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Competencies Required of High School Distributive Education Students for Entry-Level Employment in Selected Cedar City Businesses

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COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF HIGH SCHOOL DISTRIBUTIVE
EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYMENT
IN SELECTED CEDAR CITY BUSINESSES

by

Mervin W. Prince

A report submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Business Education

Plan B

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Mervin W. Prince

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The preparation of youth to succeed in the world of work is an important objective of the American high school."¹ Students enroll in high school distributive education to develop an employable skill. The instructional program provides students with a variety of learning activities related to their occupational goals.

Distributive education has expanded to serve the whole range of distributive occupations, after starting mainly as a means of training retail sales persons. An important characteristic of distributive education has been the necessity for rapid adjustment to the changing business conditions.

An important responsibility of business education is to be aware of the current and future needs of businesses. Executing this responsibility requires continual evaluation of current courses and programs to assure that employers' needs are fulfilled.²

The business community is a great source for data and information that is necessary in the development of curriculum and content for distributive education. Business operations and functions are often the basis for research that has implications for curriculum development.

"The basic practice of the distributive education program is for a competent teacher to prepare people for careers in the fields of marketing and distribution."³ This gives the business teacher the opportunity to provide students with an education which will

meet the needs of the business community.

". . . many of our communities are facing very difficult problems of unemployment and the need to upgrade skills of not only young workers, but also those who have been out of school for many years."⁴ Williams stated that vocational education must provide training, and be more sensitive to the educational needs of the students. To meet these needs he suggested ". . . the need for careful planning, the expansion of existing programs and creation of new ones, and the utilization of all community resources."⁵ One method of utilizing the community is a survey of business to determine their needs and desires of entry-level employees.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to identify the competencies needed by distributive education students at Cedar City High School, Cedar City, Utah, in order for them to become employable in specific businesses in Cedar City, Utah. Specifically, this study dealt with competencies required of businesses in the following areas:

1. Food distribution
2. General merchandising
3. Home furnishings
4. Apparel and accessories
5. Automotive and Petroleum

Importance of the Study

Deciding what jobs and trades to teach is a prime challenge to business education teachers. Often the decision of what to

teach is based on the textbooks availability in the classroom.

Too many times in too many institutions the curricula is developed by either looking at catalogues and brochures from sister institutions or by a group of educators who have never had any business experience of their own. Too many curricula are planned and adopted simply on the basis that the educators feel that these are the courses the students need.⁶

As businesses continue to expand, more people will be needed to fill the entry-level positions which naturally become available through growth. Decisions on what to offer should be based on information about current emerging employment opportunities for distributive education graduates.

Basing curriculum on employment opportunities caters to the employer's desire for workers with the specific skills he needs. At the same time, however, it meets the student's needs for he does not want training in a trade where he cannot get a job when he graduates.⁷

The State of Utah and the Cedar City area reports unfilled job openings ending June 30, 1976, in the following areas:⁸

	State of Utah	Cedar City, Utah
Sales	378	9
Service	1,170	29

This is an indication that some individuals lack the training to fill these job openings. The primary objective of business education is to develop student's occupational competencies so that they can obtain and keep positions in the business and distributive areas.

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to the specific businesses in Cedar City, Utah, which may hire distributive education students. The business areas that fall within the framework of this study were food distribution, general merchandising, home furnishings, apparel and accessories, and automotive and petroleum. All the businesses were within the city limits of Cedar City, Utah. The purpose of this study was to determine the competencies needed by distributive education students to become employable by these businesses.

Definition of Terms

Distributive education. Distributive education is that field of study concerned with the vocational training of students desiring employment in that phase of the economic structure of our society which is concerned with the movement of goods and services from producer to the ultimate consumer.

Student. An individual enrolled or contemplating enrollment in a distributive education class in a high school.

Entry-level jobs. Initial jobs--jobs which require no previous work experience, but where some education and/or training is necessary.

Competencies. The ability, skill, or knowledge needed for an individual to have sufficient resources to become qualified for work.

Employable. An individual meeting the minimum requirements for a specified kind of work or position of employment.

Apparel and accessory stores. The stores which deal in the ready-to-wear merchandise, including clothing and furnishings for

men, women, and children.

General merchandise store. The retail establishments that offer a large variety of goods for sale. General merchandise stores include department stores, variety stores, and miscellaneous general stores.

Food distribution stores. Self-service food stores with at least four basic departments: grocery, meat, produce, and dairy.

Home furnishings store. The store which deals in goods that are for the home, such as furniture, home furnishings, appliances, radios, and televisions.

Automotive and petroleum. The business which deals in the selling of petroleum and minor auto parts to the general public and service for their automobile. These businesses would include self-serve and full-serve service stations.

Limitations

The general term of "attitude" was used on the research questionnaire. Thus, the results of the findings and conclusions of this study was limited by the lack of preciseness of the terms.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Information pertaining to competencies needed by students to be employable at entry-level positions was examined.

For the past few years, businessmen have been voicing the opinion that entry-level employees lack proficiency in their ability to work with others, to understand the world of work, and to adapt to change. Yet, we still have not implemented successful program procedures which aid students in developing these aptitudes.⁹

It was further stated that "the primary objective of business education is to develop students' occupational competencies so that they can obtain and keep positions in the business field."¹⁰

Employer input into training programs for a particular job undoubtedly dates back beyond recorded history. However, as the complexity of modern technology has increased, it has become more expedient for men to receive at least part of his vocational training in the setting of an institution of society which has training as its goal rather than production.¹¹

Educators, businessmen, industrialists, and statesmen are placing priority on the planning of educational programs which will prepare potential employees for skilled and technical jobs. The late President Lyndon B. Johnson stated:

Our society's demands for new skills and upgrading of old skills have made our vocational program a front line in our total educational effort. The importance cannot be overstated, and is a must for meeting the needs of our increasingly complex economy. But it is one of our most effective weapons in the war against poverty, unemployment, and the displacement of workers by technological change.¹²

Instructional programs that prepare persons to enter and advance in jobs should be based on the competencies required for the job.¹³ Writers on this subject support the idea of contacting business and industry directly. In his manual under a section entitled "Decisions/Curriculum Planning and Development," Johnson stated that community surveys can be useful in two ways. First, the findings are useful for curriculum planning; and second, the process can involve leading citizens and encourage their support, a point that cannot be overlooked.¹⁴

Wallace, in an article for the American Vocational Journal, considered an assessment of the local employment community a major step in the development of any training program.¹⁵ Voelkner, in an article for the same journal, said job availability must be known prior to launching any new programs.¹⁶

Blocker, Plummer, and Richardson implied the need to contact the employer by setting the following guideline as part of the requirement for a technical program: "The curriculum must be related closely to the requirements for skills, knowledge, and understandings of the occupation or group of occupations."¹⁷

In Dona Ana County, New Mexico, Edington and Andrews conducted an occupational survey of the area. The purpose of this study was to determine the positions which existed in the county and also the training required. As the study revealed, many positions require some training for initial employment, but further training after being employed would also be of value.¹⁸

Murphy, in her identification of common content, said the first

task is to identify the commodities in vocational education courses at the secondary level. Teachers could then develop vocational education curricula to better meet the needs of secondary students.¹⁹

In the last decade there has been much work in curriculum, including the preparation of study guides, course outlines, and curriculum guides in all vocational areas. Sjorgren and others identified common pre-entry level behaviors for agricultural technicians and metal fabricating workers.²⁰ Dailey and Neyman identified three basic vocational talents--Abstract reasoning, mechanical comprehension, and spatial visualization--and they developed and tested curriculum materials to teach these concepts.²¹ These studies and others of the same type have identified concepts, competencies, or content common to the occupations.

Huegli, in a 1974 study wrote about a recent survey suggesting that businessmen do not feel even one-third of present business college graduates can satisfactorily apply theory to the real world, and that they experience serious difficulties in adjusting to corporate life. This study suggests that today's college graduates may be ill-prepared for their first positions.²² If college graduates are so ill-prepared for the working world, where do high school graduates rate in the working world for their first position?

In the Battelle study for developing, revising, and keeping vocational education programs up to date, the major objective of the study was to develop a method which school systems could use to reduce discrepancies between employer-desired skills and

curriculum-produced skills.²³ Battelle further indicated the method to use for updating and revising the curriculum to assure that program offerings fit students' interests, needs, and employment opportunities with the following:

1. Decide on curriculum organization and select program offerings.
2. Assess employer and job requirements.
3. Define the objectives of the program and devise measures of success in meeting these objectives.
4. Assess the characteristics and capabilities of students.
5. Design the curriculum.
6. Put the program into operation.
7. Conduct follow-up studies.²⁴

One practical reason for supporting competency studies in distributive education was expressed well by Michael E. McGown, General Manager of Klauser Corporation in Tacoma, Washington:

As never before, the food industry needs distributive education programs that are accountable to its needs and suitable to its standards. The food industry has no place to turn for the solution to its price-cost problem except to increase productivity via better training and more efficient methods of food distribution.²⁵

In review of the related literature, the program used to prepare students to secure jobs and to advance should be based on the competencies required for the job. The selected research reports give insight to some of the thinking and evidence provided by researchers in business education.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this unit was to present the procedures of selecting businesses, developing the questionnaire, and analyzing the questionnaire.

Selecting the Businesses

This study dealt with businesses in five distributive areas: (1) food distribution, (2) general merchandising, (3) home furnishings, (4) apparel and accessories, and (5) automotive and petroleum. Selection of stores was based on geographic area (those within the area of the study), and those which hire high school students. Businesses that fit within this framework were surveyed. Because of the small number of businesses available, no effort was made to randomly select the businesses for this study.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to obtain information needed to meet the objective of this study. The items contained in the questionnaire were drawn from the knowledge of the research as well as the titiluer available in the field. The businesses used in the sample testing were from St. George, Utah. Ten businesses were selected with two businesses from each of the five distributive areas. Selection was done by random process. A sample survey

and cover letter were mailed to the ten businesses for their review and feedback. In the cover letter, the businesses were informed of the procedures and instructions covering the survey instrument. The survey forms were collected at each place of business ten days after they were mailed. The surveys were then analyzed, and changes were made, if necessary.

The survey and cover letter were then mailed to the selected businesses in Cedar City, Utah. Ten days after mailing, the survey was collected at each place of business in order that the material could be analyzed. For those businesses who had not completed the forms, an appointment was made to return and pick-up the completed form at a later date.

Analyzing Data

An analysis was completed by totaling the number of responses for each question by the businesses in like areas. The question receiving the most responses were given number one priority, and so on to the question with the fewest responses. The questions with the same number of responses were listed together, but not in any order of priority.

The five different distributive areas were then compared one to another to determine if there was any consistency in their responses. A comparison was shown with the question receiving the most responses being given number one priority; the question receiving next more responses was given number two priority and so on. The findings were interpreted to mean that the first priority

is the one item the majority of Cedar City businessmen feel distributive education students need to become competent employees. The comments made by the businessmen were also shown in the findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify the competencies needed by distributive education students at Cedar City High School in order for them to become employable in specific businesses in the local community. Specifically, this study dealt with competencies required of businesses in the following areas:

1. Food distribution
2. General merchandising
3. Home furnishings
4. Apparel and accessories
5. Automotive and petroleum

The purpose of this chapter was to report the data obtained from the questionnaire. There were twenty-six (26) questionnaires mailed. The data for the questionnaires were obtained by the researcher through a personal visit to each employer participating in the study; thus a 100% return was achieved.

The data in Tables 1-5 indicate how the different businesses rank the competencies listed on the questionnaire. The respondents had a choice of giving each competency a rating of one through five. These ratings, their descriptions, and weighting are shown below:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----|
| 1. Very Important | 100 |
| 2. Important | 80 |
| 3. Useful | 60 |

Table 1
Comparison of Competency Importance

Home Furnishings Stores	
Accuracy in Computation	100
Attitudes*	100
Cooperativeness	100
Courtesy	100
Honesty	100
Industriousness	100
Initiative	100
Oral Communication	100
Punctuality	100
Self Confidence	100
Tact	100
Efficiency	93
Grooming	93
Interest	93
Neatness of Dress	93
Reaction to Authority	93
Reliability	93
Legible Writing	87
Reading Comprehension	87
Record Keeping	87
Written Communication	87
Sales Ability	31
Business Math	75
Filing	75

* Attitudes was not defined in study, but authors viewpoint was related to attitude toward the world of work.

4. Unimportant 40

5. Very Unimportant 20

The figure shown is the total weighting each of the like businesses gave to the competency, divided by the number of like businesses.

The Data in Tables 1-5 provides the rankings of all businesses that were surveyed. A comparison one to another was made to see if there were any consistency in responses.

Table 2
Comparison of Competency Importance

General Merchandising Stores

Attitudes	100
Honesty	100
Courtesy	96
Initiative	96
Reliability	96
Accuracy in Computation	92
Cooperativeness	92
Industriousness	92
Oral Communication	92
Punctuality	92
Tact	92
Interest	89
Business Math	85
Reaction to Authority	85
Sales Ability	85
Self Confidence	85
Grooming	82
Neatness of Dress	82
Efficiency	78
Legible Writing	78
Reading Comprehension	78
Written Communication	75
Record Keeping	67
Filing	60

The businesses surveyed in the Home Furnishings Store category (see Table 1) were most consistent in their listing of Very Important competencies. The consistencies in which all agreed were Very Important to the entry-level employee were as follows: Oral Communication, Accuracy in Computation, Initiative, Attitudes, Self Confidence, Honesty, Industriousness, Punctuality, Cooperativeness, Courtesy, and Tact.

Table 2 provides General Merchandising Store responses. The

Table 3
Comparison of Competency Importance

Food Distribution Stores

Attitudes	100
Honesty	100
Interest	100
Oral Communication	100
Initiative	95
Reliability	95
Cooperativeness	90
Courtesy	90
Efficiency	90
Self Confidence	90
Filing	85
Grooming	85
Neatness of Dress	85
Punctuality	85
Tact	85
Business Math	80
Industriousness	80
Reaction to Authority	80
Record Keeping	80
Written Communication	80
Accuracy in Computation	75
Reading Comprehension	75
Sales Ability	70
Legible Writing	65

businesses surveyed in this category were in agreement that Honesty and Attitudes were Very Important. All other competencies were rated from 96 down to 60, Filing was listed as the least importance.

The businesses surveyed in the Food Distribution Store category (see Table 3) were in agreement in four very important areas. These areas were Attitudes, Honesty, Interest, and Oral Communication. The other competencies fell between 95 down to 65, with Legible Writing the area of least importance.

Table 4
Comparison of Competency Importance

Apparel and Accessory Stores

Industriousness	100
Punctuality	100
Reliability	100
Attitudes	95
Business Math	95
Honesty	95
Oral Communication	95
Courtesy	90
Initiative	90
Neatness of Dress	90
Reaction to Authority	90
Cooperativeness	85
Interest	85
Legible Writing	85
Reading Comprehension	85
Efficiency	80
Self Confidence	80
Written Communication	80
Accuracy in Computation	75
Efficiency	75
Tact	75
Filing	70
Record Keeping	70
Sales Ability	70

The businesses surveyed in the Apparel and Accessory Store category agreed that Industriousness, Punctuality, and Reliability were Very Important. Table 4 shows that all other competencies fell between 95 and 70, with Sales Ability being rated as least important.

The businesses surveyed in the Automotive and Petroleum category agreed in nine areas of Very Important (see Table 5). They were Attitudes, Efficiency, Courtesy, Honesty, Legible Writing, Neatness

Table 5
Comparison of Competency Importance

Automotive and Petroleum

Attitudes	100
Efficiency	100
Courtesy	100
Honesty	100
Legible Writing	100
Neatness of Dress	100
Oral Communication	100
Reliability	100
Self Confidence	100
Cooperativeness	95
Grooming	95
Industriousness	95
Initiative	95
Reading Comprehension	95
Accuracy in Computation	90
Interest	90
Punctuality	90
Reaction to Authority	90
Record Keeping	90
Sales Ability	90
Tact	90
Business Math	80
Filing	80
Written Communication	75

of Dress, Oral Communication, Reliability, and Self Confidence. All the others ranged in area from 95 down to 75, with Written Communication rated as least important.

The Data in Table 6 are the average rankings of the five businesses listed for each competency. The figures were found by adding the five individual rankings together and dividing by five.

The Data in Table 7 list the competencies in order that the

Table 6
Average of all Businesses

Attitudes	99
Honesty	99
Oral Communication	97
Reliability	96
Courtesy	95
Initiative	95
Industriousness	93
Punctuality	93
Cooperativeness	92
Interest	91
Self Confidence	91
Neatness of Dress	90
Efficiency	88
Tact	88
Reaction to Authority	87
Accuracy in Computation	86
Grooming	86
Reading Comprehension	84
Business Math	83
Legible Writing	83
Sales Ability	79
Written Communication	79
Record Keeping	78
Filing	74

businesses ranked them by their weighted averages. The competencies receiving the highest ranking are given number one priority. When more than one competency was listed under the same priority number, they were listed alphabetically with no particular priority.

At the conclusion of the questionnaire, the business had the opportunity to respond freely if it desired. Six businesses stated competencies which they felt should be added. They were as follows:

1. Use of Cash Register
2. Shrinkage Control (Profit-Loss)

Table 7

Order of Importance of Competencies of all Businesses

Competency	Rank
Attitudes	1
Honesty	1
Oral Communication	2
Reliability	3
Courtesy	4
Initiative	4
Industriousness	5
Punctuality	5
Cooperativeness	6
Interest	7
Self Confidence	7
Neatness of Dress	8
Efficiency	9
Tact	9
Reaction to Authority	10
Accuracy in Computation	11
Grooming	11
Reading Comprehension	12
Business Math	13
Legible Writing	13
Sales Ability	14
Written Communication	14
Record Keeping	15
Filing	16

3. Desire to Learn
4. Drive to get ahead
5. Ability to react to others
6. Understanding of others feelings

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of the study was to identify the competencies needed by distributive education students at Cedar City High School in order for them to become employable in specific businesses in the local community. Of the twenty-six questionnaires mailed, all businesses responded during a personal visit to employers by the researcher; therefore, a 100% return was established.

As stated earlier, an important characteristic of distributive education has been the necessity for rapid adjustment to the changing business conditions in the community. The majority of employers felt all the competencies listed were fundamental, all should be included in the curriculum. The business community is a great source for data and information necessary in the development of curriculum and content for distributive education.

The selected business in Cedar City were elated at the possibility of being able to have input in the subject matter in the school system and were more than willing to work and develop competencies for entry-level employment.

Major Findings and Conclusions

The following major findings and conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Of the top fifteen competencies ranked by businesses, twelve can clearly be identified as those which fall within the social skills area of Distributive Education.
2. There was a high level agreement (90 or above) on the following competencies for all of the occupational areas within this study.
 - a. Attitudes
 - b. Honesty
 - c. Oral communication
 - d. Reliability
 - e. Courtesy
 - f. Initiative
 - g. Industriousness
 - h. Punctuality
 - i. Cooperativeness
 - j. Interest
 - k. Self confidence
 - l. Neatness of dress
3. The following competencies in all occupational areas were rated 83 or below.
 - a. Business Math
 - b. Legible writing
 - c. Sales ability
 - d. Written communication
 - e. Record keeping
 - f. Filing

4. When a comparison was made of one type of distributive business to another, and putting all five types of businesses together, there was not only competency in which 100 was achieved on the Very Important rating. Thus, there appeared to be slight discrepancies of opinion among groups.
5. Those competencies receiving the highest rating from the majority of the businesses were Attitudes and Honesty. Filing was the lowest competency receiving a ranking of 74. All other competencies were rated between high of 99 and low of 74.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Employers should be invited into the classroom to inform students of the competencies they desire in entry-level employees.
2. Distributive Education curriculum at Cedar City High School needs to keep up with the needs of business.
3. An active on-going Advisory Committee is needed to advise the Distributive Education Curriculum at Cedar City High School.
4. This study should be expanded to other areas of Utah to see if Cedar City is unique.
5. The question as to attitudes and values of entry-level employees need further study; i.e., Should public schools

teach attitudes and honesty.

6. Stronger emphasis needs to be placed on those competencies which the businesses listed as Very Important which are classroom-oriented skills.
7. Less emphasis should be placed on the competencies rated low by the employers.
8. The entire school needs to become more involved in the competencies which are taught, such as communication (oral and written), and reading.
9. Further study needs to be done on attitudes where it is defined in more specific terms and greater detail.

FOOTNOTES

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APPENDIX

Dr. Jerald S. Hawley
Principal
Dr. Dee El Stapley
Assistant Principal

Dr. J. Clair Morris
Superintendent

February 10, 1978

Gentlemen:

The Business Education faculty at Cedar City High School wishes to make its Distributive Education courses relevant to current personnel recruitment and training needs for entry-level positions. We want to be certain our students are being trained according to the competencies required for jobs in today's businesses.

A list of attitudes, competencies, skills, and personality characteristics is attached. Please indicate by check mark which ones, in your opinion, should be covered at the high school level.

I will come by on February 21 to pick up your checklist. Your cooperation will be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mervin W. Prince

dp

Enclosure (1)

THE SEAL OF THE CEDAR CITY HIGH SCHOOL
UTAH
KNOWLEDGE

1940

Competencies Required of High School
Distributive Education Students For Entry-level
Employment in Selected Cedar City Businesses

Directions: The purpose of this study is to identify the competencies required of high school Distributive Education students for entry-level employment. Please react to each statement as to whether this competency should be taught at the high school level.

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Very Important | 4. Unimportant |
| 2. Important | 5. Very Unimportant |
| 3. Useful | |

	1	2	3	4	5
Oral Communication					
Written Communication					
Business Math					
Accuracy in Computation					
Initiative					
Attitudes					
Sales Ability					
Self Confidence					
Honesty					
Industriousness					
Legible Writing					
Record Keeping					
Filing					
Reaction To Authority					
Punctually					
Cooperativeness					
Neatness Of Dress					
Reliability					
Courtesy					
Tact					
Interest					
Efficiency					
Grooming					
Reading Comprehension					
Other					
Other					
Other					

VITA

Mervin W. Prince

Candidate of the Degree of

Masters of Science

Plan B Report: Competencies Required of High School Distributive Education Students for Entry-Level Employment in Selected Cedar City Businesses

Major Field: Business Education

Biographical Information:

Personal Information: Born at Cedar City, Utah, December 14, 1944, the son of Lyle B. and Venice W. Prince. Married to Dorothy A. Densley, August 18, 1967. Parents of two sons, Robert M. and Dale V.

Education: Attended New Harmony Elementary (two-room elementary school) New Harmony, Utah. Graduated from Cedar City High School, Cedar City, Utah, in 1963; received the Bachelor of Science in Business Education from Southern Utah State College, Cedar City, Utah, in 1972.

Professional Experience: Taught Business (Accounting, Economics, Law, Marketing or Distributive Education, Math) Secondary level, Cedar City High School, Cedar City, Utah, 1972-1979. Taught Course on Methods of Teaching Cooperative Education in the school districts of Garfield, Beaver and Iron County Utah, under the direction of Utah State Board of Education, and Utah State University, Winter, 1977.