Clarifying vocational maturity during adolescence and implications for mid-life

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INTRODUCTION

While Super's theories of vocational development [6; 7] cover an individual's life span, most of his work regarding vocational maturity focuses on the Exploration stage of vocational development which he indicates occurs, for the most part, during the period of adolescence (ages 15-24). Individuals in the tentative sub stage engage in quite general tasks whereas those in the transition and trial sub stages engage in more specific and focused tasks. In order to examine this portion of Super's theory a study was designed in which two groups of adolescents, freshmen and senior high school students, participated in a career development program. The purpose was to determine whether this program would have a differential impact on the participants' levels of vocational maturity due to vocational maturity's different structure at different stages of development. The results also related these differences and the concept of exploration to mid-life vocational development.

RATIONALE AND HYPOTHESES

Westbrook [10] defines vocational maturity as the ability to cope with vocational developmental tasks. Super's Career Development Inventory (CDI) [8] was chosen to measure vocational maturity for several reasons. First, it is derived directly from his theories of vocational development and maturity. Second, it assesses both attitudinal and cognitive aspects of vocational maturity. Third, and most importantly for this study, the three scales cover the full range of vocational developmental tasks and behaviors which occur during the Exploration stage of vocational development. This enables us to infer whether or not a career development program has a differential impact on the vocational maturity of adolescents who are in different sub-stages of the Exploration stage. Forrest [8] examined the content, criterion and construct validity of the CDI and all were found to be acceptable.

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The reasons for selecting the Life Career Game (LCG) [1] are based on data relating to the effectiveness of simulation games as teaching devices and its relationship to Super's theories.

As a simulation game, Life Career enables the participants to make decisions in the areas of education, employment, family life, and use of leisure time for a fictitious person approximately the same age as the participants in the present study. This is done year by year for eight years beginning with the person's junior year in high school.

Research data relating to simulation games have been summarized by Chartier [3]. He reports that simulation games generate interest even among poorly motivated students and promote the learning of facts, principles and problem-solving, decision-making skills. Varenhorst [9] states that use of Life Career enables individuals to practice making decisions without the fear of making major irreversible decisions which might be inappropriate and therefore cause them to suffer the negative repercussions of such decisions.

By covering a period of eight years beginning with a person's junior year in high school, The Life Career Game spans the Exploration stage of vocational development as defined by Super. Because Super’s theory states that individuals in different stages of vocational development usually must cope with different vocational developmental tasks, the experience of the LCG may be expected to have a differential impact on individuals who are in different sub stages of the Exploration stage. For high school freshmen, for example, some of the tasks engaged in during the simulation might be too far off in the future or too specific for them to address effectively. Similarly, for seniors who would tend to be in the transition sub stage, some tasks might be ones they had already accomplished. Consequently these would have no further effect on certain components of their vocational maturity; all of which could be determined by Super's Career Development Inventory.

Based on the CDI and the LCG, several specific hypotheses emerged from the basic assumption that a career development program might have a differential impact on the participants' levels of vocational maturity due to its differing components at different stages of development. These are as follows:

1. The mean score on the Planning Orientation scale (scale A) of the career Development Inventory (CDI) will be significantly greater for high school freshmen who participated in the Life Career Game (LCG) then the mean score for freshmen who did not participate.

2. The mean score on the Resources for Exploration scale (scale B) of the CDI will be significantly greater for high school freshmen who participated in the LCG than the mean score for freshmen who did not participate.