

**The following information is an excerpt taken from a report published by Hanover Research entitled, “Effective Career Awareness and Development Programs for K-8 Students”. (Hanover Research, 2012 pages 9-12)  
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## **The Importance of Career Development Programs in Elementary School**

Researchers also support the introduction of career awareness as early as elementary school. Carolyn Magnuson and Marion Starr, in an article titled *How Early is Too Early to Begin Life Career Planning? The Importance of the Elementary School Years*, report that helping children to achieve self-fulfillment greatly benefits children as they develop. The later development of skills related to career awareness, career exploration, and skill development can be magnified through the early development of the skills that will be needed for this career awareness. Magnuson and Starr list five major premises which help to clarify the foundation for their research and findings. These premises are:

- \* Life Career Development is a Life-Long Spiraling Process
- \* Life Career Planning Includes a Series of Sub-Skills
- \* Career Awareness and Career Exploration Form the Foundation for Effective Life Career Planning
- \* Idiosyncratic Factors Influence the Decision Making of Each Person
- \* Child Development Theory and Career Development Theory Are Interrelated

Magnuson and Starr emphasize that “what happens at one level of development will influence subsequent levels.” They elaborate:

Our responsibility as adults in the lives of children and young adults is to provide many and varied developmentally appropriate opportunities for career awareness, career exploration and the development of life career planning skills. To be personally meaningful to children as individuals, the experiences must be accompanied by opportunities to express individual thoughts and beliefs as they develop.

The authors provide strategies for the planning of activities for children, as well as the actions of mentors as they encourage the development of skills that will be beneficial to career and life planning. These strategies are presented in the table below.

## **Strategies for Children and Mentors for the Development of Skills Needed for Career Planning in Elementary School**

### **Strategies for Children**

Common to all of the strategies are the processes of: encouragement of effort, self-evaluation, and planning for children's growth via providing increasingly more complex tasks. The tasks will be varied, require a range of skills, and allow for successful problem solving.

#### ***To encourage curious spirit within children:***

\* Provide areas in which children are free to explore and wonder. Include such things as: old, small household appliances that may be taken apart and put back together, magnifying glasses, construction tools, building blocks, and hats which may be used in a variety of ways. As children experiment with the objects, introduce them to workers who use the tools.

\* Encourage make-believe play and the use of objects in creative ways, e.g., an eraser becomes a microphone for a budding rock star.

#### ***To build bridges to more complex learning, begin with what children know to help them move to what is not yet known:***

\* If a child repeatedly chooses the tools/hat of a firefighter, expand her possibilities by asking what she thinks about being a carpenter or physician. Make tools of other occupations available, without discouraging her choices of a firefighter's tools.

\* Encourage a youngster interested in plants to work with and talk with you as you care for the plants, gradually guiding him to learn when to water and how to identify leaves that need plucking.

\* Provide free-time choices, academic project ideas, reading materials, and games on different levels of difficulty. As children grow in competence and confidence, they may choose from activities on their own or with your encouragement.

#### ***To develop social understanding (including the awareness of self and others) provide opportunities for individuals to engage in frequent interactions with a variety of people:***

\* Each day, a myriad of workers passes through the doors of your school. Invite workers to stop by your class for a few minutes. This will personalize their work and will create world-awareness in several ways: children will expand their knowledge about jobs; they will gain

an understanding of the interrelatedness of people; they will hear first-hand that satisfaction can be gained through working; you will be modeling respect for all workers.

\* Help children develop an understanding of their internal success criteria through self-evaluation and self-reflection. Provide sentence starters such as “Jobs I would not like and why ...” Children’s shared thoughts provide cues for understanding their interpretations of their experiences.

\* Plan for the expression and exploration of children’s thoughts about specific work and workers through drawing, writing, talking in groups or in dyads. Encourage conversation and journal writing about work tasks.

\* Plan opportunities for children to have many successful tryouts of occupations. Role-playing allows children to try on many roles and (through feedback from self as well as peers and adults) enables them to gain information about themselves and work.

### **Strategies for Mentors**

#### ***Become a constant observer of children:***

\* Watch for the individual’s approach to tasks; idiosyncratic ways of approaching tasks provide insight about the learning style of a child.

\* Watch for children’s choices of activities, e.g., the level of activity required, group or individual participation, being a leader or follower. Use these preferences to encourage the child’s efforts and emerging abilities.

\* Observe the child’s initiative-taking. Initiative is a characteristic that contributes to ongoing success and it is in childhood that children are deciding about the value of their initiative.

\* Watch, listen without judgment, take notes over time about individuals’ choices and monologues/dialogues and reflect on your observations. Patterns of choice and themes in self-talk will emerge and provide cues about the ideas children are forming about work, workers, and self.

#### ***Consider the processing of an activity as important as the activity itself. Processing includes feedback from others or self:***

\* Focus feedback on the specifics of children’s efforts. Keep in mind that adult response to the efforts of a child may mean the difference between the child developing a sense of industry or a sense of inferiority.

\* Accompany career awareness and career exploration experiences with opportunities for students to express their beliefs about themselves in relation to the various occupations.

\* Encourage reflection about classroom projects through discussions and/or writing, e.g., what they did, what pleased them about their efforts, what they would do differently if they were to do the same or a similar project another time and what is needed as they continue their exploration.

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The strategies presented above encourage children to explore their interests and learn to problem solve through activities designed to facilitate creative thinking. Creating structured environments for students to learn about careers by articulating what they like about certain careers, as well as interacting with professionals in those careers, provides an open knowledge base for children to begin to explore their own career development. The strategies provided to mentors highlight the need to provide children with non-judgmental feedback based on their activities and natural preferences. Together, these strategies emphasize the need to design creative and explorative ways for elementary-aged school children to begin their career development path.

Source: Magnuson, C. and Starr, M. 2000. "How Early is Too Early to Begin Life Career Planning? The Importance of the Elementary School Years." *Journal of Career Development*, 27:2.

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