

CAREER EDUCATION VIA PEER COUNSELING

An Action Model for Group Work

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Career education in the United States is characterized as a theme for all basic educational programs. The idea former US Commissioner of Education Sidney Marland pushed has helped to emphasize a point of view for vocational education that *education is preparation for work*. The world of work is tied to the belief that one is valued for one's contributions to the general welfare through a process called "career"—the business of at least being self-sustaining. Jobs are ranked from highest status (Supreme Court Justice) to lowest status (transient laborer) in the minds of most people. Therefore it is safe to assume the connection between one's job and the individual's feelings of self-worth. "I am as important to me as my job is to you," may closely approximate the attitude displayed toward self and to others' jobs. It seems to be so closely linked that students' aspiration levels reflect the stereotype each one has learned. The stereotype may dictate the careers they aspire to achieve. The influence is so complete that alternative career choices are not accepted as possible by most students. The conventional wisdom of the "impossible dream" reflects an attitude from deep within the social belief and value system that each person seems to acquire at an early age. In one way, the change we seek through career education is to overcome the erroneous effect that

particular conventional wisdom may have on a person's career planning.

Career education directly confronts the self-concept the person holds. It has been difficult to get minority, disadvantaged, and handicapped persons to aspire to higher-status jobs because of the self-concepts they hold. The self-concept brings out the person's value system. It goes something like this: "I can drive that truck, but I could not handle being in charge of other drivers." "I could never become a skilled craftsman." "I could run the parking lot." The bias is an expression of self-concept. Self-concept holds one back or pushes one ahead. Here is where Peer Counseling-Consulting Training (PCCT) is used. The results from PCCT show a marked change in aspiration levels and demonstrates an improvement of self-acceptance (self-concept). Self-esteem is another expression of self-concept, self-acceptance, and the valuing process one uses to express one's self-worth. The PCCT program has demonstrated an effective way to enhance students' self-view and the value of oneself to self and others.

Peer Counseling-Consulting Training

Self-development is the prime target in PCCT. Each person moves from trainee to trainer to supervisor to

consultant through the four phases of the training. In PCCT individuals learn self-awareness, interpersonal skills, counseling skills, and communication skills. *Self-awareness* is the result of experiencing oneself in a new context. *Interpersonal skills* result from direct practice with new ways to act and respond to others. Interpersonal skills also help one to know one's self. *Counseling skills* are the means for helping others; they help one to learn to be supportive to others. Interviewing skills are improved in counselor training. The use of referral resources and professional backup are emphasized. *Communication skills* help each person reach out to others with messages and meanings that match. Messages with meaning that do not match can be very misleading and sometimes upsetting. The content of the message (what is said) must confirm the feeling "I" get (the emotional message). Interpersonal skills also teach communication skills in that they help one to listen effectively to others and to ask non-threatening questions when relating to others.

The above skills are learned through the structured experiences found in the six PCCT manuals (Fullmer, 1978, pp. 201-480). Each manual is for a particular age-grade level. There are two PCCT manuals for school use, one for elementary

and one for secondary. The manual for peer-counseling skills is for all levels. There are manuals for peer counseling in conflict resolution, crisis intervention and child abuse; peer facilitation in values clarification; and family-group consultation. The five manuals, excluding "Family-Group Consultation," are vehicles for introducing career education to the school-age population. The manuals have been used with university graduates and undergraduate students.

Research results from four studies clearly show that career goals are changed as a result of PCCT. A fifth study currently underway will yield data on an intermediate school-age population. The expectation is that similar outcomes will be found.

Research Results from PCCT

The findings from the four completed studies show:

1. PCCT had a positive effect on self-concept. It raised self-esteem. There were statistically significant results between measures on "experimental" and "control" groups.
2. PCCT had a positive effect on becoming self-aware. This was based on measures of perceived behaviors toward others as measured on a 40-item scale of concrete behaviors identified in PCCT training. Results from pre- and post-testing of "experimental" and "control" groups of sixth-graders (not statistically significant) and tenth-graders (significant) show that the 40 behaviors on the scale became increasingly difficult as the students progressed, but were done more frequently. For many, the more difficult behaviors were new behaviors and therefore produced more stress.
3. PCCT had a positive effect on reducing the effects of racism when two or more racial and ethnic groups were trained together.
4. In classrooms where training (PCCT) was done, there was a significant positive change in attitude toward other students within the class.

5. PCCT helped to increase skill in talking about "my feelings." Students found the skill "really difficult," but reported doing it more often.
6. It was easier to make friends after the PCCT experience.
7. It was easier to feel comfortable in new situations after the PCCT experience.
8. After the PCCT experience, the trained person became more cautious and was less likely to help someone in a dangerous situation. Maybe life becomes sweeter after PCCT, or the individual more mature or less reckless.
9. From observation we know that PCCT can effect a change in the emotional climate of an entire high school. The PCCT student counselors were changed from adversaries to advocates within the school.
10. Students in the first PCCT group, a ninth-grade training group, graduated from high school in June 1979. Many of the students have gone on to college or into post-secondary education programs. When these same students started the PCCT program their aspiration levels did not include any consideration of continuing their education beyond high school. The initial survey of the beginning participants' future career goals showed a preponderance of day-labor type jobs. One year later, the same students were skipping the training sessions to attend classes so that their grades could improve enough to make successful admission to a college or other post-high school programs a possibility.
11. A sense of personal power or confidence in oneself was gained during the PCCT program. Youngsters who were ashamed to speak out in the beginning were able, following one year's training, to organize an auditorium filled with more than 150 4-H youths.
12. Attitudes changed from "I cannot do it" to "I would like to try." The change in the emotional climate that comes out of a change in attitudes can be very significant to developing career plans.

The mastery of one's environment is a lifelong career. The skills and knowledge gained through PCCT help students, in a sense, learn-how-to-learn about themselves and the environment (or, world of work).

Learning-how-to-learn is the process described by Gregory Bateson as *Deutera-learning* (Bateson, 1942). Learning-how-to-learn is one example of preparation for prevention of the usual blocking one encounters when one is faced with new and novel situations. The PCCT skills and knowledge are delivered through a training model that emphasizes skills for sharing, and the knowledge that one learns best what one attempts to teach. The model delivers a treatment because what is learned helps to prevent the repeating of past problems and prepares persons to handle existing and emerging problems.

Skill Development for Career Education

The concept of competence is a more acceptable criterion for measuring behavior in the individual than had been traditional concepts of "dis-ease," illness (pathology) or health (Racism, 1976; Fullmer, 1978). The new concept of competence in behavior provides a directly observable set of variables, i.e., the individual's behavior in a specific setting or situation. The focus is on the degree of health and strength the individual achieves in spontaneous personal behavior. The concept of competence, from the educational model, is more concrete than the traditional dis-ease, illness (health) concept of the medical model. The education model is a more positive, measurable (competent) model to use if one is to go beyond the criterion of zero symptoms or the simple lack of dis-ease used in the medical model. The absence of a disease ceiling is raised by the competence concept in the educational model. The competence criterion gives a goal that can be achieved by the healthy individual without placing a ceiling on the degree of competence or health (Carlson and Fullmer, 1977). The medical model lifts the responsibility and accountability from the individual

by the paternalism inherent in the role of the Doctor.

Skill development for career education is enhanced by PCCT when counselors and teachers use the educational model for encouraging growth and mental health. Mental health is enhanced through career development because of the close connection between a job and the student's identity. Personal worth is tied closely to what the student can contribute to the general social welfare. A job is the most common way one can experience these world-of-work phenomena.

What are the skills to be developed in career education? These skills are parallel to the skills developed in PCCT. The PCCT is concerned with self-development, self-awareness, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and counseling skills. The proposition presented here is that the above skills taken collectively are the same basic personal skills needed to achieve a competent career adjustment. Historically, general education has handled the affective domain of human development less adequately than the cognitive domain. The PCCT career education model handles the affective domain by developing those behavior skills needed to achieve levels of competence in job performance that will help to increase job satisfaction and personal success. Self-esteem is enhanced by the PCCT experience. Strengthening a persons' coping skills can improve career development processes. Some of these skills are values and attitudes toward oneself and others. A few examples are:

1. I can be counted on to do all types of work and to help someone else.
2. I can be proud of myself.
3. I have many friends.
4. I am happy most of the time.
5. I can wait patiently.
6. I keep working—even though others are bothering me.
7. I can laugh at myself.
8. I tell the truth most of the time.
9. I decide about things quickly.

10. My friends, teachers and parents can depend on me.
11. I stick up for my friends most of the time.
12. People believe in what I say and do.
13. I try my very best to do my work well.
14. I can work with others on projects without too much fussing or arguing.
15. I usually like what I am doing.
16. I do things without having to be told.
17. I am polite to others.
18. I persuade others to do what I want.
19. I work by myself with no one watching over me.
20. I arrive at places on time.
21. I am neat.
22. I return things that I borrow, such as pencils, books and sports equipment.
23. I return lost items which I have found to the "lost and found" box.
24. I would show a new student around the class and introduce him to the others.
25. I am willing to help another student with a difficult problem.
26. I can laugh with my friends when I make silly mistakes.

Additional skills are available from the PCCT manuals in the book by Fullmer (1978). A selected list sampling some of these skills follows:

1. I remember another person's name.
2. I encourage the other person by acknowledging his efforts.
3. I am aware of the meanings and signs in the non-verbal behavior of others.
4. I give positive feedback whenever the opportunity arises.
5. I am spontaneous in my behavior; if not, I know something is causing anxiety.
6. I am an active and sincere listener.
7. I am genuine whenever I am spontaneous.
8. I paraphrase others' statements to check out if I have heard what message they were sending to me.
9. I trust the other person to be true to himself.
10. I have learned the skills of timing and pacing of communication.

11. I am confident that I can recover from mistakes.
12. I have learned to play no-lose games instead of win-lose games in interpersonal interaction.
13. I have confidence in my competence because if I need help, I can let others contribute, too.
14. I like myself, so others can like themselves, too.
15. I give others a chance to contribute.

Career Education: An Application

Career education via the PCCT action model for group work is a recent innovation. The purpose for career education is to achieve a marketable skill for each student. More importantly, the use of an action model for training in interpersonal skills can meet the affective and human factors portion of the marketable skill outcome. Outcomes are the central focus for PCCT when applied to the concept of career education. A hands-on process is provided in training others by using videotape for instant reruns and focused feedback.

Topics are selected by the counselor(s) and teacher(s) to suit the subject matter in the curriculum module or unit currently scheduled for the students. For example, in the English class, PCCT could emphasize the significance of speaking and writing in the job-search process. Students role-play the job application to the prospective employer, then set up an interview and conduct it for a videotaped session. Each student can take turns in the multiple roles of applicant, employer, supervisor, peer worker, friend, etc. Realism is added by keeping the initial tapes for viewing opposite each subsequent tape until the desired level of sophistication is reached. The skills acquired by the student are a continuing talent for future use.

The value of work is a concept that lends itself to PCCT because the diversity of situational role-plays are numerous. Let's imagine a sudden tropical storm hitting Hawaii. Have the students select specific situations

to role-play. Use impromptu improvisations so no elaborate script or set is required. Then take happenings like wind and flooding and have the students react to an electrical power failure. Go into what they think is required to turn-on the electrical power and restore normal service. Then, role-play their thoughts. Debrief them later on the value, to each person, of that lineman who handles "hot wires" in the windy and wet environment so the rest of us can enjoy the convenience of electricity. You can do the same for the health professions, service workers, food producers and processors, etc. The drama-and-participation experience will focus on the contribution of the worker to the general welfare. Valuing work with a realistic orientation is important because mass media tends to glamorize certain jobs and stereotype workers in general. Self-esteem is enhanced by direct participation when success is assured; in role-playing there is no way to fail. Whatever the student does is accepted as his current level of functioning. He can improve and usually does on the very next effort.

The excitement of learning and contributing generates a high level of energy which helps to create an environment for enjoyment as well as enlightenment. Some students may be reluctant to participate initially. They are given time to observe the process until they feel assured enough to risk themselves. Forced participation is not recommended because of the anti-model potential so frequently triggered in teaching. For example, in reading, some students learn not to read from the same method that teaches others to read. Such a phenomenon can be avoided by careful attention to the timing and pacing process. This is important when first exposing students to experiencing themselves as they do in PCCT.

Motivation is affected by PCCT. The evidence has come from the data in each of the studies completed to date. Motivation, e.g., to get better grades and to learn about new careers, follows the improved self-concept the student develops. Both job and identity are closely aligned in the American cultural valuing process. "I am what I am when I do what counts or contributes," is still largely true in our experience with PCCT.

Summary

To meet the goals of Career education, counselors, teachers and administrators can enhance the skill development in each student through a planned program of self-development provided through the PCCT action model of group work. Research results support the ideas set forth in this paper, especially in the areas of improving interpersonal skills and self-concept.

Career education proposes that each student graduate from high school with at least one set of marketable skills. A job that will permit the student successful entry into the world of work is the companion goal. If the economy can provide the job, the school needs to provide the worker. Career development begins with preparation for work. Preparation for work requires interpersonal skills and a robust self-concept. A career is an identity. Identity is a substantive part of good mental health. These variables are enhanced through a program of PCCT.

The criterion for human behavior used in PCCT is competence. The competence concept is one that permits positive growth toward increasing levels of health rather than the zero symptom criterion of health in the traditional medical model. The PCCT competence criterion is developed through the many personal behavior skills learned in the program. The education model is superior to traditional health

models for providing both the environment and the goals to achieve growth, development and competence. Values and attitudes change the level of motivation observed in the participants.

Career education is given a stronger launching pad when PCCT is used to enhance skills. Job, career, personal satisfaction, self-concept, and self-esteem all seem to be contributing to the overall development of students, teachers and counselors. In the world of work it helps to have learned how to learn.

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