The Transition From School to Work: A Developmental Perspective

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Career development theory provides a comprehensive model for conceptualizing the school-to-work transition. Since the 1920s, this model has guided the design of a plethora of career education methods and materials that orient, teach, coach, and rehearse students for the transition from school to work. The developmental model, methods, and materials aim to increase students' awareness of the choices to be made and the information and planning that bears on these choices.

The editors of this special issue asked the authors to focus on "explicitly applying their theories to the school-to-work transition of work-bound youth" and to "emphasize ways that their respective theoretical positions can be used to help understand or facilitate the School-to-Work (STW) transition of youth." This is an amiable assignment for advocates of career development theory because this evolutionary perspective on careers explicitly concentrates on the developmental tasks and individual coping resources required to successfully negotiate the transition to work life. The transition of youth from school to work looms large in the landscape of predictable passages in a career because it marks the beginning of full-time employment. This article first discusses the developmental model for understanding the STW transition and then describes methods and materials for facilitating the STW transition.

UNDERSTANDING THE STW TRANSITION

The years after a student leaves school are years of choice and change. The choices may be explicit or implicit, made by action or inaction, but either way young adults make important career choices that change their lives. Numerous studies over the last 60 years have examined the experiences of youth in making the STW transition. These studies agree on one major conclusion, the essence of the developmental perspective on the STW transition: Youth cope better with

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the STW transition if as high school students they have developed *awareness of the choices to be made and of the information and planning that bear on these choices*. To use the vernacular, high school students who "look ahead" and "look around" develop greater job-seeking readiness (Stevens, 1973) and adjust more quickly to the work world. The studies that first stated this conclusion were conducted between the Great Depression and World War II. Although conducted in a different cultural and historical context, these landmark studies articulated a wisdom that remains relevant today. Particularly important among empirical studies of this type are those that used a prospective, longitudinal research design such as the Regents of New York inquiry titled *When Youth Leave School* (Eckert & Marshall, 1939); the American Youth Commission survey titled *Youth Tell Their Story* (Bell, 1938); two Harvard studies: *Scholastic, Economic and Social Background of Unemployed Youth* (Dearborn & Rothney, 1938) and "Advice From Apprentices" (Moyer, 1940); the National Association of Secondary School Principals' study of *Occupational Adjustment and the School* (Landy, 1940); and "From School to Work During the Depression Years" (Super & Wright, 1941a, 1941b). Each of these longitudinal studies examined the dynamics of the STW transition by relating data collected from high school students about their career development to detailed information about their adaptation to the world of work.

The resemblance of these studies to contemporary research on the same topic is impressive. For example, the Landy (1940) study, which investigated high school behavior as a predictor of occupational adjustment, identified "practices which seem useful" in preparing students for the STW transition. Landy recommended that principals establish courses that would allow students to become responsible and self-directed in situations that are as much like real jobs as possible. He advised teachers to make their students aware of the problems involved in the STW transition. Landy based this advice on empirical results that showed that his *Ways of Behaving Scale* (especially items that indicated whether students had considered the place of work in their lives, explored occupations, and considered the match between preferred occupations and their own abilities and interests) predicted occupational adjustment. Other items in the set of 26 address issues such as seeking advice from competent sources, using past experiences in making decisions, and investigating training opportunities and working conditions. In terms of counseling practices concerning the STW transition, Truman Kelley (1928, 1940) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education suggested that counselors assess students' "probable success" in making the STW transition using a construct called "Index of Congruence." Kelley's colleague Brewer proposed specific criteria to use in constructing a congruence index. One of Brewer's students, Mildred Lincoln (1937), who later served as president of the National Vocational Guidance Association in 1932 to 1933, developed a detailed Index of Congruence, with profile forms and a scoring manual, that counselors could use "to estimate probability of success in carrying out educational and vocational plans" (p. 149). Lincoln's Congruence Index has eight scales:

1. Comprehensiveness of reasons for choosing occupation
2. Utilization of sources of information regarding occupation
3. Utilization of sources of counsel and breadth of contacts
4. Flexibility of plans
5. Status as to economic conditions and educational and social background
6. Individual's correspondence with educational requirements of occupation
7. Correspondence between requirements of occupation and qualifications of individual
8. Ability to carry through objectives

From 1929 to 1937, Lincoln taught the Congruence Index assessment and counseling technique to her graduate students (including Donald Super) in a Teachers College, Columbia University course titled "Methods and Content for the Course in Occupations." Her Congruence Index seems to be the earliest *vocational maturity scale,* although this term would not be introduced until midcentury.

Given the plethora of studies on the STW transition during the late 1930s, one would expect advances to have been made in the field of study during the 1940s. Unfortunately, World War II interrupted plans for the next wave of studies. The two most important STW studies made after World War II were published in the 1950s: Miller and Form's (1951) study of life patterns in work adjustment and Super's (1954) study of career patterns.

Miller and Form, both assistant professors of sociology at Kent State University at the time, devised a social psychological model of the "lifework pattern" that had five periods of work adjustment: (a) preparatory, (b) initial (i.e., part-time and summer jobs during high school), (c) trial, (d) stable, (e) and retirement. The trial period is the "job transition beginning when the worker seeks his or her first full-time job and continuing until he (or she) has secured a work position in which he (or she) remains three years or more" (Miller & Form, 1951, p. 637). Miller and Form's classic textbook includes a chapter on "The Transition From School to Work." In that chapter, they identified six career orientations that characterize youth making the STW transition: (a) the *ambitious*, who are advancing in income or status; (b) the *responsive*, who have taken jobs provided or chosen by their parents; (c) the *fulfilled*, who have a permanent job they like; the (d) *confused*, who move erratically from job to job; the (e) *frustrated*, who are blocked from moving to a better a job; and the (f) *defeated*, who repeatedly move downward to jobs with lower income and status. Miller and Form also addressed the culture shock and the marginal status that young workers experience on the job.

Super's efforts to initiate the Career Pattern Study (CPS) in North Carolina were interrupted in 1942 by his military service. In 1949, he reactivated the idea of conducting a longitudinal study of careers by writing a working paper that formulated the Career Pattern Study (CPS). According to the theoretical framework for the CPS (Super, 1957), the years after leaving high school are devoted to exploration leading to the eventual establishment of an adult career pattern.

The STW transition consists of three substages. The *tentative substage* involves the tasks of specification and instrumentation, that is, choosing an occupation and getting the required training. The *trial substage* involves the task of implementation, that is, obtaining an initial occupational position and taking steps to settle into a preferred occupation. The *stabilizing substage* involves securing a suitable position in the preferred occupation.

The critical vocational coping behaviors during these STW substages consist of actions that move one to increasingly more congruent occupational positions. Any action aimed at vocational movement is considered a vocational coping behavior including reading job advertisements and applying for positions. The six main types of vocational movement vary in quality; three are positive (training, experimenting, and stabilizing) and three are negative (drifting, floundering, and stagnating). Drifting is random movement to a position that is not logical as a next position; for which the individual lacks aptitude, interest, or preparation; or for which the individual is no better suited than he or she was for the position being left. Drifting implies deferring to others or wandering aimlessly from position to position. Floundering means stumbling performance in a position or plunging ahead from one unsuitable position to another. Stagnating involves staying longer than appropriate or remaining in a blind alley job, which limits one's future occupational possibilities. Training or instrumentation is preparing to enter an adult occupation through, for example, further schooling and apprenticeships. Experimenting or trial is movement from one related job to another in a process of elimination or zeroing in on a satisfying position. Stabilizing means settling into a more or less permanent position, making a place for oneself. Unlike experimenting, stabilizing shows that the individual has no doubt about his or her career path. In the CPS, about one third of the participants engaged in drifting and floundering during most of the 7 years after high school. Approximately one sixth of the participants drifted at the beginning of their career transition and, after 3 or 4 years, began to stabilize. At age 25, 80% of the participants were stabilizing. Over the long term (career), the quality of vocational coping behavior during the STW years seems to be more important for a person's career development than actual success in the first or second job. In the CPS, the best individual differences predictors of early stabilization were ability, interest, and school achievement. Counselors are well advised to view these individual difference variables from a developmental perspective. For example, Bynner's (1997) longitudinal study shows that problems in developing basic literacy and numerical skills by age 10 cause problems in developing work-related skills (verbal skills, manual skills, caring skills, keyboard/computer skills, organizing skills). In turn, problems with work-related skills influence high school achievement, occupational interest, and the STW transition. The best developmental predictors of stabilizing were a planning orientation to the world of work, and knowledge about preferred occupation. These measures add predictive efficiency to the individual differences variables. In short, like the earlier studies by Landy (1940), Lincoln (1937), and Miller and Form (1951), the CPS

identified the main developmental predictor of a smooth STW transition as *awareness of choices to be made and information and planning bearing on these choices.*

Note that the CPS, along with the landmark studies that preceded it, took place under different economic and labor market conditions than exist today and studied participants who were disproportionately white males. Therefore, these studies should be replicated and extended to examine diverse groups in the context of a global economy. Nevertheless, these classic studies, and the extensive empirical literature accumulated during the intervening years, suggest that career development theory's conceptualization of the STW transition with its accompanying inventories offer a viable model and useful methods for understanding how work-bound youth move from school to work, from career exploration to occupational establishment, and from adolescence to adulthood.

Since the completion of the CPS, two decades of additional research using the developmental perspective on the STW transition have identified specific types of awareness, information, and planning that advance the careers of students who are moving from school to work. The specific career development attitudes and competencies that have been studied by researchers are intervening variables that connect vocational coping responses to developmental task stimuli. As such, career development attitudes and competencies mediate how well individuals implement their self-concepts as they move from educational to occupational settings. Each attitude and competence has been linguistically explained and operationally defined by psychometric instruments that counselors can use to assess the degree of progress students are making in developing their careers and preparing to adapt to the work world (Savickas, 1984).

The awareness and planning aspects of career choice and the STW transition have been shown to be comprised of two distinct factors that condition educational/vocational decision making and the implementation of career choices; one of these factors is attitudinal and the other cognitive. The attitudinal or conative dimension consists of dispositional response tendencies that shape the individual's readiness to choose a career and subsequent work adaptability. Super and Overstreet (1960) emphasized the critical importance of positive attitudes toward planning (e.g., planfulness) and exploration. Crites (1978), another CPS team member, emphasized more specific attitudes, including involvement in the career development process, independence in making choices, willingness to make realistic compromises, preference for intrinsic rewards, and decisiveness.

The cognitive dimension of readiness for the school-to-work transition concentrates on information and planning that affect the choice of an occupation and the ability to secure a position in that occupation. Super and Overstreet (1960) emphasized two career competencies. The first is information about the work world. The second is knowledge about the principles and practice of career decision making. An important predictor of success in the STW transition combines these two competencies. The more information that individuals possess about the occupation they have chosen, the more likely it is that they will smoothly establish them-

selves in it. Again, Crites (1978) described more specific competencies: (a) self-knowledge, (b) occupational information, (c) matching self to occupation, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. Developing positive attitudes toward planning and exploring, along with increasing competence at making choices and forming plans, has become the focus of methods and materials aimed at facilitating the STW transition for work-bound youth.

FACILITATING THE STW TRANSITION

On the basis of the classic research outlined in the previous section, and the extensive empirical literature accumulated during the intervening years, it seems safe to conclude that career development theory offers counselors a useful model for understanding the STW transition of work-bound youth. The second charge to authors of articles in this special issue was to discuss how their theories can be used to facilitate the STW transition. To this end, I describe briefly four examples of counseling materials and methods designed to support the STW transition.

Recall that the developmental model for the STW transition emphasizes orientation to upcoming vocational development tasks and instruction in vocational coping behaviors that deal with these tasks, especially planning and exploring. Looking ahead and looking around develops competence and skill in five critical domains: (a) self-knowledge, (b) occupational information, (c) decision making, (d) planning, and (e) problem solving. These competencies condition placement readiness (Stevens, 1973), effective vocational coping behaviors, and early stabilization. Thus, career development materials are used to *orient* people to career development tasks, *teach* skills for planning and exploring, *coach* career management techniques, and *rehearse* problem solving. Each of the following four types of materials represents one of these four intervention methods.

Orienting: Comprehension of Careers

Career orientation explicitly fosters students' awareness of tasks to be faced and decisions to made. Career development theorists have used different terms to denote this orientation, including *anticipation* (Tiedeman & O'Hara, 1963), awareness (Harren, 1979), *involvement* (Crites, 1978), *planfulness* (Super & Overstreet, 1960), and *time perspective* (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951). Therefore, each of these career theorists endorses the maxim that "prior planning prevents poor performance." To prompt planning, they recommend that counselors and teachers offer students "anticipatory guidance" that fosters planning attitudes, competencies, and activities. This orientation seeks to make students aware of and familiar with imminent developmental tasks and encourages them to consider how they will cope with these tasks. One of the many effective orientation techniques is discussing items on career development inventories (Crites, 1974), such as the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites, 1978) and the Adult Career Concerns Inventory (Super, Thompson, & Lindeman, 1988). The items on these

inventories are used as topics to prompt guided discussion, rather than being assessment devices. As students discuss the inventory items and rationales, they become oriented to the developmental tasks involved in career decision making and develop attitudes that bear on these tasks (Savickas, 1990).

Teaching: Competence at Planning and Exploring

Orientation concentrates on students' career awareness and fosters their development of positive attitudes toward planning and exploring. In contrast, teaching concentrates on developing cognitive competencies and behavioral skills that students may use to advance their career. Examples of teaching methods that help students learn career choice and work adjustment competencies can be found in numerous career education curriculum guides. For example, Career Decision Making: Teaching the Process (Savickas, 1990; Savickas & Crites, 1981) is a high school course curriculum consisting of 20 lesson plans that develop students' career planning and exploration skills. One lesson deals with how "Work Is Different From School." This exploration lesson aims to curtail "surprise" and "culture shock" among adolescent newcomers to the adult workforce (Louis, 1980; Wanous, 1977). The lesson seeks to teach students five distinctions between school and work from Miller and Form (1951, p. 622) and five distinctions made by Savickas. For example, students learn that school and work differ in membership permanency. Each student belongs in school and has an assured place there, even when they experience or cause problems. In contrast, workers who cause problems quickly lose their positions. A second distinction involves means and ends to advance. In school, each student is expected to advance to the next grade, the means are clear, and students are offered support to reach this goal. At work, only a few of the better performing employees are permitted to advance, the means to advancement are ambiguous, and little if any support for advancement is offered. Learning about these two, and eight more, distinctions provides students with information and skills that they can use in making the STW transition.

Coaching: Career Management Techniques

Individuals with similar levels of academic success in school vary in the degree of success that they achieve on the job. Cognitive psychologists contend that the differences in job success and satisfaction are only partially explained by ability and motivation (Wagner & Sternberg, 1985). The remaining variability may be attributed to individual differences in tacit knowledge. New workers with practical intelligence about managing their careers and dealing with coworkers are usually successful at stabilizing in a job.

Knowing the employer's social expectation for employees and preferred methods for meeting these expectations allows new workers to adapt better by consciously managing their responses. Programmatic research on the developmental tasks and coping responses involved in stabilizing in a new position has produced information

about the formal requirements of adapting to a new job. Studies have identified tacit knowledge and practical intelligence in individuals who have mastered the vocational development tasks involved in stabilizing in a new job (e.g., Dix & Savickas, 1995; Wagner & Sternberg, 1985). This information has been converted into career management tips, which career coaches use in coaching newcomers to work in an organization (Dix & Savickas, 1995; Savickas, 1993). One intervention is used to coach clients in six types of coping behaviors that deal, respectively, with managing the tasks of organizational fusion, position performance, coworker relations, work habits and attitudes, advancement, and career planning. For example, tips for adapting to the culture of the work organization include the following:

1. Acquire knowledge about the company and its culture.
2. Be a team player.
3. Make quality contacts with coworkers.
4. Learn from the experts in the organization.
5. Focus on the big picture.
6. Change oneself to fit the organization.
7. Do any task to get the job done.
8. Establish credibility with coworkers.

Role Rehearsal: Preparation for Job Problems

A fourth method for fostering the STW transition involves rehearsal that prepares students to solve problems that occur at work. This can include role-taking such as part-time jobs, but role rehearsal really means vicarious preparation for and practice at solving typical problems that arise on the job. Role rehearsal often includes role-playing (e.g., psychodrama skits) and discussion of case studies. It usually involves student-centered, problem-based learning (PBL) rather than teacher-centered orientation, teaching, and coaching. Preparation for and practice at problem solving can help to increase students' work adaptability and, in turn, adjustment to their first full-time job. One example of work-role rehearsal materials is projective techniques such as the Vocational Apperception Technique and sentence completions. Counselors can use these projective materials to predict and assess how students will react to job problems. For example, Savickas (1991) devised a method for using Crites (1982) work adjustment sentence completion form in role rehearsal. Students respond to the sentence stems, then the counselor discusses these responses one at a time. The discussion uncovers "better responses" and helps clients practice enacting these responses at their work sites. Better responses are defined along a 4-point continuum of increasing complexity: (a) dependence on the work group, (b) independence among people in the work group, (c) interdependence between people in the work group, and (d) individuation within a work group of equals. Clients tend to be interested in and willing to try responses that are one step higher than their current responses. A detailed scoring manual gives counselors sample responses at each of the four levels for each of the 20 sentence stems

(Buboltz & Savickas, 1995). For example, one stem states, "When Mark's supervisor said, 'Look, we'll do it my way and that's all I want to hear about it,' Mark said . . ." Responses to this item can be scored at one of the four levels ranging from Level 1 (e.g., "You're the boss and I'll do it anyway you say.") to Level 4 (e.g., "That's fine. I want to learn more about the job and how you would like this job done. Can we get together soon to talk about it? I'm really looking forward to hearing your ideas and sharing some of my ideas with you.").

These four examples of career development interventions to facilitate the STW transition illustrate only a small portion of the myriad techniques used in career education. Career education programs across the United States use orienting, teaching, coaching, and rehearsing to foster career development. Readers who wish to learn more about how career education programs implement career development theory to prepare students for the STW transition are encouraged to consult three references that, respectively, explain career education models, methods, and outcomes:

1. A classic text on career education titled *Career Education: A Lifelong Process* (Fuller & Whealon, 1979) explains the philosophy and history of career education and describes models for curriculum integration and teacher preparation.
2. Herr and Cramer's (1996) encyclopedic *Career Guidance and Counseling through the Lifespan* discusses methods for implementing career education activities and programs.
3. A meta-analysis of the effects of career education interventions by Baker & Taylor (1998) provides a comprehensive review of empirical evaluations of career education program outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Career development theory offers a well researched model for understanding the STW transition as well as effective methods and materials for facilitating the process. Furthermore, there is a strong empirical base that documents the outcomes teachers and counselors can expect when they use career development interventions to smooth the STW transition. Teachers and counselors who wish to facilitate the STW transition can use orienting, teaching, coaching, and rehearsing to increase their students' *awareness of the choices to be made and information and planning that bears on these choices.*

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