the school was on the block schedule, one group of incoming career/technical freshmen would take the daily 90-minute course in the fall semester and a remaining group in the spring. Other schools across the state used two consecutive semesters of 50-minute classes to meet the requirement.

Once the *Career Choices* curriculum was chosen by the committee, Anderson requisitioned his *Career Choices* textbooks along with a copy of the consumable Workbook and Portfolio for each student. He also requested Possibilities, the curriculum's literature anthology, because integrating academics into his class was a priority.

Anderson knew it was important for his students to understand the importance of education in helping them achieve their dreams. By integrating rigorous reading and writing assignments into his course work, Anderson's students gained valuable basic skills practice and saw the relevance in their other academic courses. Also, knowing that he was preparing his students for the 21st century workforce, Anderson incorporated the Internet enhancements to the curriculum, [www.careerchoices.com](http://www.careerchoices.com) and [www.lifestylemath.com](http://www.lifestylemath.com).

Anderson took his duties seriously, was meticulous in his preparation, and focused on the course goals. After one semester he reported that, using the *Career Choices* texts with little or no modification, he had met every one of the state-mandated standards.

Lesson planning was straightforward for Anderson. He followed the chapter-by-chapter scope and sequence of the *Career Choices* text, taking his students through a carefully orchestrated process of discovery and helping them answer three important questions: Who am I? What do I want? How do I get it? Using the comprehensive *Instructor's Guide*, he found class preparation uncomplicated.

Early on Anderson was sure he was on the right track when his students started coming early to class and getting on task immediately. "The class concept of CMS made students so eager to learn that being prepared on a daily basis to meet their needs and expectations was somewhat of a challenge," Anderson says. "But it was a challenge well worth the effort."

Students were enthused because the reading, writing, and discussions were about them. Anderson combined class activities with projects in the shop. Normally his career/technical students balked at classroom work, but in CMS they were as eager to dive into career exploration with *Career Choices* as they were to measure and cut wood when building patio furniture. Students reported that this was because they saw how making an overall plan related to everything they did in school.

This fueled Anderson's conviction that career/technical classes could and should team with academics. *Career Choices* made it very easy to integrate the CMS standards into academics as well as the CMS classes, so Anderson made it a point to join forces with the English teachers. His students wrote autobiographies, for which they received credit in freshman English and in CMS, and Anderson invited English teachers in to see more of what he was doing to help his students practice their written, verbal, and reading skills.

The English teachers were pleased to see some of their own students who had previously shown little enthusiasm for academics, actively participate in the 25th Reunion project from *Possibilities* (pages 279-283). Further cross-disciplinary work with the *Possibilities* literature anthology included reading everything from *Richard Cory* and *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* to Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream..." speech.

At the beginning of every class meeting, Jerry wrote a thought for the day on the board for the students to respond to in their journals. Many times these thoughts were selections from the literature anthology. Other times they were inspiring quotes from the materials that related to career exploration or personal development. Intrigued, students would ask Anderson, "Where did you get that?" and then eagerly look it up in their *Career Choices* texts.

### **The Ability to Visualize the Future**

Students' favorite activities were clearly assembling their portfolios and using the Internet enhancements for *Career Choices* available at [www.careerchoices.com](http://www.careerchoices.com). However, the main success of the class related to how well students dealt with those parts of school that were not their favorites. In fact, Anderson describes the thrust of the class not so much as managing career success but as managing the questions, "Why do I have to study this?" and "When am I going to use this?"

Whenever students asked Anderson these questions, he replied, "What do you want to do in twenty years?" He tied everything back to this very important concept -- visualizing a successful future and creating a plan to achieve their dreams.

The ability to project into the future and understand the consequences of today's actions is critical to dropout prevention for both high school and college students. Studies show that students who enter college with a clear career goal are far more likely to graduate than those who do not.

By asking students to project themselves into the future, *Career Choices* has helped students who formerly saw school as an obstacle learn to regard education as a path to a satisfying future. Anderson persistently challenged his students to think ahead and to envision the future as they developed their plans. While discovering more about their personal goals and dreams through the variety of activities and exercises, their plans and portfolios came together and they became eager to apply themselves to their studies and to building new skills.

### **Practical Applications**

Guest speakers were an important part of Anderson's course (pages 6/36-6/40 in the *Instructor's Guide*). As the students progressed through their own career planning process, the speakers provided real-world perspectives as they answered student's questions.

When speakers were asked, "When am I ever going to use this?" the students appreciated the responses of the professionals -- because they directly related to positive career and personal outcomes.

For instance, when a human resource specialist came from a large manufacturing company -- one of the area's main employers at which many students' parents worked -- the students discovered that this single company employed people speaking several different languages. Jerry's students suddenly "got" why it was smart to study foreign languages because they could see the practicality of being able to communicate with diverse populations. More important, they were able to absorb the larger lesson -- that tolerance of diversity was another key to success in today's multicultural, international business environment.

## Assessment

"Students were evaluated on participation, attitude, their teamwork skills, as well as the competencies they met," Anderson says. "Much of this evaluation was done via a competency checklist and observation."

Multiple evaluation techniques were utilized to accommodate students' various learning styles. All students completed the course with an essay that explained and personally assessed their progress throughout the course.

## Getting Started

### Step One

At a minimum, new instructors should read the *Career Choices* Instructor's Guide from cover to cover. The Instructor's Guide is so comprehensive that credentialed teachers with no career guidance experience can perform splendidly with little additional assistance.

### Step Two

If anything is unfamiliar or uncomfortable, Jerry advises new teachers to go straight to the source for help. In Tennessee, that's Educational Consultant Lynn Anderson. You can contact her [by email](#) or by phone at (865) 463-7981. You can also contact Academic Innovations' curriculum support department at (800) 967-8016, or visit [www.academicinnovations.com](http://www.academicinnovations.com) for help getting started.

### Step Three

Develop the lesson plan for your course (see section five of the *Instructor's Guide* for examples). Anderson recommends that career/technical instructors customize the CMS course to fit their own strengths by incorporating the activities from *Career Choices* into other projects. For example, Anderson tied concepts in *Career Choices* to making lawn furniture and building carnival rides -- projects squarely in his area of expertise. Regardless of the project, students had a sense of ownership, achieved through the personalized approach of *Career Choices*.

### Step Four

Meet with your students' academic instructors and plan some interdisciplinary activities with them. Share your set of textbooks with them along with the *Instructor's Guide*.

### Step Five

Have fun! This could be the most rewarding experience of your teaching career. Teachers who've used the *Career Choices* curriculum get excited when they see students internalizing the long-term benefits of applying themselves academically. Not surprisingly, students' performance improves, and they begin working even more diligently. Success inspires enthusiasm, which, in turn, fosters still more success.

### Step Six

Make use of available professional development and training opportunities from Academic Innovations.

## Professional Development

Tennessee schools report great success with *Career Choices* after easily overcoming initial obstacles. For Knox County, the third largest school system in the state, the problem was how to broadly implement CMS at 14 schools while maintaining consistently high standards. The solution was quality professional development.

When asked how he got his CMS program up and running so easily and effectively, Paul Bean, director of Career/Technical Education for Knox County Schools in Knoxville, said, "My instructors worked with Lynn Anderson, educational consultant, to select a curriculum. Once we decided on *Career Choices*, Lynn did a comprehensive training, which got our folks off to a great start. Three months into the program we did a follow-up training to iron out any glitches...Our folks like the class, find the materials easy to use, flexible, with room for creativity and personal a touch of their own. My instructors love working with Lynn Anderson and are comfortable calling on her when they need assistance."

In Bradley County, a much smaller system with three high schools, there was help from the local Tech Prep consortium. They provided classroom sets of *Career Choices* after teachers attended a summer pre-launch training. Katie Chastain, CMS instructor at Walker Valley High School in Charleston, was in attendance and quickly recognized the potential inherent in the materials, leading to a successful first semester for her students. "I love this class and I love *Career Choices*," she says. "It is all so real! My students love to come to

class. I have seen total turnaround from some of my students...We really appreciate Lynn Anderson staying in touch with us and keeping us up to date. Every time I talk to Lynn I get a renewed enthusiasm for teaching."

### Why It Works

*Career Choices* and a mandated guidance course in the freshman year graphically illustrate what students have to gain from staying in school and putting forth their best effort. It gives them an opportunity to create a plan for their lives and offers guidance on how to successfully bring that plan to fruition.

Why it works is very simple: *Career Choices* addresses the individual reader no matter what his or her circumstances may be. All young people share certain concerns: Who am I? What do I want? How can I get it? By teaching self-knowledge along with reading, writing and math, *Career Choices* makes basic skills relevant and motivates students to achieve. They are willing to pay attention, to work harder, to stretch themselves because, suddenly, what's going on in the classroom is of urgent personal interest.

Renee Webb at Polk County High School, where all incoming freshmen take CMS, says "This is what I would recommend to all schools. Students come into this class without a clue as to what the future holds. As they get involved in the curriculum and the activities, they seem to get much more serious about their future. The *Career Choices* curriculum allows for creativity and flexibility for the instructor and the students, but at the same time it has kept me on my toes because no two lessons are the same -- because no two students are the same!"

After his first year with CMS and *Career Choices*, Anderson put it this way:

"After almost 30 years in the construction business and 11 years in the teaching arena, CMS is the most rewarding and challenging class I have ever taught. *Career Choices* is such an in-depth, appropriate curriculum that it gives the instructor the confidence to teach this class, while strengthening students' creativity and thinking skills. In a few years, as I look back in an attempt to evaluate my lifetime contributions, CMS will be at the top of my list for 'making a difference'."

Anyone interested in discussing this successful class with Jerry Anderson can reach him during his planning time at (865) 457-4205, from 8 AM to 9:30 AM EST, Monday-Friday.