

**The A, B, Cs of
Career Exploration and Planning
for Middle Grades Students**

Developed by

Junior Achievement (JA)

&

The National Career Development Association (NCDA)

© 2004

How would you feel if you could easily figure out your life, your friends, your parents! If you are like most young people, friends are very important at this time in your life. You may be concerned about trying to fit in all the things you need or want to do in your busy, short day.

You probably would like to do well in school and often hear your parents and teachers talk about “doing your best.” Some of you may already be hearing about the importance of excelling in school so you can get a good, enjoyable job when you venture out on your own. Such a future may seem very far away compared to the day-to-day activities you must deal with right now, including having time for your friends and family.

When you enter high school, getting a good education to prepare you for a career and deciding what to do after you graduate will be much more on your mind. It is amazing how time just keeps going on and on, and the tomorrow we didn’t think about is the yesterday we just had!

We know that you are very involved with your life and friends and family, which is good. It’s important to enjoy life and spend time with those who care about you. This helps you feel loved and accepted, and that’s very valuable.

While you’re in high school, you will be faced with making decisions that will influence your future career and life choices. Should you take a certain level math course? Should you get a part-time job to earn some spending money? Should you take time to be in a school play or join a sports team or volunteer a few hours a week to help with a special community project?

While you don’t need all the answers today, it is important that you begin to think about some of these questions. Taking time to explore your feelings and your ideas leads to self-discovery and will get you off to a good start when you enter high school.

The following three steps will give you a great head start. They are the “A”, “B”, “Cs” that help you see your future more clearly. They’re easy to do, especially when you ask a teacher or counselor for help. All they require is that you simply notice what’s going on around you in your day-to-day activities. Try the steps out and talk about them with your friends, your parents, and your favorite school counselor or teacher. At least think about them a bit and have a discussion with someone who cares about you and your future.

Step One

A: Start to notice what you like, such as your favorite hobbies or interests. Pay attention to what you’re good at, your special talents like drawing, coloring, figuring out how to fix something that’s broken or being able to make people laugh. Take time to learn more about you by expanding your self-knowledge. One way to do this is to ask your friends about what they really enjoy doing, their favorite games or hobbies. Compare their answers to your own. Are your friends’ interests the same or different than yours?

Focus on the various activities you enjoy, your special skills or talents you may be taking for granted. Think about your values, what's really important to you in life. For example, is it important that you do something to help others? Do you need quiet time alone to read or work on an art project? Counselors and teachers can help you develop your self-knowledge in a variety of effective ways. Sometimes a small group discussion or having the class focus on these topics can be helpful. A great question to ask your Mom or Dad is, "What did I like to do as a child between the ages of three and six?" This information will teach you more about you. The wonderful thing about self-knowledge is that you begin to feel better as you discover some surprising, positive things about yourself!

Step Two

B: Start to notice the work your Mom or Dad does, her or his activities during the day and at night when the family is together. Find out what types of jobs your friends' parents have. Take note of their special hobbies or interests, such as gardening, painting pictures, or spending lots of time with their pets. While you're at school, look at the various jobs people perform.

Ask different people lots of questions about the work they do, which will help you learn about the many opportunities in the world of work. Find out what they like or don't like about their jobs. Ask how they trained for their jobs or how much education was needed. This will help you learn about the different educational and training options that prepare people for work.

So many different jobs and so much information about education and training options can seem overwhelming. In fact, most people will have several jobs in a variety of career areas during their lifetimes. Is that surprising? How do you learn to choose the "right ones"?

You certainly don't need all the answers right now. But, it's important to be aware of opportunities out there simply by noticing what's happening around you. Learn from experts who have amazing ways of organizing lots of information into easy-to-understand formats that make exploring fun! Computer programs, videos, books, and many games also help young people learn about interesting occupations.

Keep in mind, counselors, teachers and your parents want to help. You just need to ask.

Step Three

C: Ask yourself if any of the jobs or activities you notice seem fun and enjoyable. Would you feel happy and satisfied if you spent time doing these types of activities? How could you find out if you would really enjoy them? How would you know for sure?

Answering such questions involves learning how to handle a lot of information to make the best decisions. Choosing what will make you happy and satisfied is a

challenging and enjoyable step. It's challenging because you need to take time to ask yourself key questions about what is important or not important to you. It's enjoyable because when you take time to do this, you can see more clearly what's best for you. It would be great to be paid to do work you truly enjoy and also have time after work to do other activities, hobbies, or volunteer work. Having a well-balanced life is important.

Counselors and teachers have many resources to help you plan a great future. Just let them know you want their assistance. Don't forget to talk to your parents—they really know a lot about you.

Suggested follow-up activities:

Ask students to reflect on the following topics and write down their thoughts. Students should sit in pairs and respond to any two topics they can later share with their classmates. Then, bring all the students together in a large group to discuss their experiences and answer any questions. It is recommended that you use these and other subjects that are appropriate for your students. Above all, show your enthusiasm for this activity that focuses on self-discovery, and your enthusiasm will spread to your students.

- 1) My three best personal qualities or characteristics:
- 2) My top three interests (likes, hobbies, and fun activities):
- 3) My top three dislikes, activities I really don't enjoy:
- 4) My top three abilities and skills, things I am very good at:
- 5) My top three life values (things that are very important to me in life):
- 6) My top three work values (things that are very important to me in a job):
- 7) When I am ready to work, I think I would like to do any of the following three jobs:
- 8) My favorite school subjects are:
- 9) My least favorite school subjects are:
- 10) To be a good student I think I need to improve in the following three areas:
- 11) I think the following three things would make the world a better place:

12) I think the following three things would make me happy in life:

Junior Achievement Inc. and the National Career Development Association wish to acknowledge the work of Dr. Edward Anthony Colozzi in developing this exercise. Dr. Colozzi would appreciate receiving any feedback you may have about this exercise. He can be reached at edcolozzi@verizon.net.