

CMS

LAUNCHING FRESHMEN DOWN THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

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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It is an age-old dilemma for educators across the nation. How do we take an unfocused, sometimes frightened 13- or 14-year-old freshman and transform them into a motivated learner, with a vision of their future and the educational path that will get them there?

The transition into high school is particularly difficult for many students. As students move into a larger, less personal environment, where is it easier to get “lost in the crowd” they must make course selections that will greatly impact their future career and lifestyle options. Students who choose to follow a less rigorous academic path limit their post-secondary educational, training, and career options. For example, if they begin ninth grade by opting out of higher order math classes, and never get back on track, most high-paying/high-satisfaction careers will be closed to them.

The Tennessee Model

To address this problem the Tennessee Department of Education unveiled a new course in the fall of 2002. Career Management Success, or CMS as it has become better known, is a mandatory class for all career/technical students in ninth grade. The goal of CMS is to provide 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, Tennessee wisely began at the end by 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. The Department decided on ten key competencies that students would demonstrate by the end of the course (see pages 5-7).

Districts were to decide how best to meet all 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 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 who would 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, Jerry requisitioned his *Career Choices* textbooks along with a copy of the consumable *Workbook and Portfolio* for each student. He also requested *Possibilities*, the literature anthology for *Career Choices*. Integrating academics into his class was a priority. He knew it was important for his students to not only have a vision of their future but to also understand the importance of education in helping them achieve their dreams. By integrating rigorous reading and writing assignments into his course work, students would gain valuable basic skills practice and, at the same time, see the relevance in their other academic courses.

Finally, knowing that he was preparing his students for the 21st century workforce, he incorporated the Internet enhancements to the curriculum, www.careerchoices.com and www.lifestylemath.com. Exposing them to the power of the Internet as they planned their futures would provide them with a practical skill they would use throughout their lives.

Jerry Anderson took his duties seriously, was meticulous in his preparation, and focused on the course

goals. After one semester he could report 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. Jerry 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 easy and straightforward.

Early on he was sure he was on the right track when his students starting 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,” Jerry reports. “But a challenge well worth the effort!”

Students were excited and enthused because the reading, writing, and discussions were about them. Jerry 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 roll up their sleeves and 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. And they now saw how all of their classes related to their goals.

At one parent conference, a couple jokingly asked Jerry, “Where is our child? What have you done with him?” Until CMS and *Career Choices*, their son had hated everything about school, they said. Now it was as if he were a different person. He couldn't wait to go to class every day.

Integrating Academics with Career/Technical Education

Jerry felt 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. The more relevant the material for both disciplines, the higher probability students will comprehend and integrate the information that both need.

Jerry showed how this could happen by teaming with the English teachers. His students wrote autobiographies, for which they received credit both in freshman English and in CMS. Jerry invited English teachers in to see more of what he was doing to help his students practice their written, verbal and reading skills.

They 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 the famous 1963 speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream...”. At the beginning of every class meeting, Jerry wrote a thought for the day on the board, to which the students responded in their journals. Many times these thoughts were selections from the literature anthology. Or Jerry might begin with the recitation of an inspiring quote from the materials that related to career exploration or personal development. Intrigued, students would ask, “Where did you get that?” and then eagerly look it up in their *Career Choices* texts.

The Ability to Visualize Your Future

Students' favorite activities were clearly assembling their portfolios and using the Internet enhancements for *Career Choices* available at www.careerchoices.com. However, the main success of the class related to how well students dealt with parts of school that were not their favorites. In fact, Jerry would describe the thrust of the class not so much as managing career success as managing the questions, “Why do I have to study this?” and “When am I going to use this?” Whenever students asked Jerry these questions, his reply was always, “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 much more likely to graduate than those who do not.

The inability to visualize their futures and set clear goals for their adult years affects our young people more than is widely recognized. For instance, students who have no vision of their future are far more likely to become teen parents, according to Michael Resnick, Ph.D., researcher and author of one of the most respected studies on teen pregnancy prevention.

The *Career Choices* program, with its clear beginning, middle, and end, takes readers logically from one point to the next. Using an “if/then” approach, this process makes sense to most adolescents. If you want

to be a nurse or a plumber then you must be able to read and do math. If you want to keep a job then you need to perform it well and responsibly. If you want to own your own home then you need to prepare for a job that pays enough for you to buy one.

By asking readers to project themselves into the future, *Career Choices* demonstrates how decisions made today have consequences down the line. Students who formerly saw school as an obstacle to be avoided learn to regard education as a path to a satisfying future.

Jerry constantly challenged his students to think ahead and to envision the future as they were developing their plans. As they discovered more about their personal goals and dreams through the variety of activities and exercises, their plans and portfolios came together. The more they could visualize and articulate a productive future, the more motivated they were 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 student's progressed through their own career planning process, the speakers brought a real-world perspective as they answered students' questions. When the 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, a Human Resource Specialist came from a large manufacturing company, one of the areas main employers at which many students' parents worked. They 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 importantly, 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," Jerry reported. "Much of this evaluation was done via a competency checklist and observation. Students' learning styles were taken into account regarding evaluation techniques. 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, Jerry suggests that new instructors 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 guidance. According to Anderson, you'd be hard pressed to come up with a program that does so much even if you had a full year to prepare!

Step Two: If anything is unfamiliar or uncomfortable, he advises new teachers to go straight to the source for help. In Tennessee, that's Educational Consultant Lynn Anderson. You can contact her by e-mail at LYasmin@aol.com or by phone at (865) 966-7075. You can also contact Academic Innovations' technical support department at (800) 967-8016 or visit the Academic Innovations web site at www.academicinnovations.com. They can help you get started.

Step Three: Develop the lesson plan for your course (see section five of the *Instructor's Guide* for examples). Jerry recommends that career/technical instructors customize the CMS course to fit their own strengths by incorporating the activities from *Career Choices* into other projects. Jerry 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 personal 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 curriculum are excited by the results; there seems to be a kind of synergy at work. Once students realize how education will benefit them in the future—clearly demonstrating "what's in it for me"—they apply themselves to all their studies. Not surprisingly, their performance improves, and this encourages them to work 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, 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. Paul Bean, Director of Career/Technical Education for Knox County Schools in Knoxville, when asked how he got his CMS program up and running so easily and effectively, replied, “My instructors worked with Lynn Anderson, educational consultant, to select a curriculum. Once we decided upon *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; thus we are doing great! Our folks like the class, find the materials easy to use, flexible, with room for creativity and a personal touch of their own. My instructors love working with Lynn Anderson, and are comfortable calling on her when they need assistance.”

At Rutherford County Schools, the Director of Career/Technical Education, Kay Nixon, sponsored CMS training with Lynn Anderson in the spring of 2002. At this training, teachers decided to use the *Career Choices* materials in their CMS classes. Kay then sponsored follow-up training in January, 2003. Ms. Nixon in Rutherford County and Mr. Bean in Knox County have the right idea—these follow-up sessions work!

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 one of those first teachers. She instantly recognized the possibilities inherent in the materials, leading to a successful first semester for she and her students:

“I love this class and I love *Career Choices*. It is all so REAL! My students love to come to class! I have seen total turn around from some of my students. They enjoy the personal touch of CMS. 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

Much as we would like students to learn for the love of learning, most young people today need the stimulation that comes from seeing how the subject at hand relates to them and to their place in the world. *Career Choices* and a mandated guidance course in the freshman year offers that stimulation. In addition, it graphically illustrates the personal benefits—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 circumstance. 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 learn. 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, is on record as saying, “This is what I would recommend to all schools. Students come into this class without a clue as to what the futures 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!”

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

“After almost 30 years in the construction business and 11 years in the teaching arena, CMS is the most rewarding yet most 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 8am to 9:30 am EST, Monday-Friday.