



TRANSITION

Highlights

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These highlights are part of a series that focuses on various aspects of transition.

THE INTEGRAL ROLE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN SUPPORTING PROGRAMS OF STUDY AND CAREER PATHWAYS

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WHAT IS CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

According to Sears (1982), career development is “the total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one’s career.” This definition was advanced by the Illinois Career Development Task Force that engaged in more than a year of deliberation. Career development is grounded in career theory, including Super’s (1957) life-span career theory. Applied to career development, the significance of Super’s (1957) theory is that it emphasizes career development as an ongoing process that continues throughout an individual’s life. Career development programs and services can assist to “improve individual career awareness, exploration, choice, preparation, and management” (Williams, Bragg, & Makela, 2008, p. 7; see also Herr & Cramer, 1996). Successful, ongoing career development helps individuals of all ages to make a variety of transitions throughout their lifetimes: between different levels of education, from education to work, and between work and education.

THE IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) notes that today’s employees must navigate a complex and changing world of work. Further, individuals face preparation gaps that educators and employers must fill through improved career development initiatives. Identifying and securing opportunities to earn a viable income is important but only part of the story. Finding employment and building a career based on interests is not an easy process (Lewis, Kosine, & Overman, 2008). ACTE states, “Without structured guidance activities, young people tend to drift through their high school education without gaining knowledge of all the career opportunities available to them or the skills that are required” (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” Dec 2008, p. 2).

Career development can help to remedy this lack of knowledge for individuals of all age levels and can promote personal and educational development. For example, research demonstrates that “career development positively impacts academic achievement, career maturity, educational motivation, coping skills, self-esteem, and age-appropriate exploration and career decision-making” (Williams et al., 2008, p. 7; see also Akos, Konold, & Niles, 2004; Evans & Burke, 1992; Hughes & Karp, 2004; Jepsen & Dickson, 2003; Lapan, Gysbers, & Sun, 1997; Legum & Hoare, 2004; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Patton & Creed, 2001; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998). Career development can also motivate individuals by providing a concrete connection between educational programs and future careers.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Scholars and practitioners disagree about the use and meanings of terms for individuals who work in fields related to career development. The National Career Development Association crafted a career provider's comparison chart to improve understanding of the various terms and their meanings. The comparison chart can be accessed at http://associationdatabase.com/aws/NCDA/pt/sd/news_article/15416/_blank/layout_details/false.

Two of the most commonly used terms are career coach and career counselor. Although these terms are used differently in different fields, Chung and Gfroerer (2003) make general distinctions between the two. According to these authors, career coaches use task-focused and problem-solving methods to help individuals develop career-related skills and make solid career choices. On the other hand, career counselors rely more heavily on psychological methods and “work with clients to achieve self-understanding and awareness in career planning and may use professional instruments to assess personality traits to aid in the awareness process” (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003, p. 142). Counselors are required to have professional training and at least a Master's degree, whereas coaches do not have specific training or education requirements. Career advisor is another term that is used extensively in secondary and postsecondary education settings to identify individuals who help to guide students in identifying career goals and align these goals with the choice of a major and the selection of appropriate course work. Like career coaches, career advisors are not required to have advanced education at the master's level or beyond, although it is not unusual for career advisors to do so (D. Bragg, personal communication, May 7, 2010).

Since these terms are often understood differently, in this document the term “career services provider” is used to allow for flexibility in understanding while emphasizing the role of individuals in facilitating career development (R. Reardon, personal communication, April 13, 2010). We also use the terms guidance counselor and school counselor because individuals employed in these positions are often asked (though sometimes unprepared) to provide career counseling in Pre-K-12 schools (American School Counselors Association, 2005).

ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career development initiatives can be implemented by career services providers and through career courses, internships/job shadowing, and computer-based guidance programs (Williams et al., 2008). These initiatives should:

- Include individuals of all ages and levels of education
- Offer services for individuals of all ages that continue through one's lifetime
- Recognize the interactions among education, business, industry, and government
- Be foundational and systemic – not an extra activity
- Emphasize alignment between academic and career development services
- Utilize and promote problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Refer to human development in theory and practice through the cycle of career decision-making

HOW DOES CAREER DEVELOPMENT RELATE TO PROGRAMS OF STUDY AND CAREER PATHWAYS?

Programs of Study (POS) consist of clusters and pathways that connect high school to college and careers in a variety of fields. POS are sequences of courses that progress through secondary and postsecondary education. POS incorporate both academic and career and technical education (CTE) courses and other curricular elements, building from the national model of Career Clusters and Career Pathways (Jankowski, Kirby, Bragg, Taylor, & Oertle, 2009; State's Career Clusters Initiative, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009). While POS are articulated from secondary through postsecondary education, there are multiple entry and exit points with numerous opportunities for students to earn stackable credentials, certificates, and degrees.

Career Clusters and Career Pathways are components of POS where students gain Cluster and Pathway level knowledge and skills. At the Cluster level, students explore their career interests while developing academically by learning a common core of foundational knowledge and skills. At the Pathway level, students gain more specialized knowledge and skills. Pathways consist of academic and technical study that prepares students for a full range of options within each of the Career Clusters. Currently, there are 79 nationally recognized Pathways, each with specific Pathway knowledge and skills. Career Pathways provide a context for further gains in students' academic knowledge and skills integrated with career exploration. Pathways are designed to link learning to the skills and knowledge needed for further education, career development, and employment.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is an important aspect of the comprehensive curriculum associated with POS, emphasizing “career clusters and career pathways as a way to guide young people through the career decision-making process” and helping “students to more clearly understand how their educational choices affect future career options” (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” Dec. 2008, p. 5). Core academics are equally as critical. Math, science, language arts and communications, social sciences, and other core subjects are essential for K–12 students who seek to transition successfully to college and careers, as well as for adults who are preparing for study or are studying at the postsecondary level.

THE ROLES OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT, PROGRAMS OF STUDY, AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Career development is important because it motivates and engages students in career decision-making through relevant and personalized education (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” Dec. 2008). Without career development, including career exploration, students are challenged to make good decisions about college and careers. Career development in association with POS can provide students with a combination of coursework, innovative instruction including work-based learning experiences, and support services that are aligned with career clusters and career pathways. POS provide the support structures and information that guide students’ course taking as they explore their career interests. Research findings indicate that participation in POS coursework adds value to the career development process by providing students with opportunities for career exploration and preparation as they develop their career identity (Lewis, et al., 2008). POS and the related Career Pathways create an organizational system that can be used to guide student exploration and connect career interests to course-taking and preparation.

Other Career Development Resources

CareerClusters.org: Interest Survey <http://www.careerclusters.org/resources/ccinterestsurvey/InterestSurvey.pdf>

Guidance tool to provide individuals with a thorough understanding of the career clusters.

CareerOneStop: Pathways to Career Success sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor <http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Includes resources for exploring careers and education, and provides resume and interview tools.

Illinois One Source: Your Gateway to Workforce and Career Information: <http://www.ilworkinfo.com/>

Provides career information in English and Spanish for elementary, high school, and adult students.

Next Steps <http://www.nextsteps.org/>

Provides information about specific careers and guidelines for career planning, career seeking, and career maintenance.

School to Careers <http://www.careers.iptv.org/>

Allows students to become acquainted with a variety of careers through interaction with professionals in different fields through media such as video and discussion boards.

Vocational Information Center <http://www.khake.com/index.html>

CTE resources, including career options, required skills, and educational programs.

INTEGRATING CAREER DEVELOPMENT, PROGRAMS OF STUDY, AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Introducing career development without emphasizing a breadth of factors that influence education and career opportunities can be confusing to students. Some teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and others worry that a focus on careers narrows the curriculum in ways that are detrimental to students' broader educational goals. Younger students may interpret career development and POS discussions as forcing them to choose between college and a technical career path rather than integrating elements of both throughout their education. This perspective may lead to tracking that limits students' college and career options, which is counter to the actual intentions of POS or CTE (Stern & Stearns, 2006). POS actually provide a means for exploring options, organizing course selections and planning for transition while developing knowledge and skills. With POS as a centerpiece, students can receive assistance to plan an individualized educational path that connects their interests with coursework and motivates them to reach higher academic achievement. Furthermore, POS and Career Pathways can help show the relevance of school to postsecondary and lifelong learning (Lewis, et al., 2008).

Along the same lines, career development programs may appear to place a liberal arts education in competition with or opposition to CTE. This competition between CTE and liberal arts and general education is unfortunate and unnecessary. Program administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors should emphasize the integration of CTE and other academic coursework to help prepare students for the transition from secondary education to college and careers (Stern & Stearns, 2006). Once again, this integration of curriculum, academic and CTE, is an essential element of POS.

CAREER SERVICES PROVIDERS' ROLE IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

High school and college level career services providers can facilitate quality career development by providing personalized educational guidance for students by helping them to choose relevant academic coursework along with practical educational and career experiences ("Career and Technical Education's Role," December 2008). Despite their recognition of the importance of personalized plans, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or Individualized Career Plans (ICPs), many career services providers have difficulty providing career-focused guidance in high schools and in community colleges, four-year colleges and universities. Since the formal training of many career services providers focuses on *student* development, these individuals may sometimes lack understanding of *career* development, a related but distinct body of knowledge. As a consequence, it is beneficial for career services providers to work closely with teachers to provide students with well-rounded guidance involving developmental, academic, and career-oriented facets ("Career and Technical Education's Role," December 2008).



CHALLENGES TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Several concerns expressed by practitioners who work closely with career development in the state of Illinois are:

- Historically, Illinois has not adopted state policy on career development or required that schools and colleges implement career development programs (Williams et al., 2008). Concerned about fragmented delivery of career development programs and services, in 2007-08 the Illinois Career Development Task Force was formed and led by Mark Williams of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). This group recommended that the state adopt a career development framework, recognizing that attention and support is needed from all levels of the P–20 system to achieve lasting impact. Without clear and consistent state and local policy, the group predicted that program implementation would continue to be uneven and likely ineffective.
- In many states and localities (not just in Illinois), counselors are trained in mental health counseling with minimal or no training in career development. This lack of career development knowledge may contribute to counselors minimizing the importance of career development and sometimes providing students with inadequate and even inaccurate perceptions of college and career options (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” December 2008).
- Even within CTE courses, the aspect of the K–12 curriculum that is presumably most aligned with career development, gaps exist between CTE and career development. Some high schools and community colleges offer CTE courses without much focus on career development, despite the potential close relationship between the two constructs. For example, some CTE programs assume that students have explored career options and have made career decisions prior to entering a CTE course, and they breeze past career orientation and exploration to skill-building (Williams et al., 2008). This approach to teaching CTE is not consistent with the building curriculum reform efforts that support the state’s efforts to implement POS and Career Pathways and facilitate student transition to college and careers.

CHALLENGES TO GUIDANCE COUNSELING

Guidance counselors face myriad challenges in delivering effective academic and career guidance (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” December 2008; Jaschik, 3 March 2010). Many high schools have tight budgets that result in a too-large student-to-counselor ratio and heavy counselor workloads. The average national ratio is reported variably as 265:1 (Jaschik, 3 March 2010) or 479:1 (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” December 2008), with some states’ ratios reaching nearly 1,000:1. Unfortunately, Illinois’ student-to-counselor ratio is toward the higher end of this spectrum (Williams et al., 2008). A consequence of these high ratios is that students feel like a face in the crowd when seeking guidance about college and career preparation. The actual time counselors have to devote to counseling students about careers is modest, at best.

The guidance counseling function is further complicated in that many guidance counselors are expected to administer the master course schedule for their schools and administer achievement tests, which take away from their time with students. Students and families that have the resources to do their own research increasingly seek online college/career resources rather than the advice of career professionals. Finally, knowing how to advise students about career options is often difficult for guidance counselors whose training has focused primarily on mental health rather than on career guidance (“Career and Technical Education’s Role,” December 2008; Jaschik, 3 March 2010).

For Further Reading

Marszalek, J., Zhu, R., Loeb, J.W., Bragg, D., & Brooks-Laraviere, M. (2006). *Career and technical education transition programs: Effects of dual credit participation on postsecondary readiness, retention, graduation, and time to degree*. Retrieved from <http://occr.ilinois.edu/files/Projects/CTE/Report/Transition.pdf>

Nikirk, M. (2007, April). Recruiting strategies for CTE. *Tech Directions*.

NATIONAL STANDARDS ALIGNING SCHOOL COUNSELING AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Consistent with the perspective that school (or guidance) counselors should play a role in assisting students with their career development, the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) (2005) adopted national standards that recognize career development as one of three domains that enhance student learning, with academic development and personal/social development being the other two domains. These standards complement the competencies listed under the National Career Development Association (NCDA) guidelines (America's Career Resource Network, undated) that emphasize personal social development, educational achievement and lifelong learning, and career management. The ASCA guidebook (2005, p. 33) provides an example of a crosswalk developed by educators in the state of Connecticut that shows alignment between the ASCA national standards and the NCDA competencies, in addition to showing alignment with Connecticut's standards for learning and school counselors' goals. This example displays how the ASCA national standards and the NCDA national competencies complement one another in ways that support the role that school counselors play in supporting their students' career development.

American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Standards	National Career Development Association (NCDA) Guidelines
Standard 4: Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions	Competency 9: Understanding how to make decisions Competency 10: Awareness of the interrelationship of life roles
Standard 5: Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction	Competency 11: Awareness of different occupations and changing male/female roles
Standard 6: Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education and training and the world of work	Competency 12: Awareness of the career planning process

Adapted from: American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: author. (p. 33).

NEXT STEPS

The Illinois Career Development Task Force (Williams et al., 2008) recommended that implementation of a comprehensive career development system should take place in phases in order to create successful changes in the P-20 educational system. Phase I should involve coordination of existing career development services and promote networking between state and local career development leaders. Phase II should include career plans for all K–12 students and make them available for all learners, as well as improve teacher and counselor training at all levels. Phase III should implement electronic and online learning to enhance current state career development programs, and should assess the support of local and state governance. These phased recommendations still seem to make sense, possibly now more than before, and we encourage the state to proceed with their implementation.

In addition, schools, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities need career services providers who can take action to ensure their students are prepared to benefit from current and accurate academic and career guidance. By focusing on the inclusive nature of CTE, career services providers should reach out to all learners in their institution and help them develop college and career plans. In addition, guidance counselors can combine their efforts with those of career services providers to provide career development for all students. Guidance counselors can expect to continue to face challenges as the emphases on achievement tests and online college and career information prevail. Underserved students face real challenges in this environment as well. However, by focusing on career development alongside academics, innovative instruction, and support services as a comprehensive initiative, career services providers can impact their students in a positive way.

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