

# Adolescent Development and Career Planning in Schools

— by Shelley L. Boan and Noella Piquette-Tomei

There are various developmental factors that can affect a student's ability and willingness to engage in career planning. The developmental areas that will be considered for this project are cognitive and social because they are so closely linked in adolescence (DeHart, Sroufe, & Cooper, 2004; Kasschau, 1995). The context of this development must also be noted as these factors are mutually interactive.

Taking into account adolescent development is of central importance when considering how to create career planning models for teens. This allows these programs to be more successful in their compatibility with teenagers' wants and needs. Cognitive development affects the ways in which students think about careers and affects their interest in their future, while social development or identity development affects how they feel about careers and therefore, affects the success of their exploration.

Cognitive shifts can be observed in how students make decisions; those in earlier grades consider themes at a concrete level whereas students in later grades have the ability to conceptualize themes and concepts. Students' rationale for choosing occupations becomes more logical, realistic, and more deeply understood as they age. Specifically, career choices and interests become broader as teens think about the future more rationally and comprehensively. Identity development is largely dependent on social influences and does have an effect on career planning. Exploration is a precursor to identity achievement and a healthy transition to adult life. Students who have explored their interests, needs, and values in a career counselling situation report a strong sense of identity achievement. It is important that the process of career planning is a positive experience for adolescents. Maintaining a supportive environment with encouragement from adults to explore

the rationale behind their interests and choices can create this. This allows them to build skills and expand career interests that are likely to carry over to further vocational research. Support from counsellors also helps to reduce the negative emotions or pressure of the process, to internalize values and motivation, to overcome challenges, and to foster improved school engagement and performance.

## Strategies to support adolescent career development

Counsellors can account for cognitive development maturation by not setting limits on the numbers or kinds of careers that students choose to investigate. Instead, they can encourage a variety of possibilities and give students adequate time to allow for this exploration. This supports the advances in hypothetical thinking that are being made. Furthermore, if changes in thinking happen rapidly, it would be beneficial to change the content of the career information for specific individuals. Promoting student engagement and meaningfulness of the career information can also incorporate varying cognitive shifts by utilizing a case studies (real or fictional) approach to show how others have benefited from career guidance or from using a group approach that encourages discussion.

Counsellors can attend to developmentally appropriate content and delivery of career information while encouraging career exploration as a means to assist with identity formation. For example, grade 12 students may benefit from brief proactive interventions on career and life planning, with less involvement from an adult, whereas counsellors for grade 9 students could focus on more intense, long-term involvement and more adult or peer attention. It is important to remember that career planning may be affected by different stages of identity achievement that must be taken into consideration when implementing career interventions.

## Specific methods to support career development

A few suggestions on how counsellors can further focus on developmental maturation when assisting adolescents in career planning are offered. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list but rather, a helpful start in understanding that adolescents must become invested in their own future plans. The intent behind adolescent career counselling is to have teenagers develop a realistic perspective on their skills and interests in order to allow them to set achievable goals. In the end, teenagers must become informed, self-reliant, and adaptable in life as well as in career, and they must have a vocational program that allows for this.

First, counsellors must ensure adolescent engagement with the career information that is developmentally appropriate. Engagement and relevance will help to build a strong sense of ownership or self-confidence, especially for younger students. One way to establish relevance, specifically for a teenager, is to vary the delivery method (e. g., lectures, technology, or role play), use real-life situations, or use a group approach.

Second, counsellors must ensure continued interest in career information. Interest is maintained by keeping the tasks and discussions developmentally appropriate. In order to do this, younger adolescents must be allowed more exploration and more support as they need time to see what possibilities exist beyond school and to test their emerging identities. This allows students to progress to more advanced exploration as they age, which may allow for greater career skill development and employability skills.

Third, counsellors must seek the assistance of the most influential individuals in student's career decision-making: their parents. Parental support is an overriding necessity of any school-based counselling career model made for adolescents. Parental involvement should include being kept up to date about what their child is doing regarding career planning (i.e., notes or newsletters sent home, open house formats to bring them into the school). Career related assignments or homework involving parents can be included as well as forging opportunities for discussion with parents and their children. The support of their parents helps to alleviate some of the

pressure and isolation that adolescents often feel with regard to important topics such as career planning. Further benefits of parental involvement include the counsellor learning more in regards to students' career ideas, decision-making tools related to future career options, and possible information to include in the career curriculum delivery that will tailor the format and concepts.

Increasing student engagement, ensuring ongoing interest and involving parents in adolescent career information increases the probability of students using the career information in a meaningful manner.

### Summary

It is especially crucial for school counsellors to ensure that the methods and information used in career counselling are helpful for students. This may be the only opportunity for adolescents to receive career planning before they enter into the world of work. As development affects things like what careers teens are interested in, how they think about their future, and what they need to maintain interest, it makes sense for vocational guidance models to take such cognitive changes into account. Additionally, as differences in identity and social development are related to the stress or confidence in the process and outcome of career planning, such models would be wise to incorporate content to address these differences. This will at least provide a starting point for the creation of career planning and exploration curriculum that is needed to build productive, successful, and satisfied workers of the future.

References for this article can be found online at: [ [www.contactpoint.ca/bulletins/v11-n1/v11-n1p.html](http://www.contactpoint.ca/bulletins/v11-n1/v11-n1p.html) ].

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