



**Career and Life Management: A Research Brief  
for Practitioners  
By Lydia Pungar  
University of Alberta**

**Introduction**

In examining the literature related to Career and Life Management (CALM) it becomes clear that the scope of the subject matter covered is wide and varied. The essential purposes of CALM as outlined by the Program of Studies (Alberta Learning, 2002) are principally to further life skills through an appreciation of personal decision making in all aspects of life, both in the present and for the future, while demonstrating respect and understanding for others. Several important topics for consideration are manifested. These include: (1) managing personal health issues – physical as well as mental; (2) financial planning and responsibility; and (3) career planning and guidance.

CALM requires the integration of multiple disciplines and resources in order to meet these outcomes. Because CALM covers such a breadth of material, much of it highly subjective in nature, the CALM educator must bring a holistic, integrated approach towards the subject matter. The pedagogical questions that arise include:

1. How best to approach the issues of career guidance and promoting self-awareness in making life choices;
2. What resources will best promote the aims and goals of the curriculum; and
3. How best to identify the areas of major health concerns for today's youth and address these effectively and sensitively.

**What The Research Says**

The Alberta Learning CALM Program of Studies (Alberta Learning, 2002) states that CALM is the core competency for high school health literacy. As previously stated, health in this context includes a diversity of topics. The program of study notes that CALM is directed towards teaching students critical thinking, personal and social responsibility, and effective communication. Taken together, the skills are designed to ensure that the student develops a sense of personal well being, and a solid core of self-knowledge.

***Other Career & Life Management Models***

Many other jurisdictions in Canada and the United States also present curricula models that attempt to address similar objectives. Saskatchewan's Evergreen curriculum, for example, contains two core classes, Life Transitions 20 and 30, which fit into the Career and Life Management archetype (Saskatchewan Education, 1996). Included in the 18 modules that make up these two classes are subjects such as personal self-knowledge, time management, relationships, and career self-knowledge. As in Alberta's CALM curriculum, the stress is placed on students' abilities to live healthy, integrated lives. Five goals are outlined in this curriculum: (1) cultivating a positive self-image; (2) acquiring the skills to deal with change; (3) developing skills to have a sense of independence; (4) applying skills to allow students to take active control of their lives; and (5) creating and reflecting on goals that will integrate them into valuable and contributing members of society.

In Ontario, the guidance and career program includes a career studies component at the Grade 10 level (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999). Once again, the focus is on developing self-awareness and effective learning that will allow students to become self-motivated, critical thinkers in the fast changing world they will face upon graduation. Taking responsibility for one's own life and gaining self-knowledge are the critical elements of the curriculum. Expectations are that students will: (1) learn educational strategies for success in school; (2) identify personal interests, skills, and goals; (3) develop their personal management style and consider how best to implement their identified strategies in a variety of school, community and home settings; and (4) acquire and utilize interpersonal skills.

In the United States there is also prevalence in the high school curricula of career and life management courses. For example, New Jersey has incorporated a Career Education and Consumer, Family, and Life Skills component within its core curriculum (New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.). Once again at the heart of the concept is the development of critical thinking skills and self-knowledge to allow students to become effective and positive contributors to society.

### *Listening When Students Identify Their Needs*

Students appear aware of the importance of such life skills education. As Hiebert (2002) notes, considerable research supports the importance of life management education for students. Many students themselves have stressed life skills training as the most important issue for schools to address. Understanding the importance of career and life management education for students, educators must ask themselves how best to implement such education in order to best meet the needs of their students.

Hiebert (2002) makes the case for addressing the "whole person" needs of the student. Research has shown that by addressing such needs, schools experience lower dropout rates, improved student behaviour and attitude, and a healthier school environment. However, Hiebert argues that it is important to listen to what students are saying when designing programs that attempt to move beyond the academics and toward a holistic approach. Students' perceptions differ from those of adults, and must be taken into account. Research demonstrates that students are much more proactive than they have often been given credit for, and tend to emphasize solutions and skills. By contrast, adults tend to put the focus on problems and are more reactive. Programs should be inclined towards mentoring a sense of responsibility and an ability to seek out alternatives, choices, and opportunities. A whole student approach depends on listening to students' needs and concerns, and implementing a program that addresses the physical, mental, social, and personal well being of the student. Developing a sense of personal worth and a belief in one's decision making skills creates a more positive outlook that affects not only students' immediate academic results, but effectively prepares them for post-school transitions into higher education or the workforce. Essentially, such whole student approaches create a sense of empowerment that is reflected in more positive career and lifestyle choices.

### *Career Planning for a New World of Work*

This understanding of student needs is vital in career guidance and development. Magnusson & Bernes' (2002) study of Southern Alberta students' career planning perceptions and needs emphasizes the difference between students and adult educators as to what is important. In seeking out career information, students are most concerned with identifying what suits and interests them. The results of the study demonstrate that for high school students the most pressing need was related to finding their "passion." Second was finding out about their interests and abilities. Teachers pre-occupied with the more practical questions of vocation may miss that for young people, career aspirations represent another facet or developmental task of forming self-identity. Information about post-secondary education and related

financial information were ranked third by students, planning information fourth, and last was support for their career plans.

An appreciation for the different perceptions of career development between students and adults is important to ensuring that the proper intervention and resources are made available. Magnusson and Bernes (2002) identified a lack of interest and engagement with existing resources on the part of many students. For example, the CALM curriculum was viewed as helpful by only 33 percent of the students surveyed. Of crucial concern was the lack of trust that students placed in school guidance counseling services. Overall the study indicated the importance of greater needs analysis through student participation in needs assessments and evaluations of programs and services.

Attempts to meet students' career planning and life skills needs have been varied. School-to-work transition programs are one instance. In Ontario, for example, school boards have been mandated to provide support for students preparing for transition into the workforce after graduation (Locatelli, 2000). Such transition programs are designed to allow students to gain the necessary employability skills for entrance into the workforce.

A fast growing model for supplying students with the requisite information for making informed career choices is the "career game" (Jarvis, 2004), which allows students to gain an appreciation for the rapidly changing circumstances of the work world through simulating real world roles and scenarios. The basis for the development of this tool and others like it is the growing recognition of fundamental shifts in the dynamics of the labour market. Traditional vocational guidance models are outdated, hearkening back to an era when individuals could expect to spend their entire working lives in one career. This linear model calls for students, through assistance from teachers and counselors, to make long term career choices before graduation and carry this plan through from graduation, career and, ultimately, retirement. Essentially, it follows this pattern:

1. Examine one's interests, aptitudes, and abilities.
2. Study the work environment.
3. Attempt to determine which occupation best suits the student.
4. Create a plan that will meet the selected occupation's requisites.
5. Graduate, find employment in the chosen occupation, succeed and "climb the ladder."
6. Enjoy a well-earned retirement.

However, the labour market has been rapidly changing, and new models have to be developed that meet the needs of this changing environment. The emerging career management models attempt to equip students with the tools necessary to allow them to make informed choices, become self-reliant, and be able to adapt successfully in a constantly changing work world.

This need for adaptability and flexibility is acknowledged by St. John-Brooks' (1996) article written for the OECD. It recognizes that career guidance is of vital importance in meeting the needs of the labour market. But there is also a lack of appreciation for this importance amongst policy makers and planners. Although cooperation between schools and employers has increased, there is a lack of focus and direction.

Career guidance, in essence, should be based not on simply choosing narrow career options but on career development whereby the student learns to equip him or herself with the tools necessary for formulating informed career choices and learning to deal with the changes and the stresses of today's workplace. Students should be encouraged to explore their distinct interests and passions, and to become familiar

with translating these into realistic choices and alternatives. Chen (2001) maintains that career counseling must be based broadly on life experiences. Therefore, guidance must be comprehensive, including social counseling and personal growth emphases. Career guidance must aim at providing students with the ability to live healthy, socially conscious, and empowered lives, and not simply be viewed as a means to a single career “end.”

### ***Health Education***

A whole student approach to career and life management must view health education as a vital component of equipping students for “real life” situations, and ensuring their longer-term well-being. Health educators must become aware of students’ concerns and needs. Regrettably, few teachers appear prepared to properly administer such a health curriculum (Summerfield, 2001).

Studies have been conducted to analyze the necessary components of successful health education (Brooks et al., 2001). The authors conducted surveys of identified master health teachers to attempt to understand what the most important components in school health education are. The results indicate that amongst the most significant factors in successful school based health education and literacy are: (1) the use of a variety of teaching methodologies and strategies; (2) working closely and in harmony with parents; (3) having strong knowledge of health content; and (4) partnering with external agencies and organizations. These findings have implications for the preparation of educators in the field of health literacy. As a subject, health should not be treated lightly, but must be viewed holistically and with serious preparation and understanding. Collaboration with other organizations or institutions to further the aims of the health curriculum must be embraced. The end result can be decisive in promoting good physical and psychological health amongst students and by extension, to society in general (Summerfield, 1992).

### **Key Findings**

1. Students should be involved in planning and implementation in order for career and life management education to truly reflect their needs and concerns. The approach should be whole student centered, meeting career, health, social, and community development needs.
2. Career guidance should be reflective of the new labour market. It should provide students with the skills necessary to make informed career choices that reflect their inner beliefs and interests. Business, community, and parents all have an important role to play in preparing students for the transition from school to post graduation education or work, and need to be enrolled in career development education.
3. Career guidance models should be based on adapting to shifting labour market trends. They should be proactive rather than reactive and not based on outmoded paradigms of work. Flexibility and recurrent choices should be stressed. Models should be geared towards providing students with the necessary tools (i.e. critical thinking and research skills) that facilitate informed decision-making.
4. Career guidance should empower students to move beyond mere occupational choice toward a more inclusive vision of a fulfilling personal and social life, upon graduation, and continuing into the future.
5. Health educators as well as career educators must be properly prepared. Professional development must be improved and ongoing. Collaborative models should be utilized, involving community agencies and parents, and promoting a variety of teaching methods.

6. School health literacy, if properly implemented, can play a decisive role in improving students' health and lifestyle choices.

### Suggestions for Teachers

1. The Career and Life Management Guide to Implementation has excellent suggestions for consideration when teaching CALM. It is available on line at [www.education.gov.ab.ca](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca)

### Additional Readings for AISI Coordinators and Teachers

#### **ERIC Resources**

Alberta Learning (2002). *Career and life management for senior high school: guide to implementation*. Edmonton: Author. ERIC Document No. ED470562.

A guide designed to help teachers in the implementation of the program of studies for CALM.

Designed to assist students in three areas: (1) personal choices; (2) resource choices; and (3) career and life choices. CALM is the required health literacy component in Alberta high schools.

Brown, B. L. (1996). *Community involvement in K-12 career education*. ERIC Digest No. 177. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. ERIC Document No. ED402473.

Provides a rationale for community/school partnerships in career education. Discusses business collaborative models, community agencies, and parent involvement and assistance in guidance. Maintains that involvement must include selecting the right people, outlining a vision and plan, and focusing on performance.

Brown, B. L. (2002). *Professional development for career educators*. ERIC Digest. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. ERIC Document No. ED472602

Argues that career educators must understand a wide variety of factors including: (1) career development theory; (2) teacher/learning strategies; (3) school to work transition; (4) school/business connections; and (5) technology and its use in career development. Career development is a continuously evolving process and educators must undergo a process of continuous education to keep up to date. Discusses implications for professional development in order to meet these ends.

Brown, B. L. (1999). *Self-efficacy beliefs and career development*. ERIC Digest No. 205. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. ERIC Document No. ED429187.

Discusses the importance of self-efficacy and the variables involved in influencing self-efficacy.

Describes strategies for raising self-efficacy amongst students: (1) contextual learning; (2) problem-based learning; and (3) community-based learning. These strategies are allied with occupational goals and interests and rendered into action through positive mentoring.

Cairns, K. (1995). *Using simulations to enhance career education*. ERIC Digest. Greensboro, NC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services. ERIC Document No. ED404583.

Makes the case that mere factual information on career and occupational skills and knowledge is of limited value to students. Argues that experiential learning is of great value in preparing students for the workplace. Difficulties may arise over implementation of such learning but can be overcome through in-class simulation of workplace activities. Simulations, to be of value, must accurately portray workplace environments and the skills and characteristics that are necessary.

Gitterman, A. (1995). *Outcomes of school career development*. ERIC Digest. Greensboro, NC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services. ERIC Document No. ED401501.

Offers a new conception of career development education. Calls for clearly articulated goals that allow students to identify their own inner beliefs and values and how they relate to choice. Career education, it is argued, should be present throughout the curriculum from early grade school and must contain community involvement. Career education must be allied with academics and social skills learning. Student input must be paramount to allow for effective programming.

McIvor, B. & Hawkins, P. (2003). *Creative career and life management*. Global Realities: Celebrating Our Differences, Honoring Our Connections. ERIC Document No. ED480509.

Stresses that career counselors must practice what they preach. Examines utilizing life stories for role modeling and investigation. Marks the importance of working, learning, playing, and giving and the way they interact in personal lives in order to achieve a healthy balance.

Millar, G. (1995). *Helping schools with career infusion*. ERIC Digest. Greensboro, NC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services. ERIC Document No. ED401500.

Argues that the most effective method for career education is infusing the skills needed (research, critical thinking) into the curriculum in general. Contending that the goal is a smooth transition from school to post-secondary education or from school to the workforce, this paper provides ideas on how educators can best achieve this. Gives samples of activities and learning strategies. Examines the need for educators to receive proper and detailed professional development to meet the needs of their students.

Summerfield, L. (2001). *Preparing classroom teachers for delivering health instruction*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education. ERIC Document No. ED460128.

This paper looks at the knowledge base for school health teachers. Discusses the lack of preparation on the part of many teachers. Examines the factors that hinder teachers in their preparation and knowledge and provides solutions for this problem. Gives strategies and standards for teachers of health education.

Summerfield, L. (1995). *National standards for school health education*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education. ERIC Document No. ED387483.

Argues that one of the ways to combat societal health problems is with school-based health education designed to provide schools with ways to develop and evaluate standards for health education. Five major discussion points are presented: (1) research that demonstrates the importance of school health education in promoting healthier lifestyles amongst students; (2) standards for the promotion of school based health literacy; (3) curriculum content; (4) teaching methodology; and (5) influences on teacher education.

Summerfield, L. (1992). *Comprehensive school health education*. ERIC Digest. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education. ERIC Document No. ED351335.

Examines what form comprehensive school health education should take. Argues for its relevancy and importance, as well as for professional certification and preparation. Summerfield describes the factors that make up a comprehensive program: (1) provision of school health services; (2) healthy school environment; and (3) health instruction (from K-12). Summerfield further insists that there are particular elements such as community health, mental health, and personal health that must be included. Gives examples of strategies, teaching methodologies, evaluation, resources, and implementation.

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