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**ABSTRACT**

Problems and issues in career education and career search for gifted and talented children are examined. The special problems of gifted and talented students in this area are noted, including early readiness for career search and restrictiveness of the career search process for multitalented students. Problems in the career choice process are considered, such as lack of concern for jobs' hidden factors and confusion between problems of the job and problems of training. The importance of encouraging parent involvement is stressed. Other influences beyond those of parents are listed, including positive or negative experiences with other jobs, overcompensation, and personal interests. The importance of understanding students' natural roles (indominus, exdominus, exemplar, and eccentric) is noted. The balance between drives to be somebody and to do something worthwhile is explored. A list of resources on the topic concludes the digest. (CL)

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## CAREER SEARCH FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

Over the past 25 years career education has emerged as a legitimate and acceptable discipline. There is still limited awareness that conventional career education methods may be of little or no assistance to the gifted and talented.

### What Are the Special Problems in Career Search for the Gifted and Talented?

- Many of the gifted and talented were ready for career search by the age of 9. Presented with this material at 14-16 their reaction is "I was there years ago. I need something more sophisticated now."
- Many gifted children have unconventional career aspirations for which they are often ridiculed by peers and even teachers and parents.
- A proportion of gifted children are multitalented and career choice is seen as a restrictive process. Results of interest tests can be misleading for the multitalented.\*
- Parents often see the gifted child as a status symbol and the child's career choice can be a way of meeting parents' needs.
- Many gifted children are motivated not to succeed but to avoid at all costs the dreadful *shibboleth* of failure.
- Many gifted children, alienated at school expect to be alienated at work and arbitrarily reject careers which could offer them some fulfillment.
- Jobs are becoming more and more programmed. Many gifted children will not find one job which can utilize their profound and diverse talents.

### What are the Pitfalls in Career Choice for the Gifted and Talented?

- Too many career choices are based on *the image of the job*. It is essential to consider the *hidden factors*. For example the image of a museum curator's job was described by a gifted student as *animate fossils looking after inanimate fossils and stopping kids sticking chewing gum on exhibits*. In fact the hidden factors of museum work call for high administrative, research, and people contact skills.
- *Problems of the job* and *problems of training* are confused. For example no one should reject a career in medicine because he or she cannot tolerate the sight of

\*Elizabeth Meckstroth has designed a program for "High school students who can do anything." She focuses on interpersonal situations, careers which *expand* options, and the moral and philosophical value of what we are doing. Further information from Elizabeth Meckstroth, 259 East Stroop Road, Dayton, Ohio 45429.

blood. This is a *problem of training*. With training, the aversion can be overcome. On the other hand a young person who wears glasses could not become a pilot in the Air Force. This is a *problem of the job*. Very often what are perceived as problems of the job are, in fact, problems of training.

- *Difficulties and distastes* are not properly documented. Often young people find that they cannot handle the difficulties and distastes when they have expended several years of training and find themselves in a job. It is part of Anglo-Saxon culture to think of the person at the top as successful and having "made it." Many young people, a large proportion impelled by their parents, are striving for a role to which they are temperamentally unsuited.

### To What Extent Should Parents Be Involved?

Parents are involved. Most major research on career choice shows that parental influence, either positive or negative, is the strongest single influence on career choice. The importance of parents, the teacher, and the child working together as a team cannot be overestimated. Parental influence can sabotage or enhance the career educator's best efforts. Many parents are only too eager for guidance.

### Besides Parental Influence What Other Influences Affect Career Choice?

- School influence—occasionally positive but frequently negative.
- Experiences with actual jobs—these also can be positive or negative.
- Chance factors.
- Situational factors—things outside the control of the counselor or the student but which affect career choice.
- Inadequate or faulty information.
- Overcompensation.
- Personal interest—this is often regarded as an intruder. It should always be the starting point.
- Second string choices—choices made as an alternative to what the child really wants to do.

### When Are Natural Roles Observable?

With many children their natural roles are observable by the age of 8. Clearly a child's natural role affects the type of career that should be considered. The roles are.

- *Indominus*—controls the groups from within. The vice-principal of a school is usually the *indominus*

- Exdominus—represents the group to those outside it. The principal is usually the exdominus.
- Exemplar—has authority because of knowledge central to the group's activities. The coach of a field hockey team has authority because of his or her knowledge of the game.
- Eccentric—has authority by virtue of specialized knowledge. In the specialized area the eccentric's authority can be absolute. Suppose a player in a field hockey team is a nurse. Normally this player is one among eleven. But suppose a player is injured. The nurse/field hockey player will take charge and give orders which will be obeyed without question.

Because we tend to think of the exdominus as a successful person who has "made it," many gifted children strive for the exdominus role when their natural role is that of exemplar or eccentric.

### What Should Be the Objective of Career Counseling for the Gifted and Talented?

Most people are motivated by two parallel drives: *the drive to be somebody* and *the drive to do something worthwhile*. Both these drives must be equally satisfied. The number of eminent people who have died by their own hand shows that to be somebody will only be a source of stress to the person who does not also have a sense of doing something worthwhile. Where both drives are not equally gratified, frustration, loss of personal effectiveness, burnout, and even suicide are the results. Anglo-Saxon cultures continue to place too much emphasis on being somebody. The gifted and talented are particularly susceptible to this demand. From an early age they are seen as people likely to be somebody. There is a need to redress the balance and help the gifted and talented do something worthwhile as well. Before they can do that, they need to find what is worthwhile for them. Anglo-Saxon values lead us to think of money, status and related benefits as the reward for our work. Gifted children need to be helped to think of their talents as the currency with which they buy money and status and answer the question *is the price right?*

### RESOURCES

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Details of workshops on Enriched Career Search for teachers and counselors can be obtained from the Office of Special and External Programs, University of Maine at Presque Isle, 181 Main Street, Presque Isle, Maine 04769.

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