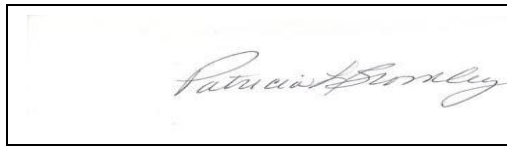


THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER PLANNING
IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read "Patricia Bernley".

Approved _____

Paper Advisor

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER PLANNING
IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The issue in this research paper was to get middle schools involved in helping students understand the connection between school and work. The goal of middle schools should reflect the need for students to develop an understanding of the workforce and to begin preparing for their roles in the workforce. Some students are unaware that the classes one takes in middle and high schools are a learning foundation for the courses one will take in college. Guidance from counselors, teachers, and parents on taking the proper courses and completing the appropriate activities can help students make the connection to the workforce and successfully achieve their career goals. Additionally, the issue was to explore the variety of activities and learning experiences teachers, counselors, parents, and the community can use to help America's children reach their career goals. A brief review of literature on career planning activities was conducted. A second review of literature relevant to the case studies emphasizing the effectiveness of career planning in middle school was conducted. A third review of literature relative to preparing for college, and successfully completing a degree was conducted as well. Through the review of literature, it is apparent that it is the role of teachers, counselors, parents, and the community to educate the children and prepare them for the future. An Individual Career Plan is an essential tool to career planning and a great place to record those milestones along the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

. The challenges that adult educators face when working with late career deciders are that the majority of them are unemployed, have no work skills, lack a stable work history, and/or lack a high school diploma. According to the Office of Economic Advisors (2008) Wisconsin's unemployment rate is 4.7%. The United States unemployment rate is 6.1% and Racine County's unemployment rate alone is 5.9%. As one can see, these challenges are not only faced in Racine County but throughout the United States.

The FoodShare Employment & Training Program (FSET) is a significant place to find examples of these challenges. For instance, recipients of FoodShare are given the option to volunteer for this program as one looks for employment. FoodShare Employment & Training case managers are there to motivate and support their participants in this process. While in the program, participants are offered transportation assistance, vouchers to pay for GED/HSED fees, and child care services so that one is capable of going out to look for employment. Ages of these participants range from 18 to 55. Some of these participants tend to get comfortable in the system and choose not to move ahead in their career paths.

One of the reasons why some of these participants are not successful is because they did not receive the proper education and/or support in career planning at school, home or in the community earlier in life. They may have received encouragement to pursue a career or the idea of a career, but did not receive encouragement to put effort into pursuing their career goals (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). As students these participants failed to see their school counselors, take the appropriate classes, or make an

effort to get good grades in school. Some students are unable to meet with their Guidance Counselors, they are unable to get the direction as to what courses to take to prepare them for college. Therefore, students do not finish their degrees and drop out of college because they are not prepared for the courses.

School is a place where adolescents can establish an identity as they learn, explore, and begin to apply their knowledge and skills to the world around them (Dahir, 2001). By the time late career deciders decide to get the education one needs for a career, they are already adults, raising families, and maybe working a full or part-time job. Perhaps the key to the above example is to motivate schools, starting with middle schools, to incorporate career planning in their curriculum as one does with some required courses such as: Language, Math, and Science.

Creating a mind set for children about career planning as early as middle school allows students who have planned ahead to take the road to success instead of getting in trouble (Dahir, 2001). They become preoccupied with their grades and develop long-lasting attitudes about learning, work, and other adult values. These students learn to take responsibility for their own education. They learn to understand how their current educational and personal choices will affect their future career goals. They are the ones who successfully achieve their degrees. The goal is to educate middle school children about career options and opportunities to help them successfully achieve their career goals at an earlier age in life instead of in older adulthood.

Part of the response must be in career inventory testing. There are tests and curriculum ideas that middle school teachers and/or counselors can use to incorporate in their program of study (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Through assessments educators can

individualize career plans for each of the students. American College Testing Discover®, WISCareers™, and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® are just a few career inventory tests available. Parents can encourage career awareness at home using different resources and activities. There are also pre-college programs available to help shape students' educational and post secondary plans. Examples include Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, and the Pre-college Program at the University of Wisconsin Parkside.

Statement of the Problem

The development of Career Planning Programs in the middle schools is highly praised by the School Boards of Education (Dahir, 2001). It is the role of teachers, counselors, parents, and the community to educate America's children and prepare them for the future. This paper will examine the elements of career education and development appropriate in middle school and describe best practices for working with early adolescents. This paper will also examine the relationship between early career education in the middle schools and subsequent career success. To what extent are early adulthood career goals necessary for successful career entry and success? Specifically the review of literature will be responsive to the question "What is the role of middle level education in helping students explore life's work and make early career decisions?"

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted through the Karrmann Library (University of Wisconsin-Platteville) over a period of sixty-four (64) days. Primary searches were conducted via internet through EBSCO Host with ERIC and Academic Search Elite. Key search topics included, "career planning in middle schools," "career development in middle schools," and "career education in middle schools."

Method of Approach

A review of literature related to research was conducted. Conclusions and explications related to work as a FoodShare Employment and Training Case Manager are explored. The findings are summarized and recommendations made.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Career planning in the middle schools

A career is an occupation or a profession of one's choice that one would consider as a life long commitment. A career should be right for the individual; it should fit their level of interests, personality, aptitude, and values. A career is important to the human race because it brings us status and wealth. One starts to prepare oneself for this commitment as early as middle school. With the support of school counselors, educators, and family, students may successfully achieve their career goals.

As educators it is our job to motivate students to choose their career goals and guide them in taking the appropriate classes one needs to achieve those goals. At the same, provide students with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to establish a strong foundation for future success. It should not be assumed that every student has the support of their school counselor to direct them in the right path. That is why it is important that teachers, counselors, and parents incorporate career planning activities in their curriculum and in family and community events.

Effective career planning helps the students connect education goals to their career goals, and offers opportunities for career exploration through school-based activities and real-life experiences (Dahir, 2001). Career planning establishes a focus for achievement and helps middle school students identify the strategies and tasks necessary to achieve their goals. It also serves as a guide in making decision about academic preparation, work experience, education, and training necessary after high school to make to make a successful transition to the next step toward their career goals.

Students should identify their academic and career goals from the very start. They should begin to design an actual career plan before high school. Ohio's State Department of Education (2000) emphasizes the development of an Individual Career Plan (ICP) by students before they enter high school. Dahir (2001) states that career plans should include the results of assessments of students' skills, attitudes, and interests by the time they enter grade 8 or 9. Exposure to career awareness should take place in grades k-6, participation in career investigations in grades 7-8, and engagement of career experiences in support of their individual educational plans in grades 9-12. Dahir (2001) also suggests an effective career planning program needs these key components:

- *Vision* – what students are expected to accomplish and how it contributes to the school's mission.
- *Commitment* – ongoing investment of resources and support from school, district, family, and community.
- *Comprehensiveness* – the participation of students in the planning process.
- *Collaboration* – shared ownership by stakeholders in the career planning process.
- *Management* – a program management system that ensures effective use of resources in the coordination, articulation, and transition of the program from one grade level to the next.
- *Evaluation* – providing evidence for the success of the program.

One school that uses middle school career planning to the fullest is Bear Creek Middle School in Fairburn, Georgia. The goal of their Career Planning Program is

to help students answer three questions: Who Am I? Where Am I going? How Am I going to get there (Dahir, 2001)? The Bear Creek career center coordinator in collaboration with counselors, students, parents and the community facilitates a career guidance program that involves all students in grades 6-8. The program's activities vary by grade level and are integrated in the curriculum. The results of the program's activities become part of each student's career plan portfolio. A portfolio is a collaboration of information bond together to make up a display of their findings, in this case career options. An example of a sixth grade level activity is the completion of a "Who Am I?" collage. Students begin to explore individual preferences about the lifestyles they wish to pursue, based on their career choices. The collage includes where they want to live, the type of job they want, even the kind of car they want to drive. An example of a seventh grade level activity is, "My Career Path," a project helping them make a connection between school and work. The eighth grade level part of the program prepares students for transition to high school. They upgrade their portfolios, establish goals for the year, and participate in career decision-making assessments.

The goal of career planning is to help students discover what they want to be when they grow up and guide them through the necessary steps to get them there. Discovering their career choice will lead them to the next step of successfully achieving their career goals by the time they finish their education. Like Georgia, Wisconsin's school systems also support their students in the participation of career planning. In the nation, Wisconsin thus far has the lowest dropout rate of college students due to the integration of career planning in the curriculum (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). On the other hand, the lack of career planning is unethical. If students do not start planning for a

career in middle school or increase their career awareness, they are more likely to be unsuccessful. They tend to have unclear goals and lack the direction and motivation needed to achieve goals. They also find themselves struggling through college and end up dropping out. This is why late career deciders are still trying to pursue their career goals at ages 30-40. Also, college becomes difficult if one has been out of school for years (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).

Middle school career education and development

Middle school students are coping with the challenges of cognitive, physical, and mental development; these challenges need to be addressed as early as elementary and middle school. Middle schools provide an opportunity for the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness that are the foundation for the next stage of life (Kerka, 2000). There are appropriate elements of career education and development and best practices for working with early adolescents. Kerka (2000) states studies of adolescents have uncovered a number of reasons that justify the need of middle school career education at this level:

- Sex-role stereotypes about gender-appropriate occupations are formed early.
- At-risk students, girls, and minority group children often limit their career choices early.
- Few middle school students have realistic career plans, and many lack career awareness.

Interviews with sixth and ninth graders show that most students had a shallow

understanding of how school relates to work, had limited awareness of the knowledge and skills needed for work, had little sense of how to develop those skills, had little or no awareness of the type of work involved in their career aspiration, and believed that schoolwork needs to be career specific to be relevant (Johnson, 2000).

Career education is an essential part of a student's middle school career. It is needed to lay the foundation for career development by helping students achieve the following goals:

- Knowledge of personal characteristics, interests, aptitudes, and skills
- Awareness of respect for the diversity of the workforce
- Understanding the relationship between school performance and future career choices
- The development of a positive attitude toward work

At this level, students should continue to build on self knowledge and career awareness that one develops in elementary and begin career exploration activities.

Kerka (2000) describes some of the best practices for middle school career education for demonstrating the value of the following approaches that enhance relevance, student motivation, and effective transfer of learning include:

- *Integrated curriculum* - Combining classroom subjects such as math, writing, and reading with a profession. For an example, the classroom takes a tour to a local bank. The banker may emphasize to the students how his math skills play an important role in his profession. Students get a real life view of how bank tellers use their math skills to count money, use a calculator, and make other money transitions.

- *Constructivism* – Actively constructing knowledge by integrating new information into already learned knowledge. An example of constructing knowledge is engaging the students in a scavenger hunt. The classroom may take a field trip to the zoo and engage the students to learn about the different animals, their habitats, behavior, and diet. The teacher would have developed a packet of questions where students can go around the zoo looking for the answers and record their findings.

- *Service Learning* – Community service activities that may help develop students' self-esteem, sense of civic responsibility, and encourage students to volunteer while exploring the reality of jobs. Teachers take part in grading students for helping out in the community. Students can volunteer to help out in a city event, get the classroom together and clean up the parks, or even participate in a school event.

- *Contextualized Learning* – Hands-on, real-world experiences that help students apply the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to actual setting. An example is a Spanish teacher teaching a lesson on food and restaurants. Students put their knowledge to use by taking a field trip to a local Mexican restaurant and practice ordering their drink and food in Spanish.

- *Technology* – referring to the use of computers; students learn to develop typing skills and bring other transferable skills to the workforce. It is an essential way to engage students in the process of learning. More schools nowadays carry computers in their classrooms. Computers foster an exciting way to learn and provide the means to explore careers on the internet.

- *Other resources* – Appropriate middle school activities include career-oriented interdisciplinary summer school, speakers' bureau, high school and college field trips, career days, portfolios, school-based mentoring, and tech prep introduction. Work-based activities include business field trips and job shadowing.

In middle schools, career education should be more than just job skills and career awareness; a career should be interpreted as life, not just work (Kerka, 2000).

Preparing middle school students for a career

Middle schools are designed to prepare students in several ways. Schools help students continue their education from elementary to college. They guide them through the challenges of puberty. Middle schools also guide them through career exploration, development of skills, self-esteem, and attitudes one needs for a rewarding work life.

Middle schools promote the development and education of adolescents and highlight how students can focus their attention on career opportunities and training. It offers families ideas about how they can encourage their children's career awareness.

Middle school students' development is constantly and rapidly changing. They face physical and mental challenges on a daily basis. Students are moving from a concrete to an abstract way of thinking (Schwartz, 1996). Students are learning to take on responsibility for their own education.

Middle school students, who have already developed career goals are more likely to have high self-esteem and be able to understand the complexity of career information (Schwartz, 1996). They have family support to prepare them for a career. Families help them in learning about career choices and their efforts in school and outside of school.

Students who have identified career options or developed their career goals are more likely to succeed in life. Those who are having difficulties establishing their goals might not be that fortunate. Unfortunately, poor students are less likely to think about how their school course choices will affect their career plans. They may also have less family support due to the stress created by poverty. Many may have already limited their career aspirations by the time they reach middle school, based on false information and beliefs.

Career education can be integrated in middle schools through various programs, curricula, and instructional strategies. Middle school programs can help students plan for a career before undertaking specific training for a vocation. Schwartz (1996) believes effective programs combine middle school education strategies with vocational education by doing the following:

- Explore with students how they can successfully live and work in a culturally diverse world.
- Help students recognize their interests, aptitudes, and abilities, and understand adult roles.
- Help students understand the broad scope of work and career possibilities available both currently and in the future.
- Help students broaden their aspirations beyond the stereotypes of gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity.
- Integrate vocational and academic education to promote intellectual development, and the achievement of higher level of thinking and problem-solving skills.

- Assist with students' development of social skills, personal values, and self esteem.
- Work with families to support their children's career aspirations.

By combining education with vocational education, students can learn work and soft skills needed to transfer to the workforce.

There are several ways middle school curriculum can be manipulated to include career planning and vocational education (Schwartz, 1996). The use of themes can help inform students how their education affects their future career choice and how they can adapt to living in a constantly changing world. Relevant themes would be:

“Understanding self and others,” “Concepts about work and family,” and “Developing positive relationships with family, work, and community.” Organizing a “Career Day” at school is another way to explore careers. Teachers can send notices home with the children asking parents to volunteer and give a presentation about their careers. Students can gain a variety of information from different career options. They can use this information and apply it to various activities they complete while finding a career of their choice.

Work-related skills can also be incorporated into the curriculum. There are many skills students need to attain before they move on to college or the workforce. Middle schools can start introducing students to the workforce by monitoring work experiences or establishing pre-apprenticeship programs, entrepreneurship, job shadowing, and community and neighborhood service. These experiences can help schools prevent students from dropping out (Schwartz, 1996). Middle schools can also combine work

skills with academic skills by assisting students to perform certain vocational tasks. Vocational tasks provide a real world context for academic skills. Teachers require these skills in their students' school careers as well; examples of these work skills are good writing, speaking, and organizational skills. Other soft skills taught in the school's curriculum are: good attendance, punctuality, and efficiency. The use of computers for the studying of businesses and other resources can help with career planning. Effective instructional strategies for vocational education curriculum include: Interdisciplinary team teaching, problem solving, key concepts or themes, and cooperative learning (Schwartz, 1996).

The role of the parents is to encourage their children to plan for a career in several important ways. Parents can encourage their children through open communication about their interests and abilities. They can talk to them about their work and other career options, to help their child decide whether they should attend a technical or four year college based on their career choice. Parents could attend with their child, "Orientation" for several college choices. Parents' engagement makes a long-term difference in the lives of their children. Parents who have timely information about educational planning increase their students' school success, facilitate their college planning, and increase the likelihood that their children will attend college (Wimberly et al., 2005)

Ohio's Career Development Blueprint: Individual Career Plan (ICP)

In 1989, Ohio's State Board of Education was empowered by legislation in Senate Bill 140 to prepare a plan of action for accelerating the modernization of vocational education (Ohio State Dept. of Education, 2000). This bill was passed in Ohio to offer opportunities to improve vocational and career education awareness for all students. The

result was, *Ohio's Future at Work*, a document which outlined specific imperatives and goals that focused on career development. It emphasized the development of an Individual Career Plan by students before they enter middle school. The Individual Career Plan is a learning process that actually begins in kindergarten and continues through the eighth grade. This helps students identify and explore their initial career goals. In their Individual Career Plan, eighth-grade students identify the educational plan needed to achieve those goals. High school students can further explore and verify their educational and career goals through reviewing, revising, and adding on to their plans when they see fit. Individual Career Plans focus on twelve key topics, each with one to three goals. Each goal has suggested activities to help master the goal for each topic. To assure that all twelve topics are addressed each middle school requires a career planning team. Each team should include representation from school counselors, teachers, and parents. The career planning team determines the best delivery system for educators to address the twelve topics. Review and revision of the Individual Career Plan is the main activity. Each topic should be addressed through one or more of the following avenues such as instructional modules, interdisciplinary approaches, and other extracurricular activities. The twelve topics suggested by the Ohio State Dept. of Education (2000) are as follows:

- *Self-awareness*: In which students gain knowledge, understanding, and learn to express themselves. Goal 1: Understand the influence of a positive self-concept. Goal 2: Develop skills to interact positively with each other by demonstrating how to express feelings and ideas in an appropriate manner. Goal 3: Understand the impact of

growth and development. Suggested activities include journaling, role-playing, and students' work exhibited in the classroom and building.

- *Self-assessment*: Formal and informal methods that enable students to measure and interpret achievement, aptitude, interest, and personality. Goal 1: Gain knowledge of individual achievement, aptitude, interest, and personality. Goal 2: Develop skill to interpret assessments in relation to career choice. Suggested activities include assessment instruments, utilization of self-assessment information, and relation and integration of results of past and current assessments.

- *Career Information*: Current and specific data concerning the workforce. Goal: Develop skills to locate, evaluate, and interpret career information. Suggested activities include real work and/or community-service experience, job fairs, and career reports and/or projects.

- *Exploration*: Experiential opportunities to explore career options related to the individual's choice. Goal 1: Understand selected careers. Goal 2: Understand and experience the process of preparation, exploration, reflection, and re-evaluation. Suggested activities include: job shadowing, worker interviews, and student-parent interaction following the exploration experience.

- *Academic Planning*: The process by which one uses all information to relate educational choices to future career goals. Goal 1: Understand the relationship between educational achievement and career planning. Goal 2: Develop skills in career planning. Goal 3: Develop skills to annually review and revise the Individual Career

Plan document. Suggested activities include college, technical, and/or career fairs, interviews with graduates, and educational shadowing.

- *Reduction of Bias:* An expansion of individual career choices based on personal interests and abilities and not limited to sex, race, ethnicity, age, or handicap.

Goal 1: Understand the continuous change in male and female roles. Goal 2: Understand equal career opportunity for all individuals regardless of race, ethnic background, and/or handicapping condition. Suggested activities include events that celebrate diversity, non biased curriculum, and role models and/or panel presentations.

- *Future Trends:* Information related to social, economic, and technological changes and the individual's need to adapt to those changes. Goal: Develop skills necessary to adapt and succeed in the twenty-first century. Suggested activities include field trips to sites utilizing state-of-the-art technology, journals including personal future events, and technology fairs.

- *Employability Skills:* Those work behaviors, abilities, and attitudes necessary to obtain, maintain, and advance in employment. Goal 1: Understand the need for a positive attitude toward work and learning. Goal 2: Develop skills to prepare to seek, obtain, maintain, and change jobs. Suggested activities include mock interviews, personal resumes, letters of application.

- *Decision-Making and Goal Setting:* The process of developing plans specific to a determined outcome. Goal: Develop skills to make decisions and establish goals. Suggested activities include decision-making units of study, leadership seminars, and simulation situations.

- *Community Involvement:* School-based activities that encourage responsibility to and citizenship within the community. Goal 1: Develop skills to become involved in the community. Goal 2: Understand the specific opportunities available for community service. Suggested activities include community service projects including child-care, health care, and poverty and homelessness; and internships relating personal career exploration community service.

- *Economics:* Information relating income, work, and economic concepts to individual career choice and money management. Goal 1: Develop skills to relate to income and money management to lifestyles. Goal 2: Understand how societal needs and functions influence the nature and structure of work. Goal 3: Understand the interrelationship of life roles. Suggested activities include units on personal finance topics, such as banking, insurance, credit cards, and taxes, stock market simulations, and marriage simulations utilizing a budget.

- *Vocational Orientation:* Assuring that vocational career options receive equal emphasis in an individual's educational planning. Goal 1: Understand vocational options available. Goal 2: Develop skills acquired through vocational education. Suggested activities include career fairs, vocational presentations to parents, and informational materials to parents and students.

Other issues that are essential to the success of completing of the Individual Career Plan are community outreach, staff development, and student's accessibility to Individual Career Plan document and assessments of interests and academic achievement.

It's About Time: Parental Activities to Help Middle Grade Students Begin to Think About

Career Choice

Middle school is the time students should be thinking about career possibilities. Since 1994, schools in Ohio have been helping middle schools with career choices through the development of an Individual Career Plan (Andrews, Gahris, Reeder, & Tizzano, 2000). The Individual Career Plan is like a scrapbook or portfolio that provides a place for students to collect ideas and complete activities about careers and keep them all in one place. It is designed to help students collect as much information as they can about themselves so they can eventually make more thoughtful decisions about future careers. Andrews et al. (2000) have a few suggestions about discussion starters and activities that will help parents be part of this career planning process.

- *Personal Planning* – Parents provide the opportunity to learn and understand their interests, strengths, skills, and work attitudes. The more children know about themselves the greater the opportunity for them to find a career path that fits.
 - *Discussion ideas:* Parents share how interests, strengths, skills, and work attitudes influenced their own career decisions. This helps children see how parents use strengths and skills in completing school or household assignments. Students may be asked to identify skills or academic strengths they need to improve in order to be successful in their potential career choices.
 - *Activities:* Parents give children an opportunity to ask questions. “How well does your teen know you?” is a worksheet of questions children may ask their parents. Questions such as: My favorite subject in school was...; I got help in making my career decision from...; or I was particularly good... are included.

- *Career Planning* – Parents provide children the opportunity to explore possible careers, discover what is required to be successful in the areas they explore, and help them decide whether which career choice will be a good match to their skills and abilities.

- *Discussion ideas:* Parents point out and discuss newspaper or magazine articles that show what the current employment outlook is like for their children's potential career. Parents may ask relatives and friends to make arrangements with their employers, during the summer months, for job shadowing experiences for their child. Parents encourage children to explore a “Plan B” for a career choice in case “Plan A” doesn’t work.

- *Educational Planning* – The goal of education planning is for students to know the educational requirements needed to be successful in their career choice. Students of today have to be ready for continual education and lifelong learning due to the rapidly changing world of work. Parents and guardians play a critical role in supporting their children with their educational planning. This is why parents should be involved in their child’s school.

- *Discussion Ideas:* Parents should meet with their child's teachers and counselors on a regular basis each school year to monitor progress and areas where their child might need help. A parent can monitor their child's school attendance and tardiness on a regular basis to ensure the development of a good work ethic and attitude. They can also encourage their child to take elective courses of interest.

- *Activities:* Together both parent and child can create or make changes to

the child's Individual Career Plan. Students can complete career interest and/or aptitude assessments. Students can develop a “Coat of Arms” for their family; it is a banner used over the years to show family talents and strengths. Parents can identify a “Hall of Fame” for their child; this can be a specific space in a home where pictures and awards can be displayed. Parent and child can work together on an annual or semi-annual family career newsletter; this can display family members’ achievements, community work, or new skills learned.

As students work on each section of their Individual Career Plans, they have to understand how their identified skills relate to school and work (Andrew et al., 2000). There is a section in the Individual Career Plan that asks students to describe a time when one has used one of the Secretary’s Commissions on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCAN). These skills are: Resources (identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources), Interpersonal (Works with others), Information (Acquires and uses information), Systems (Understanding of complex interrelationships), and Technology (Works with a variety of technology). There is an activity that shows how work and school expectations are similar. For example, one activity employs two columns. The first column is labeled Parents/Guardians and the second column is labeled Teens. The question, “What is expected at work?” is on the parents side, and “What is expected at school?” is on the students side. Parents and children have to work together in filling out the worksheet.

School to work: Beginning the journey in middle school

Today's employers expect entry-level employees to be aware of their skills and goals and to be academically prepared. Unfortunately, more than half of American

students enter the labor force without education or training beyond high school (Benz, 1996). There are many other students who begin college but do not complete a bachelor's degree. In response to this situation, the federal government has handed out \$320 million in school-to-work grants to twenty-seven states to produce a more competitive workforce by creating and supporting career-oriented programs from 1994 to 1996. (Benz, 1996).

A quantitative study using a pretest-posttest design was conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of career planning. Two years of program data was collected and analyzed. Between 2,500 and 4,500 eighth grade students from twenty-nine school districts in southwestern and south central Ohio were participants in an Individual Career Planning Program. The focus is on the 4,000 students who participated in the second year of the study. Prior to the outset of the program, students were administered the Career Maturity Survey which was made up of twenty multiple-choice items designed to measure attitudes and behaviors that relate to school and work; some items stated ways to approach decisions, career fields, and feelings of personal potential. For each question, one response was defined as the "immature response" and the other as the "mature response." The "immature response" was described as lack of awareness regarding the item ("I don't know") or a lack of thought about the item. Students then participated in an Individual Career Plan program at school. At the end of the program, they were retested with the same survey. The hypothesis tested was that there would be a decrease in immature responses from pretest to posttest. The results showed that eight out of twenty-six schools showed no statistically significant change on any question, while eighteen schools did show change. In particular, two questions showed a strong pattern of significant change. These questions were number 3 and 9. Question number 3 states,

"When I finish high school, I will probably..."; four possible responses included work, further schooling, or a combination of the two. The last response, "I haven't thought about it," is the immature choice. Question number 9 states, "I think the best way I can prepare for my future career is to..." The five responses were 1) "Take as many vocational classes as possible," 2) "I haven't thought about it," 3) "Take as many foreign language classes as possible," 4) "take as many language arts classes as possible," and 5) "Take as many science and math classes as possible." Number 2 is the immature response. The strong pattern of significant growth on these questions suggests that students have begun to consider optional career paths.

Another study was conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of career planning. Each of twenty-seven districts in Ohio implemented the Individual Career Plan Program for a nine-week period for all eighth graders. Career-related activities were conducted twice a week for forty-five-minute periods. All the schools used three core modules. In these modules students participated in assessments, reviewed their past academic achievement scores with a counselor to identify those skills, and explored career options. Teachers held "Career Day" at school and some students even spent a day job shadowing their parents or a relative. Students also conducted career research using a variety of resources. Students also participated job role-playing and were encouraged to develop family career trees. Each student completed an Individual Career Plan that was kept in a folder at school for students to monitor and modify during their high school careers. The results showed that the Individual Career Plan helped students understand the connection between school and work, and prepare them for their high school career and beyond. It also showed the fact that high school course work is linked to ultimate occupational

choices that can be developed by career awareness programs. Such programs can help students to make the connection between what is happening today in school and what might happen tomorrow on the job. Individual Career Plans measure how their knowledge of career awareness increased over time.

Promoting middle schoolers' understanding of the world of work

Due to the rapid development, early adolescents have unique educational needs for which the middle schools are designed. Early adolescence is an important period during the career development and career choice process. According to Hughes (1993) the first of two major stages in the career development process, the exploratory stage, coincides with early adolescence up to the adult years. During the exploratory stage, individuals begin to form career goals. Early adolescents need to participate in activities that help them begin the career selection process. It is unlikely that a student could realistically set as a career goal an occupation to which he or she has not been personally exposed. It is important to base middle school curriculum on the characteristics of early adolescents (Hughes, 1993). With those characteristics in mind, academic and physical competition should be discouraged from middle school curriculum. Competition can enhance self-concept in more talented students, but competition with peers often results in shame and feelings of little self-worth. Responding to the career development needs of early adolescents, the number of career-oriented programs has increased in middle schools recently (Hughes, 1993). The reason for the increase number of programs is due to the widening scope of possible careers. Therefore, our educators have pressed for early exposure to the workforce, especially when they are given choices of courses they can take in high school.

A study on which the reported research is based identified major goals, activities, and learning experiences as promoting achievement of goals (Hughes, 1993). The objectives of the study were to a) identify major goals of middle school education as perceived by scholars of early adolescent education, and b) identify activities and learning experiences in career-orientated education programs that are perceived by experts as promoting achievement of major goals in middle schools. Three steps were used to accomplish these objectives. Content and face validity of the measurement instruments were assured through a review and revision process involving graduate students and faculty members at Ohio State University. Reliability was established through a test and retest procedure. In step one, scholars of early adolescent education indicated on a six-point Likert type scale their level of agreement regarding whether each of the fifteen goals identified from the literature should be considered a major goal of middle school education. In step two, seventy-eight middle school career program teachers from Florida, North Carolina, and Wisconsin were nominated to participate in the study by teacher educators and state education agency personnel in those states. The seventy-eight teachers were mailed an instrument that included the major goals of middle school education identified in step one. The teachers listed under each goal those activities and learning experiences within their program areas which they perceived as promoting achievement of the goal. Thirty-five teachers returned usable instruments. A total of 103 items out of 3000 activities and learning experiences were submitted by the teachers. The 103 items were included in a modified Delphi instrument in step three. In step three, three rounds of a modified Delphi technique were used to identify those items in step two that were perceived by experts as promoting achievement of major goals of

middle school education. Sixty-seven Delphi panelists were selected from four groups. Those groups included scholars, career program teachers, principals of US Department of Education, and core subject teachers. The Delphi instrument included the major goals identified in step one and the corresponding 103 items from the activities and learning experiences in step two. Panel members were instructed to indicate: a) if each item was appropriate for middle school students based on the needs and characteristics of early adolescents, and b) the degree to which they believed each item promoted achievement of the corresponding goal under which it was listed. Panelists indicated their level of agreement on a six-point Likert type scale. The responses were converted to numerical scores such as: very strongly disagree=1, strongly disagree=2, disagree=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5, very strongly agree=6. The criteria established for an item to be considered as promoting achievement of the goal under which it was listed were that the calculations for the item must be yield: a) a median response of 4.5 or higher, b) a 25th percentile value of 4.0 or higher, and c) no more than three panelists responding "not appropriate for early adolescents". The results were that eighteen major goals of middle school education were identified in step one of the study. One of those goals was: "to help students develop an understanding of the workforce." As a result in step two, the fifteen activities and learning experiences were, identified by middle school career program teachers as promoting achievement of the goal. In step three, six of those fifteen activities and learning experiences were identified as promoting achievement of the goal based on the established criteria. According to Hughes (1993) the six activities and learning experiences that were identified as promoting achievement of the goal of developing an understanding of the workforce are:

- Students individually carry out a program of planned, hands-on activities during regular school hours that are designed to investigate the roles of workers in various careers.
- Students receive instruction aimed at identifying occupations within various career areas.
- Students receive instruction regarding the roles of workers in various careers.
- Students are taught by teams of teachers that include career-oriented program teachers and core subject teachers.
- Students identify occupational areas that match their aptitudes and interests.
- Students take field trips to businesses and industries.

Based on the results, activities and learning experiences that help early adolescents prepare for future career roles promote achievement of middle school education goals.

Panelists do not perceive competitive activities as playing particularly constructive roles at the middle school level. It is strongly recommended that the philosophy and goals of middle schools reflect the need for students to develop an understanding of the workforce and begin to prepare for their roles in the workforce.

Education-career planning and middle school counselors

Longitudinal national research data show that the academic choices middle school students make have a strong bearing on their educational and career development for decades to come (Trusty, J., et al., 2005). This is why it is believed that career

planning in middle schools is most appropriately viewed in relation to elementary, high school, and post-secondary education. The focus is on research data that are longitudinal; the aim is to provide a career planning framework for middle school that is both a) supported by outcome research and b) practically useful for middle school counselors and students. Education is seen as a life-career perspective and career development as encompassing education, work, and leisure. Thus, the educational and occupational components of planning are intrinsically bonded, and career planning includes academic and non-academic activities within school and outside school. For instance, it is believed students' extracurricular activities, hobbies, civic participation, and cultural experiences should be part of career planning.

The need for effective career planning is compiled into educational data spanning the past 3 decades; and these data reveal the longitudinal, developmental context for career planning. These data show steady and dramatic increases in the percentages of high school students who plan to pursue college degrees and professional careers. There also have been steady and dramatic increases in the percentages of high school graduates who enter post-secondary education immediately after high school (Trusty et al. 2005). For example, in 2000 66% of female high school graduates and 60% of male graduates entered college immediately after high school. Other data show school counselors' and teachers' contributions to these trends noted dramatic increases from 1980 to 1990 in the percentage of students who were advised to attend college after high school (Trusty et al. 2005). For example, the percentage of Latino students who were advised by school counselors to go to college was 32% in 1980 and 67% in 1990. Increases for the other racial-ethnic groups, socioeconomic status groups, and achievement groups were

similarly dramatic. Longitudinal studies of US students reveal that almost half of those who pursue bachelor's or associate's degrees after high school do not attain degrees within 8 to 10 years (Trusty et al. 2005). School counselors and teachers increasingly are advising students to attend college. Unfortunately, though more and more students are planning and actually attending college, almost half of students are not successful. Many students are not academically prepared for the post-secondary work they pursue. There have been only modest increases in the percentages of students taking the more academically intensive courses in high school, and students' paths to academically intensive courses in high school starts in middle school and elementary school. If students do not plan and behave in ways consistent with their post-secondary educational goals, or have no goals, then negative consequences ensue. Research shows that having high school post-secondary expectations is not enough (Trusty et al. 2005). Plans for college without the required increased effort in middle and high school sets students up to fail. When school counselors, teachers, and parents encourage students' high expectations without encouraging increased effort, they promote the idea that middle and high school performance is unimportant to college success.

Longitudinal national studies show that the variables that make the most difference in students' success in college are the courses that students take in high school (Trusty et al. 2005). When students add any one high school unit in intensive math or in science, they more than double their likelihood of attaining the bachelor's degree they are pursuing. The strong effects of intensive math and science course-taking are present across various racial-ethnic groups (i.e., Asian American, Latinos, and White non-Latinos). Once students enter a lower or slower math or science "track" in elementary or

middle school, it is difficult to move to higher or faster track. In fact, the Long-Term Educational Development (LTED) model is in many ways a model of engagement and disengagement. When students are engaged academically through taking more intensive courses, and engaged by regularly attending school, and participating in school activities, students are likely engaged more in their post-secondary education and their career development (Trusty et al. 2005). As students progress through the middle school years, they become significantly more disengaged from school due to the negative school experiences in the elementary school years; these experiences have a negative influence on school engagement in the middle school years. Career planning is a systematic means for helping all middle school students become engaged in school, both academically and socially. Some students will naturally be engaged in school. Many, however, will need help and encouragement.

Counselors', teachers', parents', and students' collaboration in making educational decisions has gained favor as an innovative practice in schools (Trusty et al., 2005). In an ideal world, middle school counselor, teachers, parents, and student would meet together for each individual career plan, but this is not practical. Thankfully, effective collaboration can come in multiple forms. For example, a school counselor can obtain the parents' and teachers' approval before making any changes or making any final decisions about the student's schedule or educational plan. Parent engagement makes a long-term difference in the lives of their children. The expectations that parents hold for their children's post-secondary education and parent's home-based involvement, has significant effects on students' post-secondary educational success. Teachers have vital knowledge of students' academic and non-academic behavior. Teachers can enhance the

collaborative effort by sharing their knowledge and leadership with parents, counselors, and students.

How to Go to College: The College and Career Planning Handbook for Grades 8 and 9

The College and Career Planning Handbook provides five steps and numerous activities to help guide an individual's high school choices and prepare them for college and beyond (Washington State University, 2002). This handbook provides strategies and tips to help a student determine appropriate steps they can take independently.

The first step is to discover oneself. Students may want to find out what interests, abilities, values and priorities they have to find the right career path and make the most of their education. The handbook includes information about free interest inventory questionnaires available on the internet. Examples of those websites are:

www.myroad.com, www.ncsu.edu/careerkey/you, and www.review.com/career

(Washington State University, 2002). Some suggested activity ideas are: A) Visit the school counselor and take an interest inventory. (Students may want to make a second appointment to discuss the results and talk about plans); B) Make a list of skills and abilities, then develop a second list where one might need improvement or experience; C) On a scale of 1-10 (ten being highest), rate the importance of prestige, recognition, the environment, safety, money, family, friends, being oneself, fitting in, honor, intelligence, charity, kindness, faith, and fun and talk to a guidance counselor, family member, or friend about how these answers can help plan for college and careers.

The second step is exploring one's options. Career clusters are groups of jobs or professions that require similar interests, skills, and abilities (Washington State University, 2002). An example of a career cluster is the occupation of Web designers.

Web designers mix business, technology, and graphic design. Interest inventories help focus on a few career clusters, but their results are just suggestions. One's likes and dislikes change over time. Some suggested activities are: A) List 10-15 activities and subjects that one may enjoy. Decide whether each activity involves people, things, ideas, or data and write down the answer. Based on the answer, what does one most like to work with: people, things, ideas, or data? Which career clusters match one's interests? B) Identify five jobs that sound interesting and research them using various resources. Talk to a school counselor, parent, or friend about those jobs.

The third step is to set goals. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. SMART goals challenge students to get things done on time. They help track the progress made and record achievements. "S" stands for specific. Students are advised to be specific about what they want to accomplish and when they plan to finish. "M" stands for Measurable. With a smart goal, one can set up milestones along the way to measure the progress. "A" stands for Achievable and ambitious. Students are advised to make sure goals are reasonable. If goals are set too high, one might get discouraged and give up. If one's goal isn't challenging enough, one could miss out on a sense of achievement when one reaches the finish line. "R" stands for relevant. SMART goals are those that are important to the individual. It is easy to allow others to set ones goals, but goals set by others can be difficult to reach because ones heart is not in it.

The fourth step is developing an action plan. Students are advised to set short-term goals and plan the steps that will help them reach the goals. It is best practice to develop a four-year high school plan. Students are advised to check off each of the classes when completed and work together with a school counselor to talk about the plan

and then file it in the student's file. The fifth step is making it happen. Students are encouraged to take steps toward college and beyond. This handbook provides a college prep checklist for grades 8, 9, and 10. It covers financing options, tips on maintaining good grades (GPAs), and course planning.

A college education prepares students for the fast-paced changes of the workforce, giving them extra training and more career options to consider. After their college careers, college graduates have to continue their education through trainings, seminars, and workshops. There are many benefits that college graduates receive from a degree; one may earn higher salaries, obtain positions in prestigious companies, and more likely to enjoy their work (Washington State University, 2002). Hopefully during students' middle and high school careers they may have discovered themselves, explored career options, and developed an Individual Career Plan.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

The review of literature has made it clear that the goals of middle schools should reflect the need for students to develop an understanding of the workforce and to begin preparing for their roles in the workforce. Although evidence suggests that students can prepare for a successful career in early adulthood, the numbers of students actually becoming successful has not been studied. Research provides career planning ideas that teachers, counselors, parents, and the community can use to increase the likelihood of students becoming successful in attaining their career goals. It is recommended that schools, parents, and the community be strongly encouraged to be involved in the student's career planning, so that the student can have a successful career at an earlier age in life with the use of proper career tools. It is also recommended to include an Individual Career Plan as a requirement for graduation. A simple career planning program like WISCareers can help guide and assist middle school students with their Individual Career Planning Program. WISCareers can help define who one is, give direction as to where one is going, and demonstrate how one got there.

Human service workers such as FoodShare Employment & Training Case Managers, Financial Employment Planners, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, or Career Counselors can help customers and adult career seekers with goal setting and developing a plan to reach goals. This is something that should be completed in middle school, but typically is not. Many adults still have to explore career options and attempt to establish a career by middle-age. Career planning can be effective for adults as much as it can be for middle school students. There would be a slightly different approach in career planning for adults. Adults may have already completed

their high school careers and their focus is finding a career that will fit their interests, personality, aptitude, and values. Adults who have not obtained a high school diploma can look into obtaining a General Educational Diploma (GED) or a High School Equivalency Diploma (HSED).

There are many career inventories available and the use of the Individual Career Plan to help assess which career options best fit the individual. The same tests are available for adults as for students. When one knows what career one would like to seek, one begins to inquire about available training and develops various job search techniques to get into that line of work and obtain experience. For the most part an adult's career plan is shortened to a short term goal in hope to accomplish a career in about 3-6 months, whereas a student has his/her middle, high school, and college careers to choose and plan for a career.

Regardless of the timeline, individuals benefit from self-assessment and career planning interventions. Ideally, these interventions would begin in middle school. However, career development is a lifelong process, and it is never too late to carefully consider , or re-consider one's career plan.

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