

COMPREHENSIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN GRADES K-6

By Thomas Viviano

ACCORDING TO THE AUTHORS OF HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF

Education's "Pathways to Prosperity" report, "One of the most fundamental obligations of any society is to prepare its adolescents and young adults to lead productive and prosperous lives as adults. This means preparing all young people with a solid enough foundation of literacy, numeracy and thinking skills for responsible citizenship, career development and lifelong learning."¹ The phrase "all young people" here refers to those in the primary grades, as well as those at the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Although there is very little research in the area of career development in the elementary grades, in 1983, a team of researchers led by Robert E. Campbell from Ohio State University's National Center for Research in Vocational Education, determined five categories of student outcomes when children in secondary school were exposed to career development: "(1) improved school involvement and performance, (2) personal and interpersonal work skills, (3) preparation for careers, (4) career planning skills, and (5) career awareness and exploration."² Many scholars argue that career development should not be a by-product of education but part of its mission. The end result is to attain work, whether students enter the workforce immediately after high school or after college.

Therefore, career development should not be reserved solely for those who simply

want to enter the workforce right after high school, but for all students and early enough so that they can begin to make informed decisions about coursework throughout their educational experiences. For some, this may mean a rigorous academic schedule in middle and high schools in preparation for a four-year college. For others, it may mean a less academic, but just as rigorous, curriculum in a career and technical education (CTE) program.

Earlier career development exposure could also help determine if a student should seek an education in satellite schools, such as those that major in the arts or science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs. Regardless, students in the primary grades need to know their options in order to explore and shape their interests

and craft their abilities accordingly.

If the above weren't reason enough to start broaching the topic of career development at such an early age, a 2012 Gallup student poll of 500,000 students in grades five through 12 offers a compelling reason. The poll showed that student engagement drops off with each school year, peaking at the elementary grades (Figure 1). "Student engagement with school and learning is a gold standard that every parent, teacher and school strives to achieve. If we were doing right by our students and our future, these numbers would be the absolute opposite. For each year a student progresses in school, they should be more engaged, not less,"³ stated Brandon Busteed, executive director at Gallup Education.

Figure 1 shows that by the time students

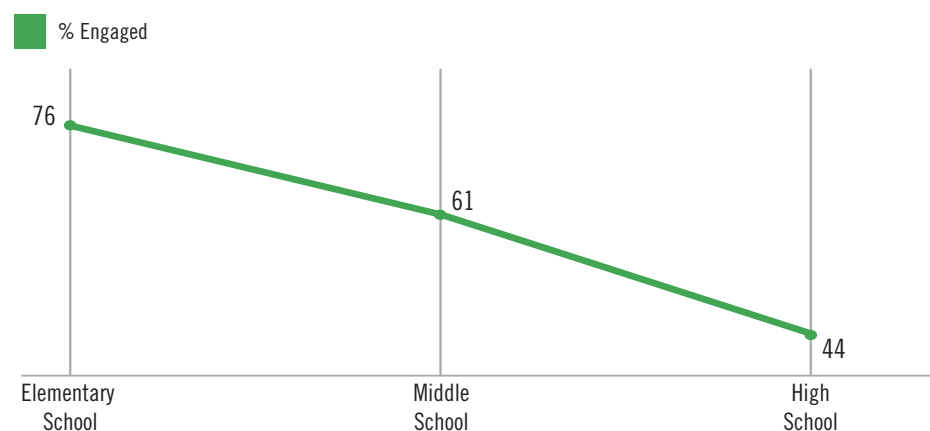


Figure 1. Percentage of drop in student engagement from elementary to high school.

*Gallup Student Poll: The School Cliff: Students' Engagement Drops Over Time (2013)

reach high school, their level of engagement dropped 32 percent. The primary level is an opportune time to introduce career development skills, and the place to begin is self-awareness or self-discovery. In doing so, by the time they reach high school, they know themselves and have an idea of their interests and abilities, which in turn should spark more engagement and interest because they have developed meaningful short- and long-term goals.

Figure 2 shows a funnel graph of what topics should be introduced in career development by grade level. At the top of the funnel, students are going through a self-discovery and self-awareness curriculum that will help them find out who they really are. I believe most young adults are trying to make career decisions based on who they think they are or what they think they'd like to do, which is often based on compensation and not their interests and abilities. Employers spend huge amounts of capital on job training, and when employees get on board and trained, they realize the career path they chose is not what they wanted to do, and this becomes a source of frustration for employers. An elementary career development curriculum helps younger students determine more of who they are so that by the time they are of employability age, they can concentrate more on what they want to do.

This model of career development focuses on elements of a curriculum at the K-6 level that encompasses and develops personal and interpersonal skill sets to help students discover their capabilities in a multitude of dimensions. Also, these skill sets are tied to work skills in some manner, especially those that foster employability skill building and collaboration, such as time management, social and emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills and problem solving, etc. These employability skill attributes are coupled with self-discovery and heuristic qualities such as likes and dislikes, role models, hobbies, leisure activities, critical and creative thinking, etc.

Typically, most counseling is focused on the academic (scheduling) and personal/social domains, which leaves very little time for assistance with career exploration. To facilitate effective transitioning from high

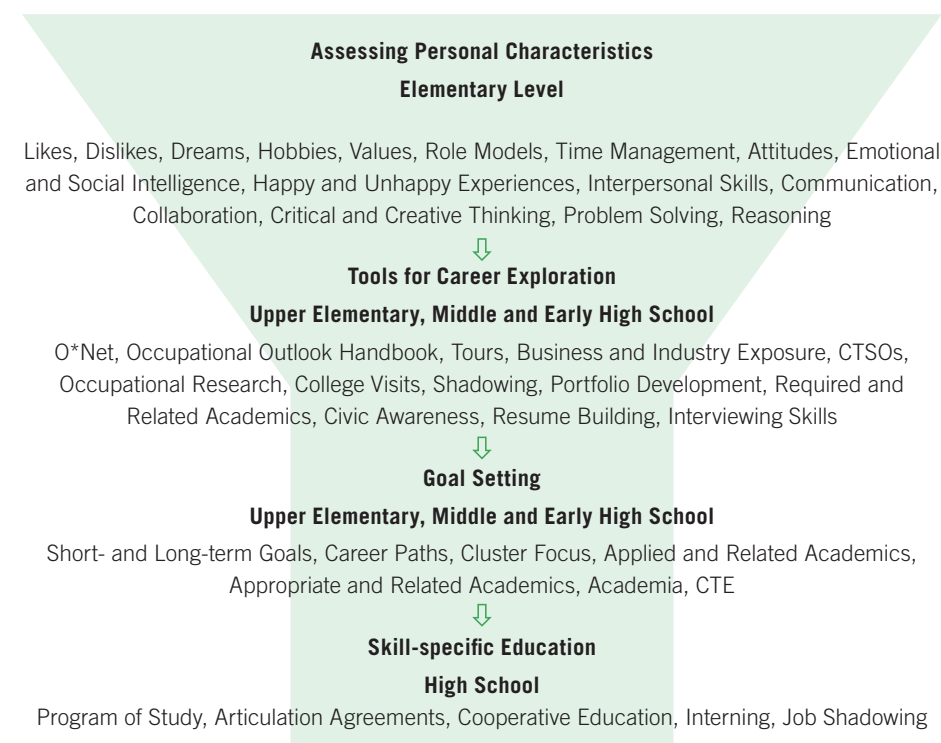


Figure 2. Funnel Graph of K-12 Career-development Process

school to college to the workforce, attention to career development must begin early, which will enhance student engagement at the higher levels of a learner's academic career. [Tech](#)

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ENDNOTES

1. Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2011). *Pathways to prosperity: Meeting the challenge of preparing young Americans for the 21st century*. Retrieved from: www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways_to_Prospersity_Feb2011-1.pdf
2. Campbell, R. E., Connel, J. B., Boyle, K. K., & Bhaerman, R. D. (1983). *Enhancing career development: Recommendations for action*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 227 303) in Wood, C., & Kaszubowski, Y. (2008). *The career development needs of rural elementary school students*. Retrieved from: www.wa-schoolcounselor.org/Files/WoodKaszubowski.pdf
3. Busteed, B. (2013, January 7). The school cliff: Student engagement drops with each school year [Web log comment]. Retrieved from: www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/170525/school-cliff-student-engagement-drops-school-year.aspx

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