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A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING
A CAREER DECISION-MAKING PROGRAM

ABSTRACT: This article describes the process used by a high school counselor to design career decision-making activities, field-test the activities, and use the field-test results to determine the most effective career decision-making program.

Education, as an institution, reflects the problems that face the larger society and also mirrors societal attempts to cope with these problems. Many students, as do many people in the greater society, feel pressure from the oncoming rush of knowledge. It has been noted, for example, that scientific and technical literature increases at a rate of 60 million pages a year (Toffler, 1970, p. 31). Students feel threatened by rapid change and the unknown and, as a result, many choose to delay decision-making until they can feel more sure of making the "right" choice. Thus we find a dilemma facing educators and students. We need to find effective ways of helping students develop their decision-making abilities when many of the students have consciously or unconsciously delayed decision-making because of confusion or threat.

Decision-making becomes particularly important in the area of career development. With increasing specialization in many career fields, the need for early decision-making becomes highly desirable; yet many students, even nearing high-school graduation, have no definite career goals.

Typically, it is the counselor who is responsible for facilitating high-school students' career development, and while a decision-making approach seems justifiable (Dilley, 1967; Gelatt, 1962; Loughary, 1961), it is no easy task for a high-school counsellor to develop career decision-making activities. It is the intent of this article to describe the process used by a school counsellor to design several career decision-making activities, and use the results to determine the most effective career decision-making program for her school. It is hoped that the process described in this article might serve as a model for other counselors in their efforts to design and be accountable for career decision-making programs in their schools.

THE PROCESS

The process consisted of five phases: a) determining the need, b) stating the desired outcomes, c) designing appropriate activities,

d) implementing the activities, e) assessing the outcomes. The results were then used to determine the most effective career decision-making program. Each of these phases is defined operationally by describing what was done by the authors of this article.

Determining Need

A survey of ninety-one twelfth-grade students enrolled in an elective social studies class determined that approximately fifty percent of these students had no career choice. Within a year these students would be either facing the world of work or continuing their education, and it appeared that at least fifty percent of them were leaving their post-high-school life to chance. Thus, there was a need to focus the students' attention on post-high-school educational and career plans.

Stating the Outcomes

It seemed critical to have in mind what the students should gain from the activity (the outcome) so that activities which appeared to have the greatest probability of achieving the desired outcomes could be designed. The following outcomes were selected:
1. Students will be able to make a career choice.
2. Students will be able to make post-high-school educational choices.
3. Students will make educational choices that are congruent with their career plans (e.g., medical school to be an MD or technical school for an electrician).

Admittedly, these outcomes ignored motivation and aptitude (e.g., a person might not have the academic aptitude to attain his educational choice, although his educational choice was congruent with his career choice); and even though variables such as motivation and aptitude were to be included in the activities, the assessment of such variables was so complex that they were not selected as outcomes to be measured.

Designing Appropriate Activities

There were three social-studies classrooms available which allowed three different activities to be tried. While assignment of the students to the three classrooms was not truly random, there was no systematic bias in the assignment.
1. One activity was called a "traditional" teaching approach. It consisted of lecturing on career development, raising questions for discussion, a term paper by each student on a career the student selected, and small group activities for personal feedback.
2. Another classroom played the *Life Career Game* using only the materials in the kit.
3. The third classroom played the *Life Career Game*, but wrote their own profiles and used local community data (e.g., local want ads, schools, etc.).

The *Life Career Game* is a simulation of the labor market, educational opportunities, and marriage and leisure patterns operating in American society. The game was constructed to give participants familiarity with the kinds of decisions that must be made about jobs, education, family life, and leisure time (Boocock, 1968). Participants plan successive years in the life of a hypothetical person and are awarded points for the decisions they make.

These three activities were selected because of their potential for achieving the desired outcomes, and because they were somewhat different and the best of the three activities could be integrated the following year into a single program for the twelfth-grade students.

Implementing the Activities

The activities were then used by the teachers of the three social studies classes for approximately two weeks and each teacher was asked to observe student reactions to the activities and to make recommendations regarding the activities. Thus, teacher recommendations as well as measured student reactions (discussed below) could be used to design a career decision-making program for the following year.

Assessing Outcomes

A brief questionnaire was administered to all the students both before and after their participation in the activities. The questionnaire contained the following items.
1. Please list your career choice at this time (if you have one).
2. What level of schooling do you plan to complete in order to prepare for a career?

The number of career changes from pretest to posttest (either from one career to another or from no career to a career choice) was tallied for each of the three classroom groups and the same was done for educational choice. The posttest was then analyzed to determine whether the educational plans were congruent with the career choice (e.g., four years of college or more would be congruent with the career choice of teacher). A Chi Square statistic was then used to determine whether there were significant differences among the three classrooms. In other words, the statistical analysis helped determine whether one activity was more effective than another in achieving the desired outcomes. The statistical analyses, along with teacher recommendations, were used to design a career decision-making activity for the following year.

RESULTS

There were no significant differences in the statistical analyses, indicating that one activity was no more effective than another. It was necessary, then, to consider the observations of the teachers. The following are examples.
1. Students were initially very interested in the *Life Career Game*, but seemed to lose interest and involvement after a few rounds of the game.

2. Students who played the game using only materials in the kit seemed to enjoy it, but discussion indicated that many students looked at the simulation only as a fun and different activity, failing to see the relevance that the procedure had to their own career development. Also, these students continually expressed concern over the need to up-date data in *Life Career,* and to modify the data so that they represented the local region. Because of this, many students felt that the simulation game was unrealistic and unreliable.

3. Student motivation seemed higher with the students who developed and applied their own self-profile to the basic format of the *Life Career Game.* Indeed, many students expressed preference for using self-profiles rather than profiles of fictitious persons because they could then "see" the relevance of the procedure.

4. Students seemed more serious and involved over a longer period of time in both the traditional procedure and the procedure using the self-profile in the simulation.

5. A majority of students involved in the traditional approach rated group activities as the most meaningful activity in the career unit. Further, a majority of students involved in the simulation using self-profiles rated the development of their own self-profile as the most meaningful activity in the unit. This seems to indicate that most students have a greater need to find out about themselves before they find out about the different alternatives available to them in the realm of career decision-making.

6. In comparison to the other procedures, girls who used the self-profiles more frequently changed their educational and career choices. It is possible that the use of self-profiles will lead to more satisfying career choices for girls.

THE PROGRAM

Based on the above observations, a career decision-making program was designed for use in the twelfth grade social studies class the following year. A brief outline of this program is described below.

Development of self-profiles: Students in the study expressed a need to find out more about themselves. If a student does not know "where he is" he cannot accurately decide where he wants to go, so the writing of self-profiles was recommended as the first step in the activity. The self-profiles could be developed by using a variety of techniques: diagnostic tests, interest inventories, and school achievement records, as well as small group discussions centering on self-perception and peer perception. The discussions could center on a topic such as, "What kind of a career do you think I should pursue, and why? What about me makes you think that I would be good in this career?" During the discussion each student would be asked to give feedback to every other student about his appearance, behavior, and possibly even some of his abilities.

Exploration of educational and career opportunities: Students in the study expressed concern about the reliability of data presented to them in the simulation activity. They were aware of the rapid change in our society and many demanded information that was relevant and up-to-date. After students have examined themselves and developed realistic self-profiles, they can then make optimal use of educational and career information available to them. This exploration could take many forms: research papers, independent reading, field trips, guest speakers, etc. It was discovered in the study that many students who were originally undecided and uninterested in career decision-making became very excited when they began dealing with concrete, real-life information and consequences relating to themselves.

After developing self-profiles and gathering occupational and educational information, the students could then play the *Life Career Game* using themselves rather than the hypothetical person and using the information they have gathered rather than information that accompanies the game. It was also suggested that the same method of assessing outcomes be used the next year, with a focus on how students change from pretest to posttest rather than the differences among the three classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to remember that the *specific* needs, outcomes, activities, etc. discussed in this article are not as relevant as the process by which a career decision-making program was developed. Every counselor must determine needs and state outcomes that are pertinent to his school and the specific examples described in this article were used only to clarify the model.

RESUME: Cet article décrit la façon de procéder d'un conseiller au niveau secondaire pour planifier des activités devant faciliter les choix vocationnels, pour vérifier les résultats de ces activités dans la pratique et les utiliser afin de déterminer le programme le plus susceptible de faciliter le processus du choix d'une carrière.

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