

ANDREW K. CLARK,  
*Faculty of Education,  
University of Alberta.*

## CAREER ENTRY SKILLS — GAP IN THE GUIDANCE CHAIN

**ABSTRACT:** Strengthening of career entry skills is advocated as a bridge to enable job-seekers of high-school age to successfully enter the world of work. Research is reported which indicates that the career entry skills possessed by job applicants in this age group are not rated highly by personnel officers, nor do they figure largely in extent or importance in vocational guidance programs. A proposed guidance curriculum unit on career entry skills is outlined and discussed.

The title prompts two questions: "Just what are 'career entry skills'?" and, "Why are they considered a gap?" The first question is answered by defining career entry skills and justifying their importance, the second by summarizing the results of a research survey involving school guidance counselors and personnel officers in business and industry. A third question: "What, if anything, can be done about it?" is answered by describing a career entry skills unit proposed for inclusion in the guidance curriculum.

### *Career Entry Skills (CES)*

**Definition.** In brief, CES are those abilities and competencies which assist or enable a job-seeker to obtain employment. Note that CES are not generally part of the curriculum of academic or vocational courses. While there may be other related skills, the primary CES would appear to be those involving:

Analysis of an individual's aptitudes, qualifications, work preferences

Preparation, production and use of a résumé

Researching prospective employers and job opportunities

Use of a variety of job search methods

Handling the employment interview

*Importance.* Career entry skills are seen as having relevance for the high-school guidance function on the one hand and manpower utilization on the other hand.

The two main aspects of vocational guidance programs appear to be: 1) provision of career *information* to help a student make a realistic vocational decision, and 2) assistance with vocational *preparation* through appropriate program and course selection. An individual may thus make a good career choice in terms of his interests and aptitudes, he may be suitably prepared for entry into that vocation within the limits of the educational system, but the optimum realization of the guidance function surely also requires that he be equipped with the skills necessary to *find and secure* suitable employment in that vocation.

The manpower implications of CES are perhaps exemplified in the work of Ginzberg, an economics professor whose specialty is manpower, and whose publications on vocational guidance (1951, 1971) have been among the most influential in the field. Recognition of the growing importance of CES in the economy is indicated by a recent report of the Economic Council of Canada on manpower planning (1971), which concerned itself with the variety of job search methods, the job-seeker's approach to the job search, and a quantitative assessment of the most effective search methods in use. A relevant topic not covered by the 1971 report was the "interview anxiety factor," which was found by Sheppard and Belitsky, in their comprehensive study into the job-finding process (1966), to be significant in the success of the job-hunters.

### *Research Findings*

The research summarized here has been reported in full elsewhere (Clark, 1973). It consisted of two separate but related sub-studies with the following objectives:

- 1) To determine the *extent* of the CES content (as defined above) in the guidance curriculum and an estimate of its relative importance, as judged by full-time high-school guidance counselors.
- 2) To determine the level of CES of career entrants of high school leaving age (16-20 yrs), as judged by personnel officers who make the hiring decisions in business and industry.

*Guidance Findings.* From Table 1 it is apparent that, although there are variations in each area, the mean percentages of time (col. 2) spent on the three types of counselling were approximately equal. There

is little basis here for the widely held stereotype of the guidance counselor as being heavily involved in testing activities of all kinds, with only 4.7 percent of counselors' time spent on interest and aptitude testing, and 2.5 percent on intelligence and achievement testing.

TABLE 1  
TIME PERCENTAGES AND RANKINGS FOR COUNSELLING ACTIVITIES  
OF FULL-TIME GUIDANCE COUNSELORS (N=37)

Activity	Percent Time		Ranking	
	Range (1)	Mean (2)	Range (3)	Mean (4)
<b>EDUCATIONAL</b>				
A. Testing	0-20	2.5	2-5	3.8
B. Under-Ach.	0-20	7.5	1-5	2.4
C. Study Habit	0-10	4.3	1-5	3.1
D. Prog. — Course	0-64	19.6	1-5	1.8
E. Other	0-15	1.1	1-5	4.6
Total	0-80	34.7		
<b>CAREER</b>				
F. Information	4-95	19.6	1-3	1.2
G. Testing	0-17	4.7	1-4	2.6
H. CES	0-25	5.6	1-3	2.4
I. Other	0-25	1.9	1-4	3.7
Total	10-100	29.7		
<b>PERSONAL</b>				
J. Social	0-20	7.5	1-5	3.0
K. Emotional	0-25	7.8	1-5	2.5
L. Interpersonal	0-35	11.6	1-5	1.9
M. Personality	0-30	6.9	1-5	3.0
N. Other	0-30	1.9	1-5	4.6
Total	0-80	35.5		

Career entry skills are well down the list in terms of time spent by counselors. Of the listed questionnaire items only items A, C, and G had time percentages less than CES at 5.6 percent. In the career counseling activities, CES was second to item F, Information, with 19.6 percent, and only slightly ahead of Interest and Aptitude Testing. These relative standings were also repeated by the Importance rankings (col. 4), with CES rated slightly ahead of the Testing item and considerably behind the Information Provision item.

*Personnel Findings.* Two kinds of data from the personnel officer ratings are summarized in Table 2: assessment of job applicants' level of CES (items 1-8), and miscellaneous data on the hiring situation (items 9-11).

The lowest rated CES were those involving knowledge of the company (organization) and its operations, followed by those involving

the degree of self-analysis shown by the job-seeker. The highest rated skills were those involving the résumé, although the mean rating of 2.6 is still closer to Fair than to Good on the five-point scale. A possible reason for this surprising (to the writer) result is perhaps that the relative few who do use a résumé (9.8 percent) take some pains to achieve a reasonable format and quality. The figure of 66.6 percent of unsolicited applications is taken as a confirmation of the need of job-hunters for greater expertise in job-search behavior.

More than half of the personnel officers responding made additional write-in comments in the following areas of concern:

Lack of specific skills: spelling, writing, math	8
Unrealistic aims, low motivation	6
No knowledge of company/job requirements	6
Lack of salesmanship (of themselves)	3
Disrespectful, unkempt, untidy	3

The overall mean rating of 3.0 by personnel officers may be taken as an indication that CES in the high-school age group are not highly developed on the whole. The figure of 5.6 percent of counseling time devoted to CES by guidance counselors, when taken with the low im-  
primary concerns in the guidance curriculum.

TABLE 2  
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE  
BY PERSONNEL OFFICERS (N=38)

CES Item	Lowest Rating	Highest Rating	Mean Rating
1. Knowledge of business letter format & tone	4.0	1.1	3.0
2. Level of grammar & diction	4.2	1.2	2.9
3. Knowledge of resumé format and content	5.0	1.1	2.6
4. Level of resumé as finished production	5.0	1.0	2.6
5. Knowledge of business etiquette	4.5	1.0	2.9
6. Knowledge of company & its operations	5.0	2.0	3.7
7. Knowledge of type of job wanted by applicant	4.0	1.3	3.1
8. Correlation between job requirements and applicant's qualifications	5.0	1.3	3.1
Overall Mean			3.0
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
9. Percent of applications unsolicited	5	100	66.6
10. Percent submitting resumé	0	40	9.8
11. Total applications/inquiries in one year (from 16 - 20 age group)	16	5,000	639

TABLE 3  
CONTENT OF CURRICULUM UNIT IN CAREER ENTRY SKILLS

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- A. Orientation to CES
    - 1. Need for career strategy
    - 2. Place of CES in career strategy
    - 3. Overview of activities in CES unit
  - B. Personal Inventory Taking
    - 1. Skills, experience, training, education
    - 2. Likes, dislikes, work or job preferences
    - 3. Interests, activities, personal data, references
  - C. Resumé Production
    - 1. Importance and functions
    - 2. Format and organization
    - 3. Drafting and revising
    - 4. Final copy and reproduction
  - D. The Job Campaign
    - 1. Organized approach
    - 2. Research: Employers and job opportunities
    - 3. Search Methods: Successful and Less Successful
    - 4. Covering letters
    - 5. The job interview
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### *Curriculum Unit in CES*

The content for a suggested unit in career entry skills is given in Table 3. No doubt some of these topics are already being covered to some extent in many guidance programs. Thus the writer has observed business education courses where extensive instruction has been given in writing letters of application and in interview techniques.

The personal inventory is most readily made by use of comprehensive data sheets covering the types of information noted in Table 3. This activity is valuable in clarifying the thinking of the individual concerning work preference and suitability. It also serves to organize the material in a manner which is easily adapted to the resumé format.

The advocacy of a resumé for this age group may be questioned. The average high-school leaver obviously has limited experience and qualifications. All the more reason he should present them in the format recognized by the world of work — the resumé. After all, the professions and other well-developed career fields are subject to systematic placement procedures, but career entry is largely unstructured for those in the 16-20 year old group, the group with the highest rate of growth in the labor force — and the highest rate of unemployment.

The approach to the job campaign will to some extent depend on the school milieu — availability of research facilities, types and numbers of business and industrial concerns — but certain basic principles can be taught which may be applied to most situations.

Given the present employment picture in many parts of North America, an increase in the level of CES can only be advantageous for the young job-seeker and for the economy at large.

RESUME: On prône de renforcer les habiletés permettant l'entrée dans la carrière pour faciliter l'accès au marché du travail des étudiants de niveau secondaire. La recherche indique que les habiletés à se trouver un emploi que possèdent les candidats de ce niveau ne sont pas très bien cotées par les agents de personnel. On ne leur accorde pas davantage d'importance dans les programmes d'orientation professionnelle. On trace l'esquisse d'un programme d'orientation qui fait place à ces habiletés.

## REFERENCES

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