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Overview of Career Guidance: Its Foundations, Objectives, and Methodology

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Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview of the foundations of career guidance as derived from the works of the career theorists Dr. Donald E. Super and Dr. John L. Holland. The standards and objectives of career guidance are enumerated based on National Career Development Guidelines, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). This paper seeks to illustrate the foundations of career development as a sequential and lifelong process and for which clear, measurable objectives become the bedrock for content development and evaluation of the programs and services offered at each age or grade level. Career interventions, as well as their settings, including home and postsecondary institutions, government-funded career centers, among others, are explained. Finally, this paper outlines the tools and resources for, as well as the delivery modes of, career guidance. Among the tools and resources listed are a committed and supportive administration and a trained staff; delivery modes discussed include such things as curriculum, web-based systems, group sessions, and one-on-one interviews.

The Foundations of Career Guidance

Career guidance is built on two foundations: a) the desire for individuals to have satisfying work, or to implement their self-concepts through work; and b) the need for nations to have a sufficient number of trained, skilled individuals to fill the positions that employers have to offer and produce the gross national product that a healthy economy needs. Below are definitions of the term *career guidance* and the related terms *career development* and *career interventions*.

CAREER GUIDANCE FOUNDATIONS

CAREER DEVELOPMENT is a long-term process, consisting of life stages and developmental tasks, which occurs within individuals over the lifespan. It can be defined as the gaining of a sequence of understandings and skills that empower individuals to make career choices in alignment with their interests, skills/abilities, and values, and to make successful career transitions when necessary or desirable.

CAREER GUIDANCE is a term used to describe planned career interventions designed to assist individuals to progress through the normal process of career development. Career guidance seeks to empower individuals to make educational and career choices that maximize their potential.

CAREER INTERVENTIONS are defined as specific activities and services that are provided to individuals in order to promote their positive career development, or more specifically, to attain the objectives defined for a given age level and population.

The career development process has been studied and researched by many theorists in the past 75 years, especially in the United States. Among that group, the work of Dr. Donald E. Super (of Columbia University) and Dr. John L. Holland (of Johns Hopkins University and ACT, Inc.) has had the greatest influence on the practice of career guidance worldwide. The following few paragraphs review their primary theoretical statements.

In his vast repertoire of writings, Super laid the foundation for the field as follows:

- He described five sequential life stages and multiple developmental tasks faced by individuals in each of these. These are tasks that parents and educational systems can teach individuals how to accomplish. To the extent that these tasks are learned and accomplished, individuals have career maturity; that is, possess the skills needed to cope successfully with education and career choices.

- The process of career development is initiated as soon as a child begins to form a self-concept, due to distinguishing himself or herself from other people and things in the environment. The process of refining and clarifying the self-concept continues throughout the lifespan.

- One's self-concept includes awareness of personal interests, skills/abilities, work values, and personality traits. Individuals seek to implement their self-concepts in their work. To the extent that they are able to do so, they are likely to enjoy job satisfaction.

- Career should be viewed as a combination of life roles, including child, student, spouse, parent, worker, leisurite, and citizen. These roles interact with each other and the interests, skills, and values possessed by individuals are expressed through a combination of these roles.

- Career development is powerfully shaped, especially in childhood and adolescence, by a variety of people and external forces including parents, peers, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, culture, gender, religious beliefs, chance, the economy, and opportunity. Career development is also influenced by internal forces, including needs, interests, abilities, talents, personality, and values.

Dr. John Holland, providing a theory that has been extensively tested in the United States and many other countries, summarized the process of career choice in the following statements:

- People can be described as a combination of two or more of six personality types, which he titled Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. One's personality type can be measured by taking a reliable, valid assessment whose items are based on this theory.

- Occupations, work environments, and school courses can similarly be described as a combination of two or more of the same six "personality" types.

- Individuals of a given type seek environments of the same or highly similar type.

- To the extent that individuals can enter educational or work environments of the same type as their own, it is likely that they will be satisfied and persist in them.

Implications of Theory

From this cursory review of theory, it is possible to draw some inferences that help us define the nature of career guidance and career interventions:

- Career development is a normal, developmental process. All individuals need some assistance with its tasks, though the amount of assistance varies widely.

- Career guidance is intensely personal; that is, it requires the provision of services that allow individuals to understand themselves – their interests, skills/abilities, work-related values, personality characteristics, and goals.

- Individuals can only choose from among alternatives that they know about. Thus, career guidance requires the provision of accurate, understandable information about a wide range of educational and occupational options.

- Career guidance must provide ways for individuals to make clear linkages between what they learn about themselves and their occupational and educational options.

- Because career development involves making a series of choices across the lifespan, its content must include learning about goal setting and decision making – how and when to make decisions and how to manage transitions when they become necessary.

Benefits of Career Guidance

When effective career guidance is provided to individuals, benefits accrue to both the individuals who receive this guidance and to the environments in which they are situated; in other words, to schools, universities, workplaces, and societies. Benefits to individuals include the following:

- The opportunity to develop their interests and abilities because they have become aware of what they are and, in so doing, to find personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

- Awareness and knowledge about a wide spectrum of options, i.e., the myriad occupations offered in a society, the educational paths and choices available, and how choices in these areas affect future lifestyle.

- The capability to make informed choices from among those options without spending undue time, money, and frustration in random testing of options.

- The increased likelihood of enjoying school subjects and majors and understanding the relationship between their content and jobs.

- The increased likelihood of job satisfaction, and therefore, of job stability and contribution.

- The opportunity for equal access to educational and occupational options for both genders and for people of all socioeconomic classes, cultures, and religious backgrounds.

These benefits for individuals can translate into powerful benefits for the schools and universities that they are attending, including the following:

- A significantly higher student retention rate, i.e., students remaining in a school or program until satisfactory completion.

- A much higher rate of completion of certificates and degrees within their planned timeframe due to the fact that students change courses and majors with much less frequency when they have chosen them in alignment with measured interests.

- Improved attendance rates and behavior due to the fact that students see a realistic relationship between school work and future work and life.

- For many students, increased motivation to seek higher education due to understanding their own abilities and the requirements of occupations.

And, of course, all of these accrue to benefit society in general. Here are just a few examples:

- Employers are able to find workers who have the technical skills needed for the jobs they have to offer, increasing a nation's potential to compete well in the global economy.

- Employers are able to find workers who have the "soft skills" needed to work in collaborative teams.

- Unemployment rates can be reduced, and the standard of living of citizens can be raised.

- The economy can be improved due to the fact that citizens have greater spending power.

- The budget for entitlements can be reduced because citizens have earning power.

- Societal problems such as crime and addiction can be reduced due to the fact that a higher percentage of the population is employed.

The Objectives of Career Guidance

Because career development is sequential and lifelong, its objectives are different at different life stages. Clear, measurable objectives at each grade level or age range are essential because these become the bedrock for content development and evaluation of the programs and services offered at each age or grade level.

The career education movement has tended to divide career guidance services into periods of career awareness (K-grade 5), career exploration (grades 6-8), and career preparation and planning (grades 9-16). Of course, the process does not end there, but continues across the life span as individuals need to develop new skills and change both occupations and jobs due to personal choices and economic demands. Thus, one major goal of career guidance services should be to assist individuals to learn a career decision-making process that they can apply at numerous junctures in their lives. Great attention has been given to the development of well-defined objectives for career guidance. Two sets are widely known and used in the United States, either adopted as stated or customized to the needs of a specific state. These are the National Career Development Guidelines and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model.

In the 1990s, as a result of input from educators across the country, the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) developed a comprehensive set of competency-based career development guidelines to help states and districts plan high-quality career guidance and counseling programs. Recommended learning outcomes are organized around self- knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. The competencies for the secondary level developed by NOICC can be viewed at http://www.academicinnovations.com/noicc.html.

Based on this work and its own further research, the American School Counselors Association (ASCA) developed a more comprehensive set of guidelines known as the ASCA National Standards. These guidelines address three areas of student development: academic, career, and personal-social.

- These guidelines can be found at:

    http://static.pdesas.org/content/documents/ASCA_National_Standards_for_Students.pdf

- with implementation strategies at :

    http://www.dpisd.org/cms/lib4/TX01001079/Centricity/Domain/152/asca_national_model.pdf

In Europe, career guidance has been set within the context of lifelong learning. Competition and growth in the 21st century global economy require that the citizens of a nation engage in lifelong learning in order to learn new skills demanded by rapidly-changing technology. It is no longer feasible to think of "completing your education," because continual updating and upgrading of skills are necessary in order to keep pace with the changing demands of occupations and employers. This lifelong learning occurs through participating in coursework offered by colleges and universities, workshops offered by various providers, and increasingly by web-based instruction. Students and adults planning for lifelong learning need guidance in order to understand the changing demands for skill development and to make informed decisions about educational choices and career progression.

According to the preface of the *Lifelong Guidance Policy Development: A European Resource Kit*, a joint publication of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), "Career guidance is an essential component of modern education and training systems to (re-)orientate younger and older generations towards the acquisition of 21st century skills. In the current context of high unemployment, guidance can help raise the awareness of people, whatever their age or qualification level, of learning opportunities that lead to the development of new skills much needed in the labour market, or that increase self-employment and entrepreneurship. As such, career guidance contributes to the Europe 2020 headline targets on reducing early school-leaving, increasing participation in tertiary education, increasing the employment rate and combating social exclusion.

As expressed in the 2008 Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies, guidance represents a crucial dimension of lifelong and lifewide learning. Guidance in the learning place not only helps students to make their learning choices for future jobs but also contributes to preventing students from leaving education prematurely and to stimulating them into higher levels of education and training." [p. 7]

The best approach to delivering developmental career guidance is to provide appropriate age-related career interventions at each grade, K-12, in higher education, and as needed, for adults. As mentioned earlier, *career interventions* can be defined as specific activities and services that are provided to individuals in order to promote their positive career development, or more specifically, to attain the objectives defined for a given age level and population. A *program* can be defined as the delivery of specific content – such as interpretation of an assessment, a session on selecting secondary school courses or a college major, or a presentation on how to select a postsecondary school. A *service* can be defined as some kind of ongoing support activity that is offered to assist individuals with career choices and development. Such activities include career advising, career counseling, career fairs, or placement in a job-shadowing opportunity or internship.

Following is a list of key objectives for ranges of grade levels, K-12, and for higher education. This list includes objectives taken from the ASCA National Model.

K-Grade 2

By the end of Grade 2, students will know that:

- Work is a part of everyone's life and that all kinds of work are worthy of respect.
- There are many different kinds of work.
- There is a relationship between your personal traits and occupational choice.
- Planning and goal-setting for the future are important.

Grades 3-5

By the end of Grade 5, students will be able to:

- State some characteristics that describe themselves.
- Identify activities and subject matter in which they perform well.
- Identify activities and subject matter that they like.
- Describe a method of organizing the occupations in their country.

- Describe how the choice of an occupation affects lifestyle.

- State the steps of a planful decision-making process.

- Explain how what you do in school affects your future.

Grades 6-8

By the end of Grade 8, students will be able to:

- Describe and use a process for setting goals and making choices.

- Describe how work is an important and satisfying means of personal expression.

- State the results of a valid, reliable, and non-biased interest assessment they have taken.

- Using the results of this formal assessment, make a tentative selection of a career pathway, career cluster, and/or of specific occupations.

- Exhibit skills to locate, evaluate and interpret career information.

- Describe the various paths of postsecondary education and training and select one in keeping with tentative occupation selections.

- Build a course plan for high school based on the selection of occupation/pathway/cluster and educational level.

- Acquire parent and counselor approval of the course plan.

- Create and maintain an electronic student portfolio that includes all of the above.

Grades 9-10

By the end of Grade 10, students will be able to:

- Either confirm or restate career interests due to having taken the interest assessment a second time.

- State important criteria related to occupational selection based on the results of a valid and reliable work values assessment.

- Use the results of these assessments to consider, compare, and narrow down a list of occupations.

- Confirm or revise the secondary school career and course plan stored in the electronic portfolio.

Grades 11-12

By the end of Grade 12, students planning to pursue postsecondary education will be able to:

- Demonstrate ability to research local and national postsecondary schools and training opportunities by meaningful criteria.

- Demonstrate the ability to compare schools or training options by these criteria.

- Demonstrate the ability to schedule visits to postsecondary schools and request and acquire information to assist with informed decision making.

- Use the decision-making process previously learned to identify highest-priority college or training options.

- Demonstrate ability to complete an effective college or training program application.

- Create an electronic portfolio that can be shared with potential postsecondary institutions.

- Demonstrate knowledge about the calculation of financial need.

- Demonstrate knowledge of the long-term effects of financial liability for college debt.

- Demonstrate the ability to research sources of financial aid and directly apply for it.

- Make a tentative selection of college major based on interest assessment results and high school record.

- Edit and maintain their student portfolios as choices are made or changed.

Students not planning to enter postsecondary education will be able to:

- Identify and explore the kinds of jobs they are able to fill.

- Identify employers who offer these kinds of job.

- Demonstrate knowledge of what and how to learn about these employers.

- Demonstrate knowledge of how to use social media to assist in the job search.

- Create criteria for a desirable job.

- Write an effective resume that ties personal knowledge and skills to the job's requirements.

- Write an effective cover letter to accompany the resume.

- Complete an effective job application.

- Create an electronic portfolio that can be shared with potential employers.

- Demonstrate effective job interviewing skills.

For all students:

- Review and revise personal career and education plan as needed.

- Pursue and develop competency in areas of interest.

- Acquire employability skills (i.e., working on a team, problem-solving, and organizational skills).

- Demonstrate knowledge about the changing workplace.

- Demonstrate knowledge about how changing economic and societal needs influence employment and the need for lifelong learning.

- Find ways through extended learning opportunities (i.e., internships, job shadowing, and information interviewing) to test out occupational choices.

- Edit and maintain the personal electronic portfolio.

Higher Education (Sample Objectives)

By the completion of the first year of a postsecondary education or training experience, students will be able to:

- State a specific occupational goal.

- Develop a career and education plan that specifies the next steps to either continuing their education toward that goal or entering the job market.

- If continuing to a second year, select and officially declare a major/program of study that is highly related to the selected occupation and aligned with the results of their interest assessment.

- If training will be completed by end of this year, develop print or electronic documents that will assist in getting a job.

- If ready to enter employment, present themselves to employers with job interview skills that make them appealing candidates.

By the completion of the second year of college or university enrollment, students will be able to:

- Determine the best courses to take in the remaining years of college or university related to stated career plans.

- Update their print- or electronic-based career and education plans.

- Engage in some reality-testing experience related to the occupation of their choice.

By the completion of the third year of college or university enrollment, students will be able to:

- Determine (or reaffirm) the best courses to take in the remaining year of college or university related to stated career plans.

- Update their print- or electronic-based career and education plans.

By the completion of the fourth year of college or university enrollment, students will be able to:

- Present an attractive, well-formatted resume and electronic portfolio that summarizes their career goals, education, and work experience.

- Identify at least three employers that offer jobs related to their skills and educational qualifications and learn about them through their websites, a visit, and/or printed material.

- Identify and implement the best three methods of finding job openings.

- Engage in mock interviews in which they can practice relating their interests, abilities/skills, and values to available jobs.

- Identify job openings and pursue them to get an interview.

- Represent their education and skills effectively in a job interview.

- Compare jobs and make an informed choice if offered more than one job.

- Get a job within three months of completion of their degrees.

Adults (Sample Objectives)

If simply changing jobs:

- Determine the characteristics of employers and jobs they wish to find and explore.

- Determine the personal and technical skills that can be transferred to a new job.

- Identify jobs that will utilize these skills.

- Develop an effective resume and/or electronic portfolio.

- Use networking and other methods, including social media, to identify employers with job openings.

- Learn more about the employers offering these jobs through reading their websites, talking with employees, and making a site visit.

- Exhibit effective job interviewing skills.

- Exhibit the ability to compare and contrast two or more job offers and make an informed choice.

If considering a career change:

- Assess current occupational interests, skills, and values.

- Identify occupations/jobs that will utilize these self-attributes.

- Determine whether additional education or training is needed.

- If so, determine location and cost of this education or training.

- Acquire additional education or training as needed.

- Identify employers offering jobs previously identified.

- Learn more about these employers through reading their websites, talking with employees, and/or making a site visit.

- Develop an effective resume and/or electronic portfolio.

- Exhibit effective job interviewing skills.

- Exhibit the ability to compare and contrast two or more job offers and make an informed choice.

Career Interventions: Where, What, & How

Providers of career guidance deliver career interventions in a variety of places and settings. For students in grades K-12, the school is the most typical place to receive career guidance. Most school districts have developed or accepted a set of objectives that prescribe the content of the programs and services to be provided. The methods used to provide that content typically include the following:

- Curricular units infused within one or more regular courses.

- Short career guidance "standalone" courses.

- Group guidance (delivery of content to groups of students in special advisory sessions).

- One-on-one counseling or advising interviews.

- Systematic web-based career planning systems, individually used by students in any place where there is web connectivity.

Either classroom teachers or counselors may teach the career guidance curriculum, which may be locally developed or acquired from a publisher. Group guidance is typically delivered by certified school counselors. One-to-one counseling or advising is provided by certified school counselors and/or certified Career Development Facilitators. Systematic web-based systems are acquired from publishers of such systems and may either be standard in content and functionality or customized for a specific state or country.

Parents have tremendous influence on the career decision making of their children. Schools should expend resources to make parents aware of this power and to help them know how to use it effectively. Schools might offer workshops to parents in which they help them understand the career planning process, provide materials that parents can use with their children, and direct parents to various sources of information, such as websites, that can support their work with their children.

For students who continue to postsecondary education, the school's career center, counseling center, or job placement center becomes the focal point for provision of career guidance. Such centers are typically stocked with books, audio-visual material, computers and software, a web-based career planning system, and resource guides (publications that describe the materials in the center and the specific informational needs each addresses). Centers typically provide workshops on a variety of career planning topics, one-to-one career counseling, assessment and its interpretation, instructional sessions on writing resumes and conducting job interviews, and opportunities to have interviews with prospective employers. College and university career centers are typically staffed by certified counselors with a master's degree or above, perhaps aided by certified Career Development Facilitator or career advisors.

Career planning services are offered to adults by a network of government-funded career centers (one-stop shops or job placement offices). Some government agencies and for-profit corporations offer career planning services, via in-house staff, to their employees. Career counseling services are also offered by private practitioners.

The Tools and Resources of Career Guidance

In order to fulfill the objectives listed in a previous section, a wide array of resources is needed, which includes the following:

- Committed and supportive administration – It is difficult, if not impossible, to deliver a high-quality career guidance program in schools, universities, and agencies without the strong support of administration. Thus, it is worth the effort to keep these stakeholders informed about the career guidance program and its outcomes.

- Committed and trained staff – As already indicated, effective career guidance can be delivered in a variety of ways, such as through curriculum, group workshops, assessment, web-based systems, and individual career advising or counseling. Each of these different delivery modes requires staff with differing kinds and levels of training.

One very important criterion for those who deliver career guidance is enthusiasm for assisting individuals in these ways. Career-related programs and services should not be viewed as less important or somehow less rewarding than dealing with personal or family problems. Besides enthusiasm, those who provide individual career counseling should have at least a master's degree and certification in counseling. Those providing career advising, group guidance, interpretation of assessments, for example, should have the training for and be certified as Career Development Facilitators or Career Advisors.

Besides these supportive people, a variety of other resources are essential:

- High-quality curricular material that can be used by trained teachers or career facilitators/advisors to deliver some of the career guidance programs and services.

- High-quality, research-based assessments that can be used to measure career-related interests, abilities/skills, and values. The results of these assessments should be empirically aligned to career pathways or clusters and linked directly to occupational alternatives and high school subject matter and postsecondary majors/courses.

- An integrated web-based career guidance system that can be used by students on any device (computer, smart phone, tablet) that has access to the Internet. This system should allow students to create and edit an ongoing portfolio, take assessments, build education plans, explore occupations and their descriptions, explore paths of training and specific schools, identify possible postsecondary majors, learn job-seeking skills, and find job openings related to their interests and skills.

- A career library or center that houses assessments, the web-based career guidance system, relevant books and videos, and offers group presentations on various career guidance topics.

- Offices where students can receive individual career advising or counseling.

The Delivery of Career Guidance Services

In these times of high accountability and restrained budgets, the goal should be to deliver career guidance services to the target population at the lowest per-person cost commensurate with effectively fulfilling the stated objectives. Individuals have different needs. Some will need individual support through one-on-one career advising or counseling. Others will need support from a Career

Advisor or Career Development Facilitator to direct them to resources that will meet their needs. Still others will use the content of the web-based system on their smart phones, computers, or tablets and receive all of the assistance they need without human support.

It is prudent to develop ways (administration of a needs assessment, for example) to assess individual needs and then to plan delivery modes that will meet a range of those needs. Applying that statement to the assessment of interests, for example, some may need to have items read to them or explained to them while most will take an assessment online without any assistance. Some will need to have the results explained to them in a one-on-one interview; others would profit from a group session in which a sample report is explained with the use of a slide presentation. Still others will understand their score reports well from reading an online description. The point is that all need to meet the defined objectives, but different individuals will do so through different delivery modes and therefore at different costs.

In designing career guidance programs, all of the following ways of delivering the content should be considered:

- Via curriculum – This would be a career guidance course that could be integrated into a subject matter course or taught as a separate course during class or advising periods. This approach reaches as many as 20 students simultaneously.

- Via an integrated web-based career guidance system – This approach provides career guidance content through interactive online activities, assessment, and instruction on a 24/7 basis at a low per-user cost. Support can be added to this intervention through email, online chat, videoconferencing, or scheduled phone or in-person sessions with a trained career advisor or counselor.

- Via group sessions – In this approach groups of 10-12 individuals are scheduled for group instruction and interaction on specific career guidance topics appropriate to their career development stage and age.

- One-on-one interviews with a career advisor, career development facilitator, or professional counselor – This, of course, is the most expensive way to deliver assistance. It is, however, needed by a relatively small percent of individuals and should be provided.

Summary

This paper has provided some basic definitions and theory of career guidance and has sought to develop a rationale for provision of career guidance services to people of all ages. Standards for career guidance for both the United States and Europe are briefly discussed. Based on these standards, the most critical objectives around which programmatic efforts and evaluation should be focused for individuals from kindergarten level through adulthood have been listed. The resources and methods for delivering programs and services around these objectives are listed and described with some attention to their relative cost and the level of training needed by those who deliver them.

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