

Engaging Youth in Their Careers

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Abstract

This paper describes the steps in designing a career literacy project where students are active agents in their career planning. It aims to inculcate career management as a staying power strategy and to foster a commitment to vocational awareness and proactive career management for life. The project is intended for implementation in an inner-city high school that is characterized by its openness to increase awareness among young adults of the need to plan a career path and instil an overall habit of career and life management. An array of linked learning tasks following principles of career literacy learning unfold and include creating career visions, generating career goals, and designing education-career portfolios. By drawing on young adults' interests and values, their investment in their career development, and research-informed approaches to career coaching and counselling, *Iterative Project – Question, Reflect, Reassess (IP-QR²)* sets the stage for a deeper exploration into how young adults can make career and or educational choices that support the successful transition to life after high school.

Engaging young people in their careers begins with self and

career understanding. Opportunities to reflect on everyday thoughts, personal traits, and career options and to explore vocational and occupational experiences anchor students' understanding of career development. Options that resonate with the young career explorers by being relevant to their traits make connecting to career choice easier and hold the potential for increasing vocation discovery and commitment to chosen path and goals. Mediated by an environment of *caring adults* – including teachers and school career counselors with support from parents and external mentors when possible - trait and career exploration, instruction, experiential learning, and task design must reflect the educational intent and culminate in a product that demonstrates growth as well as self and career awareness development. For *Iterative Project - Question, Reflect, Reassess (IP-QR²)* this production is an education-career portfolio (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005) that the student is supported to organize by the caring adults.

Project Design

The choice of *Iterative Project – Question, Reflect, Reassess (IP-QR²)* fulfills and over-achieves the educational goal. The word *iterative* is intentional as it correlates with a necessary and

continuous willingness to undergo career development and embrace adaptability (Peila-Shuster, Carlson, & Huff, 2019); upgrade skills; learn new technology; or review educational/career vision based on personal, professional, or environmental variables. The arrows in Figure 1 highlight this iterative nature. The need for continuity is reflected by the word *project* implying a learning outcome that is bigger than one task. The three stages of *question, reflect, and reassess* signify the importance of each step and will be detailed next.

Question

The first stage facilitates the designing of students' BEAVI (Beliefs, experiences, abilities, values, interests), an acronym chosen to facilitate reflection on values. Caring adults support students in this stage to discover what motivates them to act. IP-QR² provides a simple self-assessment chart - *Discover your BEAVI*, that facilitates finding each students' BEAVI. BEAVI is an acronym for:

- B - Beliefs
- E - Experiences
- A - Abilities/Skills
- V - Values
- I - Interests

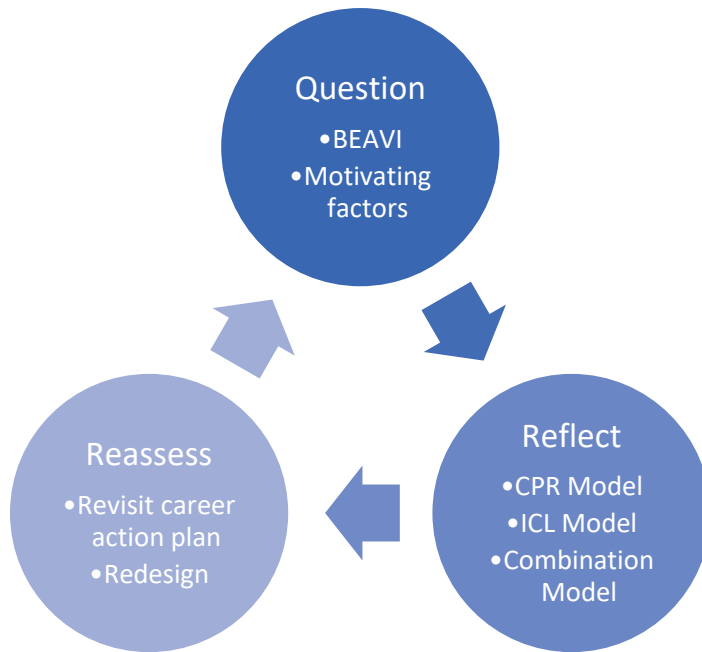


Figure 1: The Iterative Nature of IP-QR²

Students proceed to unravel the value of these five factors through powerful questioning that raises awareness, stimulates reflection, and provides in-depth insight into students' values. A *Discover your BEAVI* result underscores each student's unique values. It also provides caring adults the opportunity to discern which of the three models to utilize based on students' preferences and personalities (e.g. structured or not structured tasks) when completing *Discover your BEAVI: CPR, ICL, or CM*.

Reflect

This stage involves reflection to generate (initial reflection) and to maintain (iterative reflection) a multipurpose education-ca-

reer portfolio. Future use of the portfolio will vary depending on students' career aspirations. A portfolio should include a resume, BEAVI results, reflection on experiences as well as daily, weekly, monthly, and or annual accomplishments, awards, or recognitions. Information in the portfolio will facilitate academic/career decisions, goal setting, and resume creation. It will also expedite preparation for interviews, performance reviews, and reference requests.

Each student's characteristics are unique and every student comes with distinctive backgrounds and life experiences. IP-QR² approach proposes two models for the caring adults who take on this project to utilize based on their understanding of their

students' characteristics and experiences. They are: (a) CPR Model - Create, Process, Reflect and (b) ICL Model - Informed Career Literacy. It is important to note that flexibility to use both models can be a third option and is detailed as (c) CM - Combination Model. CM is to be utilized at the discretion of the caring adults mediating the project and is dependent on individual students' needs. Whichever model is chosen, the involvement of parents and external mentors is important in building on what is happening in school.

CPR Model (Create, Process, Reflect)

Emphasis is on open student-initiated exploration using the three steps of the CPR Model. It is the preferred model for individual sessions and is intended to address the distinctive needs of each student. The focus is on scaffolding students to use the newfound knowledge of BEAVI along with prior educational and career experiences to create their education-career portfolio and launch their experiential learning. The responsibility is put in the hands of the students while providing them with the support, questions, skills, and basics on how to create and maintain a successful career journey. CPR Model focuses on skills and practices that enable lifelong career story creation, experience processing, BEAVI evaluation, and iterative reflection.

CPR acknowledges students' voice as central to the creation of the education-career

portfolio. While the inputs of caring adults are crucial, students are encouraged to take charge of their portfolio. They decide what they will include in it, how they will create it, and how they will utilize it in the future.

Create. The caring adult's role is to ensure that students are supported to reach the career goals they set for themselves, remain accountable, explore vocations, and understand what it takes to be successful in a particular field. Questions to ask should provide value and a basis to create a career plan. They can include:

- What is your dream?
- How will you know that you have reached your dream?
- What will you see when you accomplish your dream?
- How will you feel once you have accomplished your dream?
- What will you hear?

Process. Tasks are student-centred and aim to develop and enrich career management with the creation of a resume and an education-career portfolio. Example tasks are:

- Think of three stories of personal relevant experiences - Write them down
- Process what is special about these experiences – Detail their value to you
- Connect these experiences to your BEAVI
- Create a resume
- Collect your findings in a

portfolio (online or hard copy) ensuring that you include your resume, BEAVI results, your dream-based career plan, your valuable experiences and or any other student added findings (awards, certificates...)

Reflect. Once the resume and portfolio are ready, it is time to start the reflection stage. This stage includes:

- Create a future resume based on the information in the portfolio
- Reflect on possible experiential learning opportunities or career scenarios
- Add BEAVI or experiences necessary to work towards chosen paths
- Change or delete any BEAVI or experiences that lost their appeal
- Create an action plan - experiential learning or employment opportunities

ICL Model (Informed Career Literacy Model)

The ICL Model features an alternative caring adult-facilitated, yet student-centred and structured model. ICL is a six-step model that is task-based. This model is consistent with the CPR Model. However, its step by step format is meant for students who may need guidance to initiate reflection and build on the knowledge discovered in stage 1. Due to its structured approach, it is also the preferred model for group sessions particularly in settings with 10 or more

students where providing individual support is not feasible.

1. Career Self-Assessment – Develop your BEAVI

- Recognise value of self-reflection for career success
- Identify ways to self-assess
- Develop approaches to regularly review personal characteristics

2. Career Vision Statement

- Design dream jobs, ideal lifestyles, and aspired futures
- Reflect on experiential learning or occupational opportunities that fit with vision
- Build awareness that while a career vision may not seem possible, the purpose is to reach for the moon and that the vision will change with more knowledge

3. Career SMART Goal Planner

- Clarify regular habits that support goal achievement whether to finish a school project or move toward a dream career
- Use career S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely) criteria as a launch for goal setting
- Understand value of short, mid, and long-term goals

4. Career Goals

- Identify three time-sensitive career goals
- Pinpoint strategies for creating

- career-focused goals
- Clarify the meaning and value of career goal management

5. Career Objectives

- Clarify the difference between goals and objectives: the steps or actions that bring goals to fruition
- Learn value of detailing steps/actions to determining objectives
- Practice objectives design and management

6. Education-Career Portfolio

- Determine what to include in an education-career portfolio
- Create a career action plan - experiential learning or employment opportunities
- Have the knowledge and tools to regularly update education-career portfolio

Combination Model (CM). The combination model is to be used at the discretion of the caring adults mediating the project. If the student starts with CPR and the adult feels there is lack of focus or direction, then the ICM Model can be used to continue the journey of career action plan creation. Conversely, a switch to a more student directed exploration should always be an option. It is key to remember that every student is unique and their needs will change depending on what is going on in their lives: personal, academic, professional, financial, and or physical. The caring adult is guided by students' actions to

determine which model to use. The focus is on developing an education-career portfolio that leads to creating a viable career action plan, one that the student is comfortable to follow. The goal is to provide students with the skills needed to reassess and maintain career management for life.

It is important to note that all three models aim to teach students to take responsibility for their own personal, academic, and professional growth.

Reassess

This stage is about reassessing discovered values to redesign and revisit the career action plan. This is the iterative reflection stage. Once the action plan is created, stage 3 is the checking-in stage. The caring adults' role is to guide students to clue in on their thoughts, emotions, and goals. This is a stage of reflection that reawakens and reinforces awareness of the career action plan and ensures continued commitment to goals and to career management. The need to revisit or change the plan may result from:

- Lack of commitment to plan (short term goals not followed or were hard to follow)
- Modified BEAVI
- New experiences taking centre stage
- Life changes (personal, academic, professional, financial, physical)
- Other

Caring adults may need to help students to reassess and revisit what needs to be changed and how the change affects the career action plan. However, the adults may count on the student to already know what needs to be reassessed, and their role becomes that of mentors who listen, confirm, and boost commitment to the revisited plan. This third stage is what career management is all about.

Learning Tasks: Some Illustrative Samples

In this section, samples of the learning tasks are shared to give a sense of how the stages of IP-QR² flow. The intention is to underscore the flexibility within the tasks where even though they may seem structured in nature, they can be modified to be student-directed. Tasks are meant to engage students in building critical career literacy awareness by fulfilling the final goal of this project - a personal education-career portfolio.

One of the first tasks in any career management lesson involves exploring BEAVI traits. Reflecting on their beliefs, experiences, abilities/skills, values, and interests initiates the students' path to self-realization. Prior discussions along with opportunities to ask questions provide scaffolding for this task. The flexibility in the *Discover your BEAVI* task emphasizes its value in the reflection stage. The instructions are deliberately left open-ended and allow students to choose between filling

a chart or creating their own BEA-VI version in any format or media they choose.

What happens in CPR will be mostly student-initiated with the caring adult's role becoming that of a facilitator guiding towards experiential learning opportunities for further self-realization, growth experiences, goal direction, and collecting data for the final education-career portfolio project. Recall the availability of CM as a model to call on should the caring adults sense a need for guidance. As mentioned earlier, ICL's tasks are structured and encourage reflection through tasks.

Additionally, ICL invites students to draw on their dreams, lifestyle ambitions, or future visions to complete the *Individual Career Vision Statement*. The open-endedness of what appears to be a structured task is emphasized and provides students with questions to ponder when needed. The purpose is reflection that launches a path towards selecting intentional growth exploratory experiences created and set in the *Career SMART Goal Planner* task. This task encourages creation of goals that are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely).

A more detailed *Career Goals* task that requires the creation of three time-sensitive goals further builds on the vision statement. It also familiarises students with the various steps in setting SMART goals. Discussion of the importance of goal planning precedes completing this task and should include: value of three-goal creation, significance of short,

mid, and long-term goals, and finally, flexibility of these chosen goals. Involving parents in their children's goals needs to be underscored since they are the main influencers in academic and career choices (Graham, 2020).

The *Career Goals* task leads to the *Career Objectives* task. The purpose of the *Career Objectives* task is to prompt students to define the actual actions that they need to take to fulfill their chosen goals. A role model's experience should be provided as a scaffold and a point for instructional discussion along with incidental embedding of necessary information gathering, skill development, knowledge building, and persistent actions that make career goals a reality. Students are then invited to use these discussions to identify the links between their career goals and objectives.

Here again, instructions in *Career Objectives* are open-ended since every student is different. Questions are provided as prompts to identify steps or actions needed for students to fulfill one of their goals. Questions can include:

- Which skills do you need to develop to reach your goal?
- Reflect on the knowledge you need, what do you need to know to accomplish your goal?
- What is the one thing that you can do on a daily basis to help you fulfill your goal?

The literature on career literacy highlights the role of increased awareness of education-career planning in enhancing

the rate of future success. Questions in the *Career Objectives* task build on this literature by initiating objectives' planning that leads to exploration of possible growth educational and vocational experiences.

The ultimate goal of the tasks is the creation of the education-career portfolio. Initial discussions revolve around the value of creating and maintaining a portfolio. Working collaboratively, caring adults and students reflect on what to include in the portfolio. Parents involvement is also crucial at this stage. From resume to personal accolades, the purpose is to help students see value in the life they have lived and gather enough information to identify purposeful and meaningful experiential learning and vocational opportunities.

Caring adults are the facilitators of this journey. Their role is to scaffold the transition from inspiring self-realization, encouraging growth experiences, to identifying goals-direction. As mentioned earlier, involving parents is important since they are key influencers in students' choices. Parents' input in this journey is vital and needs to be encouraged by the caring adults. Effective collaboration between parents and caring adults increases students' awareness of possible growth experiences and career opportunities.

Finally, caring adults have the flexibility to use freely available resources that they feel may aid students in this journey. For example, a caring adult can suggest the use of additional self-assessment tools, such as the VIA

Survey (VIA Institute on Character, n.d.) to support students who feel using only one test may not be enough. Other resources may include websites that focus on career education and exploration such as, O*Net Online (National Center for O*NET Development, 2020) and Alis (Government of Alberta, n.d.), that may be useful for information gathering. Recall the significance of students' IP-QR² journey and the use of these resources is to facilitate students' self-realization, growth experiences, and education or career goal direction.

It is important to note that students need to embrace these tasks and make them their own. Throughout their reflection on the three domains of self-realization, growth experiences and goal direction, the aim is to assemble an education-career portfolio as a final project. The purpose of this project is to create a reference framework for students that facilitates education-career management.

Conclusion

Engaging students in career planning involves making personal connections to career goals that are determined by the educational and non-educational exploratory experiences. This can be achieved by identifying and reflecting on key experiences that are personally and occupationally relevant. The growth experiences within and outside of IP-QR² aim to enhance students' ability to take responsibility for their personal, academic, and professional

development for life. Through the structured design of IP-QR², an education-career portfolio of experiences is collected and organized.

IP-QR² provides the basic design for a school career project; moreover, it aims to inculcate career management as a lifetime technique and to foster a commitment to career awareness and career management for life. The project is intended for implementation in an inner-city junior high or high school that is characterized by its openness to increase awareness among young adults of the need to plan a career path, to utilize experiential learning opportunities, and to develop a habit of education and career management. A preparation for such project takes time to locate and develop a community of caring adults - teachers, school career counselors, school administrators, parents, and external mentors - that supports the undertaking of this project.

With the support and unified vision of caring adults, career projects can keep students and their learning needs at the centre and achieve the goal of inculcating career management. To the extent we can involve students in the education-career plan and engage them in purposeful and experiential work, they will take charge of their plans and remain invested in their future.

Reference

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