

Integrating Career Education into the Grade 2 English Language Arts Curriculum

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In this project, a series of five career planning activities was integrated into the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education English language arts 2 program and delivered to 21 Grade 2 students at an urban school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The career planning unit was designed to encourage students to improve their language skills, engage in self-exploration, connect academic learning to the world of work and foster positive relationships with older students. The career planning activities were rated highly by students, as 97.2 per cent of students rated the activities as good or great. According to student evaluations that were administered at the conclusion of the unit, 75.0 per cent of students indicated that the unit had helped them to learn a lot more about themselves, 100.0 per cent felt that the unit had helped them to learn a lot more about careers, 100.0 per cent reported that the unit had made them excited about what they could do with the rest of their lives, and 100.0 per cent felt that the unit had made them want to learn more about careers. Reasons for this career planning unit's effectiveness and recommendations for future projects are discussed.

Background

To help situate the current research, an overview of how career planning became integrated into Canadian and international school curriculums is provided. To begin, a comprehensive career needs survey (CCNS) was developed by Magnusson and Bernes (2002) to gain a better understanding of students' career needs. The CCNS is a collaborative initiative between the Southern Alberta Centre of Excellence for Career Development at

the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education, the Chinook Regional Career Transitions for Youth Project and the Southwestern Rural Youth Career Development Project (2002). The aim of the survey was to capture students' perceptions of career development and planning needs as well as any perceived gaps that might be present in existing services (Magnusson and Bernes 2002; Witko et al 2006). The survey included both quantitative and qualitative responses, and they were distributed to 54 junior high and senior high schools in the Southern Alberta region by classroom teachers (Witko et al 2006). The survey results indicated that some of the most pressing needs for junior and senior high school students were finding their interests and abilities, discovering their passions, gaining support for their career plans and post-secondary, and gaining financial information (Magnusson and Bernes 2002). Additionally, the surveys implied that beginning career planning earlier (in junior high or even before) could be more effective in assisting students through the process of career decision making (Witko et al 2006). Given these results, it was evident that career planning was an important component that was lacking from students' educational experiences.

Based on the results obtained from the CCNS, a career education pilot project, Career Coaching Across the Curriculum, was created and implemented (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014). Alberta Education and the Canadian Career Development Foundation supported the project by providing funding to train 50 preservice teachers in career education at the University of Lethbridge, which allowed them to go into schools across Canada and

abroad internationally to implement career education across the K–12 curriculum. The pilot project consisted of two components (2014). First, the career education course was provided to the preservice teachers over four weekends (2014). The first three weekends provided preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for integrating career interventions into the regular curriculum, then the fourth weekend allowed preservice teachers to share their lesson plans, unit plans and schoolwide interventions they developed to their classmates (2014). Second, after successfully completing the four-weekend career education course, students completed a 12-week internship where they could transfer their newly acquired knowledge and skills into elementary, middle or high school (2014). The larger data set has already been published (2014) and thus, the current paper aims to detail an example of one of the specific classroom implementations from the larger study.

Students need to have opportunities to connect their school learning with workplace reality and learn that academic courses are related to real-world problems.

Career education is essential at the elementary school level (Harkins 2000, 2001; Schultheiss 2008). In elementary school, career education usually involves developing students' self-awareness (Harkins 2001; Herr and Cramer 1996; Schultheiss 2008), supporting students to develop positive attitudes, habits and competencies (Harkins 2001; Herr and Cramer 1996), and helping students to develop a sense of relatedness to others, the ability to empathize and a coherent set of values (Schultheiss 2008). Career education allows students to link classroom learning with real-world applications (Harkins 2000; Herr and Cramer 1996; Schultheiss 2008). Harkins (2000) argues that until students acquire concrete knowledge about the world of work, the idea of having a job remains abstract. For this reason, students need to have opportunities to connect their school learning with workplace reality

and learn that academic courses are related to real-world problems. Since education aims to prepare students for the future, children need to start developing work-readiness skills at an early age (Harkins 2000).

Harkins (2001) concludes that "literature provides context and is a logical source for additional information on almost any subject ... it can also be an important first step in creating a life plan" (p 32). Therefore, the use of literature in career education with children is highly beneficial, and it is easily integrated into subject areas such as English language arts.

In the current project, career education was integrated into English language arts (ELA) in a Grade 2 classroom to promote literacy development and cross-curricular competencies. Throughout the project, the teacher aimed to help children explore their uniqueness and develop an increased self-awareness. In doing so, it could help them realize that, even at an early age, they can define who they are and build a strong future for themselves, their families and the community. This project enhanced the school's literacy program to help students make connections between their community and the skills, interests and ideas that they have for the future. This project included lessons to focus on all six areas of language arts: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing.

Context of the Teaching Environment

This career education project was implemented into the Grade 2 ELA program of studies (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The class consisted of 21 students who had a wide range of learning abilities; therefore, some students completed activities with modified writing components and/or assistance from a scribe.

Cross-Curricular Integration

This project targeted several ELA (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010) learning outcomes, which are provided on the next page.

| GENERAL OUTCOME CATEGORY | LEARNING OUTCOME |
|---|---|
| <p>Comprehend and Respond (CR) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010, 15</p> | <p>Students will:</p> <p>CR2.1 Comprehend and respond to a variety of grade-level texts (including contemporary and traditional visual, oral, written, and multimedia) that address: identity (e.g., Just Watch Me) community (e.g., People and Places) social responsibility (e.g., Friendship) and make connections to prior learning and experiences.</p> <p>CR2.2 View and explain (with support from the text) the key literal and inferential ideas (messages), important details, and how elements (such as colour, layout, medium, and special fonts) enhance meaning in grade-appropriate visual and multimedia texts.</p> |
| <p>Compose and Create (CC) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010, 15</p> | <p>Students will:</p> <p>CC2.1 Compose and create a range of visual, multimedia, oral, and written texts that explore: identity (e.g., My Family and Friends) community (e.g., Our Community) social responsibility (e.g., TV Ads for Children) and make connections to own life.</p> <p>CC2.2 Use a variety of ways to represent understanding and to communicate ideas, procedures, stories, and feelings in a clear manner with essential details.</p> <p>CC2.4 Write stories, poems, friendly letters, reports, and observations using appropriate and relevant details in clear and complete sentences and paragraphs of at least six sentences.</p> |
| <p>Assess and Reflect on Language Abilities (AR) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010, 16</p> | <p>Students will:</p> <p>AR2.1 Reflect on and assess their viewing, listening, reading, speaking, writing, and other representing experiences and strategies by participating in discussions and relating work to a set of criteria (e.g., "What did I learn?").</p> <p>AR2.2 Set personal goals as a result of group discussions (e.g., "What did I do well?", "How could I be a better viewer, listener, reader, presenter, speaker, and writer?").</p> |

This career planning unit was also intended to meet several career education objectives. Students were to learn more about themselves and careers, become excited about what they could do in the future and would want to learn more about different careers. If met, these learning outcomes would speak to the degree to which the career planning unit was able to inspire and educate students.

Detailed Description of the Career Planning Unit

This unit was also designed to encourage students to engage in self-exploration, consider the occupations within their communities and develop positive relationships with students in Grades 7 and 8. The career planning unit involved five activities

that were implemented over several weeks. The following activities were chosen because they emphasized goal setting, self-exploration and relationship building that are all essential in career planning and meeting career education objectives. Simultaneously, students were able to engage in ELA content through these activities by reading, writing and learning about vocabulary that is personally relevant to themselves and their interests.

Activity 1: Goal Setting and Unstoppable Me

The purpose of this activity was to teach students about goal setting and taking steps to reach one's goals. In the first lesson, students read *Unstoppable Me* (Dyer and Tracy 2006) as a class. The book highlights various ways in which children can reach their goals. The book includes 10 major principles: (a) You're great—no matter what, (b) Persistence pays off, (c) Welcome to the unknown, (d) You have a choice, (e) Farewell to worry, (f) Peace begins with you, (g) Enjoy the here-and-now, (h) Healthy me, (i) Creativity is the key and (j) What can you give. Each principle is described in the text using situational examples of how children may apply these principles in their own lives. For example, the second principle "Persistence pays off" describes the importance of hard work, persistence and seeing a goal through to its finish. In the situational example for this section, a child is learning to play the guitar, and he acknowledges that he will only get better at playing it if he continues to practise and persist in his efforts. At the conclusion of this book, there is a section that asks the reader about how they could use each of the 10 principles. As a class, students came up with ways in which they could use each of the principles in their own lives.

After reading *Unstoppable Me* (Dyer and Tracy 2006) and answering the questions together, the teacher helped students to create booklets with monthly goals and targets to reach. At the beginning of each month, students would colour a bull's eye to illustrate whether they had met their previous month's goal. Students then wrote statements about a specific goal that they would like to achieve for the following month. Midway through the month, the class revisited their goals and discussed the actions that they had taken to achieve

them. This exercise was designed to provide students with an understanding of the positive impacts that arise from taking action to follow through on one's goals. Students monitored their progress by writing about their action or inaction throughout the goal-setting process.

Activity 2: Acrostic Poems

The purpose of this activity was to improve students' vocabulary and encourage students to think of new ways to describe themselves. In this activity, students brainstormed descriptive adjectives as a class. These adjectives were to be words that students could use to describe themselves. As a class, students created an A to Z alphabet listing of descriptive adjectives. Students then wrote acrostic poems to describe themselves using these adjectives. For example, a student named John could have written: Joyful, Open, Honest, Nice.

Activity 3: Photo Story

This activity was designed to have students think about their life stories and practise writing descriptive paragraphs. Students created a digital photo story of their lives using photos that depicted their lives from birth to present day. Students brought photos from home that were personally meaningful and/or tied to significant life events. For each photo, students wrote at least one paragraph by making jot notes, drafting, revising and then writing a final copy. The teacher assisted students to correct each rough draft before they wrote their final copy. The photos were then scanned and imported into the Microsoft Photo Story program. The teacher then recorded students' voices as they told the story of their lives with each photo. When all students had completed this activity, the class watched the photo stories together.

Activity 4: My Community—Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me

This activity was designed to expose children to a variety of occupations and encourage them to consider areas of personal interest. Prior to the activity, the teacher gathered several books that detailed various careers and created a mini classroom library. Each day, the teacher read aloud a section

of Priddy's (2003) *ABC of Jobs People Do*. This book offers explanations and vivid illustrations of professions and occupations for each letter of the alphabet. Once students had the opportunity to read various books, they naturally began to choose books based on self-interest. To supplement the library, the teacher also created a classroom wiki website to allow students to access videos, vocabulary lists, interactive games and virtual tours of their careers of interest.

Activity 5: Completing Posters with Care Partners and Career Day

For the first part of this activity, students created posters about occupations held by "community helpers," adults in their neighbourhoods who were in helping roles. For example, some students described individuals who were police officers, nurses or veterinarians. To complete these posters, students first answered the following questions:

- Where does your community helper work?
- What does your community helper do?
- How do they dress?
- Who do they help?
- How do they help people?

Students answered each question in paragraph form using the books available in the classroom library and the classroom wiki website.

At this point, Grade 2 students were matched with care partners from Grades 7 and 8 to complete their community helper career posters. Care partners were referred to as older students who provided support to younger students by guiding and directing them in completing assigned tasks (for example, assignments, projects and so on). The older students assisted the Grade 2 students by helping them edit their work, find relevant photos and display the career posters. This helped to ensure that the Grade 2 students were able to finish their posters in a timely manner prior to the career day. For instance, some Grade 2 students might find that searching for information on the computer is time-consuming if they are not comfortable with technology; therefore, the older students were able to show younger students how to navigate this process. In return, the older students were given the opportunity to enhance

their social and helping skills, which are also vital skills for career planning. Moreover, having both groups of students collaborate encouraged greater connection among the school community.

The school held a career fair in the school gym to give students an authentic learning experience by bringing the community helpers to the classroom. The students rotated from station to station to learn about various occupations, and the career posters that students had created were proudly displayed on each table. The invited guests brought the tools of their respective trades and/or professions as well as gifts for each student. A highlight of the career day involved an entire crew of firefighters that came with their truck, and students were invited to go inside of the fire truck and talk to each crew member. To incorporate English language arts into the career day activity, students wrote thank you letters to each career day volunteer.

Summative Assessment

Upon completion of the career planning unit, students completed brief evaluation surveys (Appendix A). This survey was designed to (a) assess which students participated in each activity, (b) indicate whether each activity was perceived as helpful, (c) highlight aspects of the unit that students enjoyed, (d) collect students' recommendations regarding how the unit could be improved in the future and (e) collect student ratings as to whether the career planning unit had met the four standardized learning outcomes.

Results

The results from the student evaluation surveys are presented in the following tables. It should be noted that five students did not complete the first page of the survey, and the numbers in each column fluctuate because students apparently had difficulty completing the survey. In many cases, boxes and/or smiley faces were either left blank or more than one option was selected. When this happened, the response was not included in the summative count.

The first table presents students' levels of participation in each activity.

Table 1: Participation

| ACTIVITY | I DIDN'T DO IT | I DID IT |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | 0 (0.0%) | 15 (100.0%) |
| Acrostic Poems | 0 (0.0%) | 14 (100.0%) |
| Photo Story | 1 (6.7%) | 14 (93.3%) |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | 0 (0.0%) | 15 (100.0%) |
| Completing Posters with Care Partners and Career Day | 1 (7.1%) | 13 (92.9%) |

Note: 97.2% of the students who responded to this question completed all activities.

The following table presents the extent to which each activity was perceived as helpful by the students. Students' responses to the open-ended questions are described in the Discussion section.

Table 2: Perceived Helpfulness of Each Activity

| ACTIVITY | NOT GOOD AT ALL | GOOD | GREAT |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | 0 (0.0%) | 4 (28.6%) | 10 (71.4%) |
| Acrostic Poems | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (7.1%) | 13 (92.9%) |
| Photo Story | 1 (7.1%) | 1 (7.1%) | 12 (85.7%) |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | 1 (7.7%) | 1 (7.7%) | 11 (84.6%) |
| Completing Posters with Care Partners and Career Day | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 11 (100.0%) |

Note: 97.2% of the students reported that all activities were good or great.

The career planning unit's perceived adherence to four standardized learning outcomes is presented below.

Table 3: Adherence to Learning Outcomes

| | I DON'T AGREE | I'M NOT SURE | I AGREE |
|---|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| These lessons helped me to learn a lot about myself. | 0 (0.0%) | 5 (25.0%) | 15 (75.0%) |
| These lessons helped me to learn a lot about careers. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 21 (100.0%) |
| These lessons made me excited about what I could do with my life. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 20 (100.0%) |
| These lessons made me want to learn more about different careers. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 20 (100.0%) |

Note: On average, 93.8% of students agreed that all learning outcomes had been met.

Discussion

Overall, this career planning unit had excellent results. However, these results must be interpreted with caution, given the number of students who did not fully or properly complete their evaluation forms. Based on student data, 97.2 per cent of students felt that the activities were good or great and 93.8 per cent indicated that the unit had met all of the learning outcomes. The career day and completing posters with care partners activity was rated most helpful, as 100.0 per cent of students indicated that the activity was great.

Many of the students' open-ended comments on the survey indicated that they enjoyed working with their care partners and they would have liked more time with them. This highlights the influence that older adolescents may have on children in early elementary school. This career planning unit was able to build community within the school by pairing Grade 2 students with Grades 7 or 8 students and encouraging them to collaborate. Students also enjoyed the career day aspect of this activity, and many students' comments highlighted

Specifically to English language arts, this career planning unit appeared successful in allowing students to develop their language skills while describing themselves and the world of work.

their positive experiences with guests such as police officers, chefs, veterinarians, nurses and fire personnel. It was useful for students to read about various occupations in their classroom career library, but having the opportunity to meet with various professionals and learn more about their work was an engaging and eye-opening experience.

Students particularly enjoyed the acrostic poem activity perhaps because it was relatively simple, as students only needed to select one descriptive adjective for each letter of their name, and it also allowed students to come up with words to describe themselves. Students also rated the goal setting, photo story and my community activities to be helpful. Each activity incorporated English language arts outcomes into their design and allowed students to become more comfortable in describing personal attributes and examine a variety of potential career options. Students commented that they enjoyed learning new words to describe themselves, and they also appreciated seeing and showing pictures of themselves. In this way, students were able to celebrate their individuality during activities such as the acrostic poem and photo story.

Specifically to English language arts, this career planning unit appeared successful in allowing students to develop their language skills while describing themselves and the world of work. Students were able to assess and reflect on the texts that the teacher read aloud and demonstrated comprehension. After the read alouds, students contributed insightful responses to the discussion questions. For instance, in reading *Unstoppable Me*, students were able to use their newly acquired knowledge about the 10 principles and communicate how it would be relevant and applicable in their own lives. The Grade 2 students were also able to compose several writing pieces (for example, thank you letters to volunteers, photo stories

and posters) to communicate their ideas in paragraph form. Additionally, students created visual representations (for example, posters and photo stories) that accurately represented their understanding of career planning concepts (for example, self-exploration and job opportunities).

On their open-ended responses, students indicated that they would have liked to have more time to complete their activities and more time with their care partners. The teacher echoed this statement, as she had planned additional career education activities that were not implemented due to time constraints. Other students indicated that they wished the classroom had been quieter when they were trying to write, or alternatively that they could have listened to music while they were writing.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the successful implementation of the career planning unit, it is worthy to note some existing limitations and recommendations for future career planning projects. First, using an interview format instead of relying on paper-pencil surveys might have made it easier to validate students' thoughts and experiences regarding the career planning unit. Considering Grade 2 students are still working on developing their writing and comprehension skills, they might not have had the time or capacity to express all of their ideas on the survey. Moreover, it is difficult to be certain if students actually understood the information on the survey; therefore, using an interview format may also be helpful for the teacher in collecting deep, authentic and meaningful responses from students regarding the unit's effectiveness. Second, colouring a bull's eye to track goals may be a difficult concept for Grade 2 students to conceptualize. Therefore, using a chart where students can check off goals or place a sticker beside the goal may be more developmentally appropriate. Third, as previously mentioned, because Grade 2 students are still expanding on their writing abilities, having them write jot notes, a draft version with edits and a final copy could be very time-consuming and beyond their developmental capacity. This process could be shortened by inviting students to simply write one copy using a pencil so that they are able to erase and correct their mistakes afterward. Last,

future assessment of a career education project like this one would also benefit from taking separate measurements for the care partner and career day activities. This would allow for more certainty with regards to which activity was perceived as most helpful by the students.

Taken together, these limitations and recommendations may be able to offer additional insight and opportunities in developing future career education projects.

Throughout this career planning unit, students were given opportunities to learn more about themselves, the world of work and working cooperatively with others.

Conclusion

The students enjoyed engaging in self-exploration and learning more about the world of work. Students benefitted from experiential learning, as they were able to take what they had read and then interact with professionals from various occupations. Students celebrated their individuality through photo stories and were mentored by older students to conduct career research and create posters. Throughout this career planning unit, students were given opportunities to learn more about themselves, the world of work and working cooperatively with others. Each of these areas involves critical life skills that will undoubtedly benefit students for years to come. 📖

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Appendix A

Career Coaching Across the Curriculum: Student Evaluation Survey

Thank you for participating in this career planning unit! I would like to know if it was helpful and how it could be made better. Please answer the questions on this sheet to help me with this.

Part 1: Please let me know if you did the activities.

| ACTIVITY | I DIDN'T DO IT | I DID IT |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Acrostic Poems | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Photo Story | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Career Day and Completing Posters with Our Care Partners | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |













Part 2: Please let me know if you thought the activity was helpful by circling whether you thought it was not good at all, good or great.

| ACTIVITIES | NOT GOOD AT ALL | GOOD | GREAT |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Acrostic Poems | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Photo Story | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Career Day and Completing Posters with Our Care Partners | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What did you like about this lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention?

How could this lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention be made better?

Part 3: Please tell me how much you agree with the following statements by putting a checkmark in the box that best tells me how you feel:

| | I DON'T AGREE | I'M NOT SURE | I AGREE |
|---|---|---|---|
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about myself. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about careers. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me excited about what I could do with my life. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me want to learn more about different careers. |  |  |  |

Thank you very much for your help!