

Career Development Through Children's Storybooks

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Abstract

Professional school counselors have the expectation and responsibility to provide career development to elementary school children. This resource brief presents 13 career-oriented children's storybooks with nine corresponding classroom activity suggestions.

Career Development Through Children's Storybooks

Elementary school counselors use children's literature regularly in individual, small group, and classroom counseling. I was recently co-leading a literacy workshop to school counselors in which my co-presenters and I shared and discussed the benefits of reading aloud with children. Academic benefits include promoting an enjoyment of reading, opening children's imaginations, introducing new vocabulary terms and concepts, developing comprehension skills, and fostering critical thinking (e.g., Beauchat et al., 2012; Lacina et al., 2016; Leland et al., 2003). Social-emotional benefits include increasing self-awareness, affirming self-worth, promoting pro-social skills, reducing bias, encouraging diverse perspectives, exploring sensitive subjects, and providing opportunities to learn problem-solving skills, deal with discouragement, and combat bullying (e.g., Heath et al., 2017; Iwai, 2015; Lacina et al., 2016; Leland et al., 2003; Mabry & Bhavnagri, 2012; Mankiw & Strasser, 2013; Wang et al., 2015).

One of the participants at this workshop asked, "What storybooks do you recommend specifically for career development?" It was a simple question to which my co-presenters and I had no immediate answer. After the workshop, I dove into academic and practitioner literature expecting numerous articles and resources about promoting career development with children's books. In both the school counseling and related (library, literacy and reading, early childhood education, elementary education) literature, I found primarily older articles. Most helpful was Harkins (2001a, 2001b), who discussed the importance of integrating career development across the early childhood curriculum. The author listed five goals of career education in the early grades: Acquiring Information; Building Self-Awareness; Developing Positive Habits and

Attitudes; Understanding Issues of Equity; and Expanding Academic and Work-Related Skills.

Given that career development is one of three domains central to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA; 2019) Professional Standards and Competencies and that National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG) exist (NCDA, 2004), it is striking that there are not more current articles and resources on the use of children's literature in elementary career development.

Thus, what follows are 13 recommended career-oriented storybooks for elementary-aged students and 9 corresponding classroom activities. Books are categorized into Harkins (2001a, 2001b) areas for career development, although to modernize the theme of Understanding Issues of Equity (diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and ability), books related to equity and diversity are integrated into each the other four areas, rather than separated out as a fifth area. Following each book citation is its plot summary and an activity suggestion for how to extend messages from the book to maximize student learning.

Acquiring Information

In this area, I share books that outline specific career examples, both familiar and likely less familiar to children, as well as corresponding working conditions and job responsibilities and activities. National Career Development Guidelines (NCDG; NCDA, 2004) that link to the suggested activities for these books highlight the Educational Achievement and Lifelong Learning and the Career Management domains.

Both *Clothesline Clues to Jobs People Do* (Heling & Hembrook, 2012) and *Whose Hands Are These?* (Paul, 2016) present tasks of specific occupations presented

in rhyming text structured for students to guess, leading to a reveal of the given profession. *Clothesline Clues* presents mail carrier, farmer, chef, artist, carpenter, firefighter, and astronaut. *Whose Hands* presents farmer, cook, police, scientist, potter, news reporter, mechanic, architect, referee, physician, and teacher. To extend students' acquiring information about specific careers, each learner can choose one career from the book and one additional career of their choice. Using research resources, students create compare-and-contrast documents, in pictures and/or words, of the two professions.

Iggly Peck, Architect (Beaty, 2007), *Rosie Revere, Engineer* (Beaty, 2013) and *Ada Twist, Scientist* (Beaty, 2016) are three in a series. Each book follows a child from toddlerhood into elementary school, as they develop their skills as an architect/engineer/scientist. Each must face doubts or negativity – from others or from themselves – and each demonstrates perseverance in their chosen area of focus. To deepen students' understanding of the profession(s) presented, they can explore various sub-careers within each broad career category of architecture, engineering, and/or science. Given specific job titles, students can search internet sites such as O*NET OnLine (onetonline.org) to discover activities and skills of the career and the educational requirements to attain it. For architecture, students can research bridge architect, commercial architect, interior designer, landscape architect, residential architect, and urban designer. In engineering, they can investigate civil, chemical, computer, electrical, industrial, and mechanical engineers. For science, they can explore discipline-specific professions such as anthropologist, biologist, botanist,

chemist, climatologist, ecologist, geneticist, marine biologist, meteorologist, and social scientist.

Building Self-Awareness

In this category, I present books that highlight personal interests and the jobs that correspond. The activities suggested for these books together correspond to all three of the NCDG domains, Personal Social Development, Educational Achievement and Lifelong Learning, and Career Management.

Trombone Shorty (Andrews, 2015) is told in first-person by the author, Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews. It is the story of growing up immersed in the music and culture of New Orleans. Today Trombone Shorty is a Grammy-nominated and award-winning and professional musician. The book centers on themes of hard work, determination, perseverance, and a love of culture. “Collage” is another theme – collages of music styles, foods in gumbo, and artistic presentation. To widen learning from Trombone Shorty’s interests to students’ own, they can create collages of their own abilities, skills, and interests. Students can then share their self-awareness collages orally or in writing, and connect to specific career categories.

In *Someday* (Spinelli, 2007), a girl dreams about someday becoming an artist, dolphin trainer, archeologist, animal scientist, gymnast, and more based on the interests and activities she has today. To apply this book to their own lives, students can record lists of their own current interests and activities, and using research and information resources such as My Next Move (mynextmove.org), they can identify specific occupations that correspond to their interests and activities. Students can further research one or more of the job(s) they find and identify the skills needed to perform

those jobs. They can summarize by relating how their interests and abilities relate to specific careers and career goals.

Developing Positive Habits and Attitudes

Here I examine books that, on their surface, may not appear to be career-oriented, but present personal expressions of cooperation, persistence, and other positive attitudes and actions that relate to college- and career-readiness. These books correspond to NCGD Personal Social Development and Educational Achievement domains.

After the Fall (Santat, 2017) and *Izzy Gizmo* (Jones, 2018) present stories of perseverance. In *After the Fall*, we learn what happens after Humpty Dumpty's great fall. He develops a fear of heights but misses sitting high upon the wall with the birds. Through perseverance, he gets back up again, and learns how to fly. In *Izzy Gizmo*, Izzy fails many times before finally inventing functional wings for an injured bird. To highlight the message of perseverance, learners can create or color positive self-talk bumper stickers with growth-mindset phrases such as Progress, Not Perfection; Don't Stop 'til You're Proud; I'm Training My Brain; or I Have Not Failed Until I Quit Trying. To further expand messages of persistence and learning from failure, students can research "famous failures." Given specific current or historical figures, they can uncover the many not-yet-successes before ultimate success and eventual fame. For example, Albert Einstein didn't speak until he was 4 years old and failed his school entrance exam; Beyonce lost her first national singing competition; Jim Carrey was booed off the stage at his first attempt; J.K. Rowling spent 7 years writing the first Harry Potter book and it was rejected by 12 publishers (Adams, 2016). Michael Jordan is quoted as

saying, “I’ve missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed” (Forbes, 2015).

In *Last Stop on Market Street* (de la Peña, 2015), CJ and Nana travel on the bus to work at a soup kitchen. On their bus trip they interact with community members including the bus driver, a musician, and a man who is blind. Nana helps CJ see beauty in unexpected places. To further develop the theme of positivity and reframing, students can turn nonsense squiggly lines and shapes into familiar objects. They begin with a provided or peer-drawn doodle-squiggle mark on a page and use their imagination to envision the mark as part of a larger picture. As they draw the larger picture, they have turned what seemed like nothing into something.

Expanding Academic and Work-Related Skills

In this final category, I highlight books that focus on academic, problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills. Extension activities suggested for these books together correspond to NCDG domains of Personal Social Development and Career Management.

Counting on Katherine (Becker, 2018) is a biography of Katherine Johnson, who excels in school, deals with racial and gender discrimination, and eventually uses her imagination and mathematical skill to save NASA’s Apollo 13 mission. For an activity, students can create a timeline of key personal and academic events in Katherine Johnson’s life and then stretch to create a timeline of their own personal and academic events, both up to this point in their lives and projected into the future.

Marvelous Cornelius (Bildner, 2015), told in an American folktale style, celebrates the life of Cornelius Washington, a New Orleans street cleaner and the cooperative coming together of community after the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. *Manjhi Moves a Mountain* (Churnin, 2017) is the story of a man who slowly over decades literally moves a mountain to connect his remote village to schools, farms, and markets. Together, these books demonstrate cooperation and problem solving. To contribute to students' understanding and experiencing of these core work-related attitudes and skills, students can do a team-building cooperative activity such as build the tallest tower possible using only provided supplies such as index cards, straws, tape, and paper.

Using children's storybooks is an ideal way to introduce and advance elementary students' awareness of career development. School counselors can use the 13 books and corresponding 9 classroom counseling activities shared here to promote college and career readiness.

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