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INFORMATION REGARDING THE USE OF THE LIFE CAREER GAME IN THE PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT GUIDANCE PROGRAM.

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A PROGRAM TO TEACH DECISION-MAKING SKILLS TO NINTH AND 11TH GRADE STUDENTS USING LOCAL RESEARCH DATA, VISUAL AIDS, AND OTHER MATERIALS WAS UNDERTAKEN. IN GROUP GUIDANCE SESSIONS, THESE PROBLEMS WERE DISCOVERED--(1) SOME DECISIONS ARE NEVER CONSCIOUSLY MADE, (2) THE EMOTIONAL BASES OF DECISIONS ARE NOT CONSIDERED, (3) MANY STUDENTS AVOID MAKING DECISIONS BECAUSE THEY FEAR LASTING CONSEQUENCES, AND (4) PROVISIONS FOR PRACTICE IN DECISION-MAKING ARE NEEDED. TO ALLEVIATE SOME OF THESE PROBLEMS, THE LIFE CAREER GAME DEVELOPED BY BOOCOCK AND COLEMAN, WAS EMPLOYED. USING TWO GROUPS COMPRISED OF 10 AND 18 STUDENTS RESPECTIVELY, TEAMS OF TWO STUDENTS WERE FORMED. EACH TEAM PLANNED A FICTITIOUS STUDENT'S LIFE FOR 20 YEARS, INCLUDING EDUCATION, OCCUPATION, FAMILY LIFE AND LEISURE TIME. TEAMS COMPETED FOR THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF POINTS IN THE GAME. THE GAMES WERE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE THEY PROVIDED MOTIVATION AND INVOLVEMENT, ILLUSTRATED FUTURE FACTUAL REALITIES, AND LED TO DISCUSSION. SINCE THE GAME MEETS SOME NEEDS WHICH WERE LACKING IN GROUP GUIDANCE SESSIONS, IT CAN BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SESSIONS. PLANS CALL FOR ITS EXTENDED USE IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS AS WELL AS IMPLEMENTATION IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS. (FR)

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Information Regarding the Use of the Life
Career Game in the Palo Alto
Unified School District
Guidance Program

THE PROBLEM

Career decision-making or vocational guidance for many years has been a difficult task for the guidance worker. Articles have been written discussing the problem and suggesting possible variables that must be dealt with in order to arrive at a workable, dynamic, flexible, and successful program. Although it has been a perplexing problem for many concerned and aware professional guidance personnel, other factors have added an impetus to arriving at solutions. With the additional funds being poured into guidance programs, and the increasing complexity of vocational choice, greater pressure has been placed on those working with students to develop answers to the problem and to develop techniques and methods that actually do help students to make wise, satisfying and considered vocational decisions.

In such efforts the focus of most attention and analysis has been on isolating what factors promote or impede the decisional process. Hershenson and Roth (1966) suggest the factors of: a) information, b) capacity for commitment to one's decisions and c) elements of interpretation and impact of experiences as the critical areas. Hilton (1962) suggests feelings, role performance and environment as possible factors affecting the decision-making process. Gelatt (1962) states the premise that in order for students to be "good" decision-makers they need certain relevant information: (1) information concerning the possible alternative actions open to a student, (2) information concerning the possible outcomes of the various actions, (3) the relationships between actions and outcomes, and (4) a student's relative preferences for the various outcomes. All of these suggestions have validity, but the question arises, as to how these are dealt with in a guidance program, or in an individual counseling conference.

The work we have done, and are attempting to do in Palo Alto is an exploratory effort to answer that question and to develop a program that will aid students throughout the country who want to become effective educational-vocational decision-makers. We have based what we have done on the framework that if individuals learn how to make decisions, then they will be prepared to meet most of the specific, major and minor decisions that they may face throughout their life without the dependence upon others such as parents and counselors. Effective decision-making develops independence from significant others and provides for greater and more flexible choices.

"Invitation to Decision" - A group guidance approach: For the past six years research data have been collected on those students who have graduated from the high schools in Palo Alto. These data have been summarized in the form of "experience tables" (rather than expectancy tables) which report what students actually did and the experience of those students going through high school and into post-high school life. These summaries, together with other pertinent information about the decision-making process and high school and college information have been collected into a workbook for student use. The workbook, plus visual materials and other relevant material form the basis for a series of group guidance sessions presented to all students at the ninth and eleventh grade levels in all of our secondary schools. Some evidence has been gathered that seems to demonstrate that presentation of this material to students who have before them pertinent personal data such as present grade-point-average and test scores, results in more effective decision-making with respect to educational choices. The program specifically emphasizes: 1) teaching decision-making skills, 2) utilization of relevant information in making decisions, 3) demonstration of the relationship between what students do and the possibility of certain outcomes, pointing out that students do have some control over what happens to them, or to the outcomes of their choice.

After two years of using the program, we have become aware of certain factors that are missing from this approach which need to be corrected to strengthen the total district's commitment to a decision-making framework of educational-vocational guidance. In studying these factors and analyzing the program thus-far, we have been given further direction in our development of such a program. The most notable areas are these:

1. Dealing with factual alternatives versus selective internalized alternatives. It is evident that as one works with students to help them evaluate alternatives in a choice situation, consideration must be given to the choices that have already been internalized by the student. For example, the decision to go to college rather than to enter a job is not a conscious choice for many Palo Alto students for they have already accepted the expectation held for them by their parents which is strongly reinforced by the school and socio-economic environment of the community to attempt a college education. They do exercise choice over the particular college which they will attend. Consequently, students are not utilizing the full potential of the decision-making process which indicates free consideration of all alternatives. Therefore, work needs to be done on adapting the program, taking this factor into consideration.

2. Utilization of emotional and value factors in the decision-making process.

It is an established fact that many decisions are made on an emotional basis rather than a purely logical basis. A strictly logical approach to teaching a process that is so critically affected by affective influences, will not succeed. This is particularly true when the program is used with students who are very involved in differentiating qualities about themselves, and establishing a value system apart from that of their family or friends. Data of a different type is therefore necessary.

3. Fear of making major, irreversible decisions.

This area is closely related to that of affective factors, but specifically deals with the awareness that even with knowledge and understanding of the decision-making process, one is afraid to utilize the process. Most people would like others to carry the responsibility for decision-making. Insecure young people desire it even more. We have thoroughly endoctrinated our students into believing that certain decisions are very serious with grave consequences. Therefore, they may resist making their own decisions even when they know how.

4. Lack of practice in decision-making.

The material is presented to students immediately preceding certain major decision-making, i.e., before choosing course programs for high school or choosing a college or making post high school plans. No one feels comfortable "practicing" a new process on a major personal decision. There is a tendency then, to revert to the conventional pattern of deciding. Provision needs to be made for some type of practice experience, not only to learn the process more effectively, but to give assurance that the process works.

5. The incomprehensibility of the future.

The future, even though it is only two months away, is too far away for it to have meaning or reality for most students. They simply cannot think that far in advance, nor comprehend the meaning of much that is told them about that future. Part of their inability to comprehend this is due to their lack of exposure to any of the elements that compose that future. Few have had jobs, even though they want to; few can tell you what their father does, other than

perhaps his title; few have had to support themselves financially, and none have experienced what it is like to be a college student or high school student. They know virtually nothing about the requirements of the future.

USE OF SIMULATION: THE LIFE CAREER GAME

Simulation has been used effectively, particularly by the military, for training purposes. More and more agencies and groups are taking a look at this technique as a means to educate, design and test people, instruments, and projects. Crawford (1966) in discussing the dimensions of simulation refers to it as a media by which the student is brought into contact with his future job or occupational environment. In distinguishing between open-loop and closed-loop systems he discusses the system applicable to vocational guidance. The simulation of closed-loop systems involves interactions among components which control, in some fashion, the environmental variables impinging on any particular component.

It would seem that if elements of future life could be simulated into some system or technique whereby students interact with the components of that future environment, they would not only be exposed to some of the realities of the future, but also learn how to deal with them, i.e., get some practice in decision making. Such a system would require information and data, such as that presented to students in the decision-making group sessions, but would process the data through a technique which involved them, and facilitated their learning and understanding.

Sarane Boocock and James Coleman at the Johns Hopkins University developed such a simulation technique in the form of a Life Career Game. Using this as a foundation, we have begun adapting this to the educational and vocational guidance program in one high school. Mr. Gary Shirts, in San Diego County, has also used the game in working with sixth grade students.

Our pilot work in the spring of 1966 involved two groups of students: one group of ten Caucasian students in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, representing a wide range of ability and another group of 18 Negro students who were eleventh and twelfth grade students with a more homogeneous ability level. The groups met once a week for an hour from February until May for the purpose of participating in the simulation game experience. Teachers had given permission for students to be called out of their various classes and the hour at which the groups met were rotated, to prevent students from missing the same class each week.

Explanation of the Game

The room is set up so that students can work together in teams of two. Some place in the room a job table is located at which information is available about jobs according to categories: a) jobs available for those with less than a high school education, b) jobs available for

those with a high school diploma, c) jobs for those with some college, d) jobs for those with a college degree, e) jobs for those with more than a college degree, f) jobs available with apprenticeship or technical training , and g) military service. Also, a marriage and family table with appropriate application blanks is necessary and an administrator table for the game director, together with appropriate spinners for use in the game.

Each team of two students is given a player's handbook containing decision planning sheets, rules of the game, life history blanks, other necessary information and application forms. In addition to the handbook, each team is given an identical written profile of a student that has been written based on actual case material of students*. The teams are told that they are to plan this student's life for the next twenty years with respect to the student's education, occupation, family life and leisure. The teams start the planning of this student's life with the junior year in high school. Contained with the profile is a transcript of the student's grades in the ninth and tenth grade. The profile (sample in appendix), contains information about the student's family, family income, educational background, the student's hobbies, talents, social life and ability scores. The teams are told that they will receive game points at the end of each decision period which constitutes one year of the student's life. Although the means of providing competition is rather superficial, the factor of competition seems to be quite important. Teams get very eager to win and therefore to make better decisions throughout their planning.

The decision planning sheet (sample in appendix) is the important item in the whole process. This is a chart, divided into hours from 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday. The first seven hours are left blank for teams to write in the courses the student will take in school. For the remaining hours they must indicate whether the student studies, and if so, what subject does he study, whether he works at home, doing household chores, whether he works at a part-time job, or spends time in leisure. At the bottom of the sheet the team totals the number of hours for each of these catagories. It is on the basis of these totals that scores are computed.

As the teams have only the information contained in the profile and the grades on the transcript, they must begin projecting their thinking as to what this student might plan to do. The first "decision" they seem to work with is whether or not the student will go on to some type of college or other educational program, or either get married or go into the labor market. Once they have labored over this decision, the next difficult decision is whether or not the student should try

*Hereafter, throughout the explanation of the game the use of "student" refers to the ficticious student of the written profile. Students playing the game are referred to as the "team."

and get a part-time job. Upon graduation from high school they may want to decide to apply for admission to a college or technical school, or they may wish their student to get married. Out of these various decisions facing them, they, the teams, seem to do much debating, information seeking and verbal weighing of one decision against another.

Scores for the four areas are computed in this way:

Education. The scores are dependent upon the grades that the student earns in the subjects he is taking. The grades for each course are determined according to three factors: a) the ability level of the student in this subject, b) the number of hours the team has decided the student spends studying, and c) the throw of a die. The grade determined by the throw of the die is based on probability data. For example, a student with average verbal ability who studies one hour a week on English, has one chance out of six of getting an "F", on chance out of six of getting a "C" and four chances out of six of getting a "D". If the student studies more than five hours on any one subject, the grade is not affected. It is pointed out to teams that there is a point beyond which it does not pay to have their student study further. Beyond this point studying is taking away time from other subjects or activities. If a student has average ability, then points earned towards the game for this one subject are computed as follows:

Grade of A = 5 game points
Grade of B = 3 game points
Grade of C = 2 game points
Grade of D = 0 game points
Grade of F = -1 game point

After grades are computed for all subjects, and equivalent game points are assigned, these are totaled and form the education score for the first decision period, or for the junior year in high school.

Occupation. Scores for occupation during the high school years are based on the salary that the student is earning, plus the number of hours of work. For example, if a student is earning less than $5,000, he receives 2 points for every hour of part-time work. However, if his salary is between $5,000-$10,000 he only receives 1 point for every hour, since he would have to work fewer hours to earn sufficient money for needs during high school years. If his income is over $10,000, as a high school student, he receives 3 points for every hour of part-time work, such work being, undoubtedly, a highly specialized type of work. When a student graduates

from high school, scores are computed according to job classification and number of years person has held this job. For example, a waiter or waitress is classified as 1B and the first year a student holds this job after graduation, he would receive 20 points. If he holds this job a second year, his score drops to 19 and continues to drop for each year until after holding the job 12 years he is only getting 9 game points for the job. This points out that there may be immediate, quick gains to getting certain jobs, but these diminish after years of time. However, other jobs, such as a school teacher, increase in value as the years go on.

Marriage-Family Score. If and when a student marries, his score is determined according to the age when he marries and his level of education. If there are children in the family, then added to the above score would be 5 x number of children. If the person is divorced, his total score equals only 5 x number of children.

Leisure Score. The leisure score is based upon a leisure rating determined by family income, education level and family status, i.e., married, divorced, number of children. Once a rating has been established based on these factors, then points are assigned according to rating and number of hours spent in leisure.

The meat of the game lies primarily in the discussions that team members have with one another, as they plan the student's life and in some of the procedures they must go through to carry out their plans. If a student desires to apply for a job, the team must get a job application form and complete this. This is brought to the game administrator who spins the job spinner. This spinner contains various catagories: yes, you get the job; no, you don't get the job; yes, you get the job if there is an increasing demand for workers in this field; yes, if 75,000 of the workers in the field are of the same sex; yes, if the student has the proper training, etc. A reference book on job facts is used to answer some of these questions. Since all teams enjoy watching the spinner, they are listening as some of these facts are discussed. If a student does not get a job after three applications, then the game administrator can assign a job, such as baby sitting, if student is a girl or yard work if student is a boy. Teams are also given bonus points if they find a job on their own, i.e., if teams find an appropriate job in the newspaper, or by going to the employment office to discuss job opportunities.

Once the student, if a girl, is 16, or if a boy, 18, the student can get married. If they desire the student to get married, the team would pick up a marriage application blank and take it to the game administrator. Then the marriage spinner is used. It is spun, first, to determine,

whether the student has an opportunity to get married, then several more times to find out the age of the potential spouse, his education level, whether or not the potential spouse is employed and if so, at what type of job. This information is filled out on the marriage application, and the team then decides whether they still want the student to get married, to this potential spouse. If they don't, they can refuse the application and can try again next year. If they do, then, the student is now married. Once the student is married, the couple has the opportunity to have children, and again must fill out an application to have a child. The family spinner again decides the outcome.

Post-High School Life

When the profile student graduates from high school, the rules of the game change. Certain time requirements are set, such as the number of hours to be spent in daily housework, required limits for either work or study, and amount of income for married couples, plus an additional amount for each child. Also, when teams bring their decision sheets for results of decisions, they must now also choose from a group of unplanned events cards. These cards contain such messages as that they have been promoted, if they have a job, or they loose their job, and the probability of being promoted or loosing a job is determined according to job category. Or an unplanned event might constitute being drafted, getting a divorce or having a child that was not planned for. These events must now be incorporated into the continued planning that the team does for its student.

Each team may work at its own rate of speed. As soon as one year has been completed, the team can go right on to the next year of planning without waiting for all teams to complete the first year. Frequently, however, when scores are posted on the master score sheet, all the teams stop their work to discuss why one team got more points than another. Out of these discussions may come greater understanding of the planning that must go into sound decisions.

Strengths of the Simulation Technique

Having observed the two groups of students playing this game, certain trends can be noted.

1. Students are very much involved in the entire process. They seriously study many aspects of the decisions they are considering. They pour over catalogs from colleges, weigh the consequences of getting a job as opposed to spending more time on study, carefully evaluate courses they might take, and seek out information that they need to make some of these decisions.

2. The game provides a readiness to learn certain facts that they have been given at other times, but did not see any need to learn them then. For example, one team asked if Biology

met the Lab science requirement for the University of California. They probably have been told this at least once a year since they entered junior high school, but now find some need to know this, and are ready to listen and learn. Never have students been observed pouring over college catalogs as diligently as were these while participating in this game. They also secured some catalogs on their own.

3. Some of the factual realities of future life seem to be illustrated vividly for them. When one girl saw how many hours she would have to spend in doing housework once she got married, she announced loudly, "Wow, 25 hours of housework! I'm not getting married!" Discussions pertaining to the providing of sufficient income for families has led to a greater awareness of the costs of living, and the value of certain family incomes.

4. Value issues seem to be highlighted and students are eager to discuss them and compare opinions with others. One of the hours was spent entirely on a discussion about what constitutes a "successful" life. No definite conclusions were reached, but ideas were exchanged and thinking was aroused.

5. The validity of the assumption that affective factors are influential in decision-making seems to be supported. The item in a profile pertaining to a boy friend, or a girl friend seems to be what catches attention first. Plans are made around this issue and the frequent statement was heard, "She'll probably marry that guy, and the marriage will probably end in a divorce. Therefore, she'll have to get an education so she can get a job and support the children she'll probably have."

Mechanics of the Game

The idea of the game is for teams to play a game involving twenty years with one student profile and then play the game with another student profile, utilizing some of the things they learned in the first game. This process can be repeated many times using different type student profiles. The plan in our pilot work was for students to eventually write a description of themselves and use this profile to play a game.

If students were to play one game straight through, it would take approximately three hours of time. Putting the teams through a game quickly is a good idea, so that they get the feel of a complete game. After this, then the game can be played more slowly, taking time out for the valuable discussions that ensue.

The game administrator not only computes scores, but moves from team to team, answering the questions that arise. Because this is valuable, it is helpful to have other people at the job and marriage tables. Students can be trained to do this, or students can do their own

scoring, leaving the administrator free to move about among the teams.

With proper assistance, the game can be used for groups of 30, or more. This means that the game could be used in a classroom situation, avoiding all the detail work of gathering students from a variety of classes.

Coordination of this Technique with Decision-Making Group Sessions

It has been demonstrated that the game meets some of the needs that were lacking in the group guidance sessions. It provides for involvement, both rationally and emotionally. Students are learning where and how to seek information and how to evaluate the information they are getting in terms of which decision to make. Students are receiving immediate outcomes of their decisions. They are able to see the consequences of those decisions and are learning how to adapt future decisions on the basis of the outcomes of past decisions. When they have seen their mistakes, they frequently ask if they can go back and do it over again. Since in life we can't go back and do over previous decisions, teams are not permitted to do this either.

With a variety of teams working with the identical information and situation, they are able to observe other decision-makers. They, therefore, have before them a variety of models. In addition to this, when looking at the outcomes in terms of game points, they may see that people can come to the same place in life, be it the number of game points, a successful life, or what other definition one might give, by different paths or routes and that one can be happy, choosing a different way of life from others. This seems an important concept to teach.

Students are getting the feeling of what a future life may require. They can get the benefit of experiencing the future without having to wait until they actually experience it.

Students are practicing decision-making, but in an atmosphere and setting where the penalties are not going to be directly to them as a person. They can try some things on for size that they could never do in life without some severe penalties to them in terms of irreversible decisions.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

1. Another version of the game has been developed for junior high school students. This game will be called the high school decision-making game, and will involve planning only five years of a student's life. This will be tested with students in one of the junior highs.

2. Extension of the high school program will include using classes, and classes involving the lower ability students who frequently have the difficulty planning their lives.

3. Counselors will be given in-service training with the game, so that they can use this technique with their own counselees.

4. It is being proposed that after teams have become involved in the game, the same material on decision-making as used in group sessions containing the experience tables and other information, will be introduced. Teams will go through the process as used now in the group sessions but will use their profile student as the person they are considering.

5. The job information parts to the game will be expanded, so that at critical times in their planning, relevant job facts and statistics can be introduced and taught to them.

As continued experience with the game develops, further adaptations will undoubtedly result. The major area for immediate study will be in terms of evaluation of this instrument. Evaluation will center not only on the game itself, but on the possibility of using the game as an evaluation of the decision-making approach to guidance.

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