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When should you teach kids about careers?

LINDA WHITE

Many high school students are working summer jobs and have given some thought to post-secondary programs that will serve as a foundation for their future careers. But is enough being done to help elementary school students plan for their future careers?

A new research report from Toronto-based career charitable organization CERIC, entitled *Exploring Possibilities! Journeying Through Career-Related Learning in Grades 4-6, A Teaching Toolkit* makes the case that career education and development needs to start in the early years so kids can build confidence and effective decision-making skills that can help lead to successful and fulfilling work lives.

"The seeds are sown very early on in helping young children think about their hopes and dreams," says Lorraine Godden, teacher, educational researcher and co-author of the report. "However, we know that children's understanding of the world can be narrowly defined, which can limit aspiration and opportunity, resulting in a lifetime of restricted choices and disadvantage."

CARRY ATTITUDES

If a child has an early understanding that they're not very good at math, for example, they tend to carry that attitude with them through future grades. "This might impact the type of math courses they take in high school and subsequently rule out certain post-secondary education options," Godden says. "Consequently, children may rule out certain hopes and ambitions."

Eighty per cent of parents surveyed for the report believe it's appropriate for Grade 5 students to be thinking about their future careers, yet just 28 per cent say their child tells them about interesting jobs or careers they've learned about at school.

Researchers conducted a survey of Grades 4 to 6 students from across the country, asking them what 'career' means to them. "Approximately two-thirds of them said 'a job' or something employment related," Godden says.

"When talking about particular jobs, they mostly identified very visible jobs, such as teacher, firefighter and police officer. Interestingly, more than half of the students linked some kind of technology or technological role to their knowledge of jobs, for example computer programmer or YouTuber."

TEACHER TOOLKIT

The report is designed to help teachers understand that career includes learning, life and work. "The toolkit reassures teachers that no one expects them to take on the role of career development practitioner or career counsellor; that no one is asking teachers to instruct students about jobs or that teachers should be helping students to get jobs," says Godden.

Instead, the toolkit (which is available as a free pdf download at www.ceric.ca/possibilities) shows teachers how the work they're already doing supports their students' career journeys and highlights research-based evidence that points to what effective career-related learning is and offers practical and free activities they can use in their classrooms.

Career development can help students discover their passions and aspirations while also challenging biases that might limit their exploration. "In the elementary school context, engaging in career conversations helps our young learners to begin the process of investigating themselves, find out more about their interests and aptitudes, and consider what type of life they feel they might want to lead," she says.



Teacher and educational researcher Lorraine Godden. SUPPLIED

That means thinking about questions such as the following:

- What do I like to do most?
- What do I think I am good at?
- What makes me happy?
- How can I best help others?

Common biases might be that some working roles, such as nursing, are gender specific, or that all engineers build bridges and roads. "Other biases might be around the cost and availability of further or higher education, or that skilled trades are for students who do not like academics, when in reality most skilled trades require good grades and a high level of skill."

Though career exploration isn't about giving business and industry influence in the classroom, each can provide "valuable insights" into how skills and knowledge are applied in real-life contexts.

"This helps teachers understand how the foundational skills that they are teaching are valued later on in life and how they are used in workplaces," Godden says. "In addition, when teachers build relationships with business and industry, outcomes can include innovative opportunities for children to learn more about work, especially the work that happens in their communities."

Talking to kids about careers

There are numerous ways to start a conversation about careers with kids, says teacher and educational researcher Lorraine Godden. Consider her tips:

- Begin with conversations you feel comfortable with and make use of your local environment and community. Consider asking questions such as, 'What types of things do you think I have to do while I am at work?' and 'What types of things do you think people who work in that store do?'
- Centre conversations on the value various people bring to local communities through the work they do, such as repairing roads and cleaning the local park.
- Discuss the differences between jobs, work activities and skills.

Economy sees 'modest' growth

LINDA WHITE

The Canadian economy grew by a "modest" two per cent in this year's second quarter on the heels of 1.7-per cent growth in the first quarter, the Canadian Federation of Business's (CFIB) latest Main Street Quarterly report finds.

"The decent growth in the economy in the first half of 2024 correlates with a recent uptick in long-term business optimism," says CFIB's chief economist and vice-president of research Simon Gaudreault.

"While encouraging, it doesn't mean that all is well for small businesses. They're still grappling with steep cost increases on all fronts, including wage pressures, significant energy and fuel costs, and high interest rates."

General uncertainty and various cost pressures are affecting the ability of small business to invest, he notes. The CFIB says the third quarter should continue growing at about the same pace as long as inflation remains under control and the central bank continues cutting rates.

Agri-food research

The provincial government is investing \$7.2 million in 44 Ontario-led research and innovation projects that it says are helping farmers and agribusinesses become more competitive.

Funded projects focus on protecting animal and plant health, strengthening production systems, increasing environmental sustainability and bolstering productivity and growth. Project examples include developing plastic alternatives to provide environmental solutions that reduce reliance on single-use plastic products and developing a harvesting robot for tomato greenhouses.

The investment is being made through the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the province, University of Guelph, and Agricultural Research and Innovation Ontario.