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ABSTRACT

School districts are at a pivotal and exciting time in education in the province of British Columbia, Canada. With changes to provincial graduation requirements there exists an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the life/work journey of youth in this province. Districts have been given the responsibility and challenge to reinvent career development education by building on the successes of the past and adapting to the challenges facing youth in the future. The following report provides a context for the changes to the graduation requirements in terms of current career development thinking and the way schools are responding to the challenge of change. (Contains 14 references.) (GCP)

# *Key Skills to Help Youth Make Positive Life/Work Transitions*

by  
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## **Key Skills to Help Youth Make Positive Life/Work Transitions**

Jessi Zielke

School districts are at a pivotal and exciting time in education in the province of British Columbia, Canada. With changes to provincial graduation requirements there exists an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the life/work journey of youth in this province. Districts have been given the responsibility and challenge to reinvent career development education by building on the successes of the past and adapting to the challenges facing the youth of our province in the future. To help shape the future of career education redevelopment, many school districts in British Columbia are using the components found in the *Blueprint For Life/work Designs*.

The following report provides a context for the changes to the graduation requirements in terms of current career development thinking and the way schools are responding to the challenge of change.

### **Why the changes to the British Columbia Graduation Document?**

The information revolution, like the industrial revolution before it, has profoundly affected and changed the skills required to make successful transitions in the world of work (Wallace, 1997; Beck, 1995; Lewis, 2001). Toffler (1990) described the third wave of societal shift as the Information Era where people need to develop skills and attitudes to deal with knowledge with an emphasis on sharing and using that knowledge to produce goods or services. Over the past 10 years, economists and business leaders have joined international, national, and provincial agencies to identify key competencies needed to enter, stay in, and progress in the work world. It became apparent from the research and feedback through the British Columbian graduation review consultation that many entities believe that the educational system should be doing more to help youth prepare for the new world of work.

Whether moving from job to job, maintaining a current work situation, moving from school to work, or navigating the consulting world, life/work transitions for working adults and youth are becoming increasingly

volatile and unpredictable. It is hard to imagine that in less than 40 years, a member of the working population has gone from an expectation of employment with one employer for an entire work life to an expectation that any given person will change their work situation seven to ten times over a lifetime (Bridges 1997). "This transition from old to new is like a perilous game of snakes and ladders—except that it isn't a game in these turbulent times. The economy is going through a paradigm shift, and the ladder we were all comfortable on, the old economy of mass manufacturing, has vanished before our eyes. (Beck, 1995, p. 10). In a more recent view of the changes in the economy, Sherry Cooper (2001) says, " 'this is the Acceleration Age, where everyone expects the world to move at a pace unprecedented in history'" It is evident that youth need to learn to be adaptable and accept change as a common factor in their day-to-day work interactions.

Youth entering the work environment of the new economy also require higher levels of education and training because more and different skills are required to do the work that the new economy demands. Advances in technology and the constant change in working styles those advances bring requires many workers to be skilled in entirely new ways. The physical skill people used in the agricultural and industrial society to make a product has shifted to the worker's skill at manipulating data in order to produce a good or service.

The skills required to cope with the demands of the new economy are identified by many sources. Bridges (1997) writes in *Creating You & Co* about "the significance of the 'Ten Basic Skills for the Workplace' as they were identified in the December 1995 Journal of the American Society for Training and Development. These are: reading, writing, computing, speaking, listening, solving problems, managing oneself, knowing how to learn, working as part of a team, and leading others" (p. 33). Similarly, the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education (2001) identifies three skill areas—occupation-specific skills, employability skills or generic transferable skills and career development skills or competencies (p. 23 - 30). In June of 1991, the United States Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) prepared a report for the U.S. Department of Labour that identified three skill areas needed for job success – basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. The World Future Society (1996), in their report *What Students Must Know to Succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, identified skills loosely categorized as academic, personal, and civil that would help students not only prepare for the future, but build their future.

## **Skills Youth Need to Master in Order to Make Positive Life/Work Transitions**

During extensive graduation review consultations with the public, including students, graduates, employers, k-12 educators, post-secondary educators and members of the business community, three areas of skills surfaced as a “must have” to make successful life/work transitions. These same skills were also identified as not currently being taught with purpose and/or effectiveness in the k-12 system.

The first identifiable area was occupation-specific skills or academic skills needed to work in a particular occupation. These skills are obtained through on-the-job training and experience as well as specialized education or training. Requiring occupation-specific skills obviously is not a new condition for work, however, for workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the pressure to continually upgrade will be tremendous. In today’s complex and competitive world, a post-secondary diploma, certificate or degree is no longer a guarantee of employment. In the emerging world of work, those credentials are combined with a person’s ability to function effectively while work situations are rapidly changing. Therefore, the skill of self-reflection and the knowledge of how to access and obtain appropriate training and/or learning as well as evaluating the relevance and quality of that training were deemed to be an essential for youth working towards their preferred future.

The second area of key competencies identified during the consultations was employability skills, which describes the set of skills that employers identify as those needed for a high-quality Canadian workforce. These went beyond occupation/academic skills and included teamwork and personal management skills. The Conference Board of Canada has spent a great deal of time researching and completing a rubric for those skills and coins them as “essential skills.” The conference board has produced a document called *Employability Skills 2000+*. The SCANS report and prominent authors reflect a similar skills set. The employability skills reflect the three detailed subsets identified by the American Society for Training and Development.

The third key area of skill acquisition and development identified were skills needed to make positive life/work transitions. Participants at the consultation articulated that youth might possess occupational skills and employability skills, but on many occasions did not know how to apply and actualize those skills in the world of work. The resource that embodies these application and actualization skills is reflected in the *Blueprint for Life/Work Designs* (Hache, L., Jarvis, P., & Redekopp, D., 2000). The resource builds on work done by the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (US) in the early 1990’s. These competencies

cross match many of the occupational skills and employability skills, but focus directly on a person's ability to utilize the skill in the life/work building process. Some of the skills identified in the rubrics include interacting positively and effectively with others, changing and growing throughout one's life, locating and effectively using life/work information, securing/creating and maintaining work, and understanding, engaging in and managing one's own life/work building process. The acquisition of these career management skills must be in place for individuals to make smooth transitions to next stages along their life/work journey. Throughout the graduation review, it was articulated that career management skills are essential. People need to know how to use and apply occupation-specific skills and employability skills in order to acquire, maintain and retain work.

### **Changes to the British Columbia Graduation Document**

For youth, the effect of the articulation of these three skill areas by business leaders, educators and government workforce agencies will be significant and has affected provincial educational policy. Every province and territory in Canada already has specific career development language imbedded in its k-12 curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, October, 2001). In 1995, the British Columbia Ministry of Education was the first province to implement Personal Planning, k-7, and Career and Personal Planning 8-12.

Despite the introduction of these programs into the British Columbia curriculum in 1995, a key issue that surfaced in British Columbia was the lack of cognitive skill acquisition by students. In the 2001 (BC Ministry of Education, October, 2001) review of the CAPP curriculum, parents, business leaders, teachers and students endorsed the continuation of the curricular area and deemed it an integral part of a youth's education, however, there was an acknowledgement that there is a great deal of inconsistency across the province as to the successful delivery of the learning outcomes. These disparate inconsistencies in delivery hampered all students' right and ability to develop the life/work building competencies. While some schools provided more than adequate opportunities for students to develop these skills, many schools fell behind, sighting the rigors of the academic courses as an excuse to divest themselves of the responsibility of preparing youth for the world of work.

As a result of the extensive consultations and research during the graduation review in 2002, the new career development paradigm is reflected and embedded in the new requirements in a way that it is clear that career development education is for all students, not only those students enrolled in existing successful intensive career preparation programs.



For educators to fulfill the role of helping youth build the skills for the future, there needed to be a greater emphasis on the purposeful, intentional development and acquisition of the key skills as identified by Beck (1995), Bridges (1997), Toffler (1990), the NOICC, the SCANS report (1996) and the Conference of Canada (2001). These are embedded in the *Blueprint for Life/work Designs* (2001). With the graduation revisions and ministry restructuring of funding allocations for career preparation programs, career education in British Columbia has been impacted and is at a pivotal point.

### **Responding to the Challenge of Change**

The new flexibility of the way in which youth can achieve graduation and navigate their grade 10, 11 and 12 journey through access to dual credits, external courses, and school board approved credits is reflective of the changing career development paradigm. With the retooling of the k-9 CAPP curriculum and the introduction of Planning 10, Focus Areas and Portfolio's, school districts have an opportunity to reinvent and bring new meaning to career development education within their own systems. The opportunity to create connections for youth to future work and learning options and opportunities has been brought to the forefront. Districts can build on the past successes of "best practices" career programs and Career and Personal Planning courses to develop offerings more reflective of the significant changes in the way youth will navigate their personal life/work journey.

One of the main tools introduced to the BC Ministry of Education and being used by many school districts in British Columbia to redevelop and re-grow their career development education is the *Blueprint for Life/work Designs*. Used as a foundation document, the value of the *Blueprint* as a career education organizer is its unique attention to detail and the recognition of career management skill acquisition as a process or evolution from one level (age group) to another. It is a straightforward tool that helps to identify clear learning expectations and leads to lesson plans that demand a high level of engagement with clear outcomes. Educators in British Columbia have begun to evaluate their own career development education curriculum and programs using various components of the *Blueprint* in order to conduct needs analysis, determine the gaps in student learning and identify areas that need to be enhanced or expanded upon in order to meet the new requirements in the graduation document.

British Columbia school districts face the task of preserving the essence of what is excellent about their current career education programs and re-growing them in light of the new career management paradigm reflected in the new grade requirements. The districts that have kept career program

personnel in place are poised in an enviable position to be able to draw on their expertise to implement the new graduation requirements that speak so clearly of improved career management education for all students. For youth to rise to challenges facing them in light of the dramatic changes in the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, school districts have a responsibility to pay attention to and address how students will use, document and apply the work they do in school in a meaningful way to help students develop and move towards their preferred future.

What is needed is an increase in understanding of the shift in career education thinking, not only amongst counselors, parents, students and career teachers, but also amongst the community and the school system as a whole. Every teacher is intimately connected to the life/work journey of each and every student regardless of curricula area. Districts need programs and resources based on clear career management learning and performance outcomes. There is a need for a comprehensive accountability infrastructure for this proposed career management paradigm shift and the programs that are related to it. The *Blueprint for Life/work Designs* provides the foundation to address these concerns.

To effectively manage the changes required in the graduation review, Districts need to develop a common map or framework of career management skills to help identify the linkages, or overlaps, between programs, and to identify gaps in existing programs and services. Districts have been given the responsibility and challenge by the British Columbia Ministry of Education to reinvent career development education by building on the successes of the past and adapting to the challenges facing the youth of our province in the future.

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