

Life Planning Education in Hong Kong: Developing Life Explorer Identity with senses of future, journey and self-development among primary students

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Abstract

In 2021, the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region requested all Hong Kong primary schools to start implementing Life Planning Education (LPE) at upper primary levels, under the implementation framework, namely the 'Framework of Implementation Strategies on Life Planning Education for Primary Schools' from the 2024-25 school year (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021). In this policy context, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive literature and conceptual review of LPE, or career-related learning, in primary schools by exploring recent practices and research from the international community, particularly the United Kingdom. The broad-ranging review concludes that LPE in primary schools is best viewed as an essential precursor to career development, with high awareness of age appropriateness (Millard et al., 2019), rather than starting early with youth's career guidance in a literal sense (Yip, 2023). Under such positioning, LPE in primary schools should aim to nurture three fundamental mindsets for secondary-level preparation: i.e., a positive sense of the future, a sense of a journey towards life, and an active sense of self-development that helps children to cultivate a 'life explorer' identity (or identity capital) during the late 'growth' stage in Super's career development theory (Super, 1996; Côté, 1997). A teacher survey (n = 101) was also conducted to explore school/teacher preparedness and the support needed to fulfill the policy requirements. It is found that systematic capacity building and teacher training (including initial teacher education) are critically needed in helping students to develop precursive mindsets for secondary-level career guidance, and a common progressive learning framework of career-related learning (in LPE) with all-level curriculum connectivity with subject teaching is highly recommended for effective implementation under the whole-school leadership approach in Hong Kong primary schools.

Keywords: career-related learning, life planning education, primary education, career and life development, career guidance, Hong Kong education.

Background: Life Planning Education in Primary Schools

"Ignoring the process of career development occurring in childhood is similar to a gardener disregarding the quality of the soil in which a garden will be planted." (Niles, S. G., and Harris-Bowlsbey, J., 2017)

Hong Kong has a long tradition of career guidance in schools, particularly in secondary education. Life Planning Education (LPE) is being introduced as an expanded concept of career guidance, following the Policy Address in 2014, which mandated all secondary schools to provide comprehensive career guidance to enhance students' career readiness and facilitate a smooth transition from school to post-school study and work. Regarding primary-level LPE, primary schools in Hong Kong are not entirely unfamiliar. Ever since the territory-wide launch of the Curriculum Reform in 2001, 'career-related experiences' (CRE) have already been identified as one of the five essential learning experiences in both the official curricula for secondary and primary schools, in view of supporting students' lifelong learning and whole-person development (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2001; Yip, S.Y.W., 2004).

After more than two decades of curriculum reform, the Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2024) continues to emphasize the importance of CRE, usually in the form of life-wide learning activities. It is viewed as the follow-up of the specific recommendation from the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum, final report, "*Optimize the curriculum for the future; Foster whole-person development and diverse talents*" (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2020), that instead of focusing career guidance in senior forms of secondary education, an early start of LPE at the upper primary and junior secondary levels is strongly recommended. From September 2024, all Hong Kong primary schools are mandated to implement LPE at upper primary levels, under the guidance of the implementation framework, namely '*Framework of Implementation Strategies on Life Planning Education for Primary Schools*' (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021). In parallel, the curriculum policy document also stresses that CRE should be 'organically aligned' with the newly emerging Primary LPE, which is not entirely equivalent to career guidance and counselling in secondary education (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2020, Booklet 8, p. 7).

In summary, LPE in upper primary levels is not a completely new initiative that is suddenly imposed from recent policies on secondary career guidance and LPE. The Education Bureau has been advocating Primary CRE since the Curriculum Reforms, namely Learning to Learn (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2001) and Learning to Learn 2.0+ (Education Bureau, 2022), since 2001. However, it is often undermined by primary schools according to studies which showed that only 21% primary heads claimed to offer CRE to their students (Yip, S.Y.W., 2004). To some extent, the LPE in Upper Primary is the policy initiative of CRE to reinforce its importance in the primary curriculum and to lay a good foundation for secondary career and life development programs. Comparison between CRE and LPE (upper primary) is illustrated in Table 1 and Table 2 shows the key elements and expected learning outcomes of LPE (Upper Primary) mandated by the Education Bureau. Both illustrate the policy's level of consistency and trajectory of career-related education in primary schools over the last two decades.

Table 1: Comparison table of CRE and LPE in Upper Primary schools

	Career-related Experiences (CRE)	Life Planning Education (LPE) (Upper-primary)
Policy starts	since 2001 (under the Curriculum Reform, <i>Learning to Learn</i>)	since 2021 (as follow-up strategy of the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum)
Official document (most updated)	Primary Education Curriculum Guide, Booklet 7: Life-wide Learning and Experiential Learning (2020)	Framework of Implementation Strategies on Life Planning Education for Primary Schools (2021)
Status	One of the Five Essential Learning Experiences in school curriculum (including Humanities subject and Science subject)	Mandated initiative offered in school education
Key points	Learn about the world of work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • importance of work ethics • the necessary qualities required in their future careers • Job types frequently come across and the required personal attributes Prepared for students' career planning in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 (secondary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-understanding and development • Future study and career exploration • Secondary study and planning (with 11 expected learning outcomes)
Implementation strategies	Formal curriculum learning in various Key Learning Areas, esp. Personal Social Humanities education, PSHE): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary Humanities subject - Primary Science subject - as Life-wide Learning activities 	Implemented through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - updated/ enhanced Personal Growth lessons - Cross-curricular learning (across subjects) - As cross-team activities (e.g. Values education, Guidance team, ECA)

Table 2: Three Core Elements and 10 Expected Learning Outcomes* of LPE (Upper Primary)

Three Core Elements of LPE (Upper Primary) and 10 expected learning outcomes*		
1. Self-understanding & development	2. Study Pathway and Career Exploration	3. Planning and Management for Future Studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-understanding (ability, personality, interests, aspirations) • Setting personal goals & motivates them in preparation for study and life • tackling gender stereotyping and job biases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know secondary education systems, language medium and subjects etc; prepare for the interfaces, • understand the connections between job types and school subjects • understand the rapid societal change/ trends and assists them to face challenges • discover personal dreams; through self-understanding to realize the relationship between study path choices and dreams. • share their aspirations and expectations in future study/ work and lifestyle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose prospective secondary schools and set appropriate goals for preparation. • cultivate positive values and attitudes (e.g. punctuality, responsibility, integrity) and understand the importance of these virtues in future study and careers.

* EDB framework has 11 outcomes – due to concept repetitions, it is revised to have 10 learning outcomes

LPE in primary schools across the globe

LPE in primary schools is also not a totally new thing worldwide (see Appendix 1). Over the last decade, many countries (or jurisdictions), such as the United Kingdom¹(The Research Base, 2021) and Australia (Moore, Nesbitt, and Godden, 2024), recognized the importance of starting career education *early* in primary education, under different initiative names or titles. Take the UK as an example: building on the nationwide success of the Gatsby Benchmarks for career guidance in secondary schools (Holman, J., 2014; Gatsby Charitable Foundation, 2024), UK primary schools are encouraged to implement “*career-related learning*” to make a good interface with career guidance programs in secondary education (Career Development Institute, 2024). In a nutshell, “*career-related learning*” emphasizes the six curriculum themes: ‘*grow throughout life,*’ ‘*explore possibilities,*’ ‘*manage career,*’ ‘*create opportunities,*’ ‘*balance life and work,*’ and finally ‘*see the big picture*’ (ibid). Since then, numerous initiatives have been attempted in the UK, including projects adopting the city collaborative approach (Hughes, D. et al., 2022) and the ‘*Drawing your Future*’ initiative (Chambers, N. et al., 2018). Summing up these experiences, there are six guiding principles of implementing “*career-related learning*” in primary schools (Kashefpakdel, Rehill & Hughes, 2018):

- (i) ‘Successful leadership of a school’
- (ii) ‘Make this open to all’
- (iii) ‘Embed career-related learning in the curriculum’
- (iv) ‘Involve external organizations and employers’
- (v) ‘Start early’; and
- (vi) ‘Ensure activities are age-dependent.’ (Millard et al., 2019).

A UK survey carried out by Education & Employers, alongside the Times Educational Supplement (TES) and the NAHT² headteachers' union, revealed that most teachers think children should begin exploring careers and the world of work during their early primary school years.

¹ UK in this article refers to England and Wales.

² NAHT stands for National Association of Head Teachers.

Almost 47% of respondents felt that career education should begin at age five or younger, emphasizing that connecting classroom learning to real-life experiences boosts motivation, expands children's ambitions, and helps break down gender stereotypes. (Kashefpakdel, 2018). The evidence-based rationale for starting "*career-related learning*" early in primary schools is to broaden their horizons and pave the way for future lifelong career exploration (Kashefpakdel, Rehill, & Hughes, 2018; Cahill & Furey, 2017). Often combining with the reflective-narrative approach of career development (McMahon, M., & Watson, M. 2017) as well as a community-collaborative approach (Hughes, D., Shakoor, I., Hampshire, K., & Croll, L. 2022), primary career-related experience is evident to help younger children understand the relevance of school learning, develop positive attitudes towards school, as well as explore and reflect on individuals' career possibilities, rather than limiting their choices early on (ibid).

The Careers and Enterprise Company, as the official executive arm of the UK national-level "Careers Strategy" policy in schools, concluded in their report, "*What works: career-related learning in primary schools*," (Department for Education, 2017) that "a small number of high-quality studies, as well as evidence from interviews with teachers and other leading experts in this field, suggest that participation in career-related learning can improve children's knowledge about work and help develop 'soft skills'" (Kashefpakdel, Rehill, and Hughes, 2018, p. 28).

In terms of parental involvement in young children's career-related learning, there is worldwide evidence recognizing the important role that parents play in young children's career development and how childhood experiences can shape their futures (Liu, J., Watson, M., & McMahon, M., 2015; Commonwealth of Australia Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021), and some research claimed that "parents are powerful agents in the socialization of children to work" (Oliveira et al., 2020, p. 63). Career and Enterprises Company's nationwide evaluation found that 'some of the activities have actually worked better when they have been done at home' and 'pupils actually felt more confident working on their own ideas at home and having the time and space to think about them rather than doing it in a group setting' (The Research Base, 2021, p. 33-34). 'Home learning' and 'parental engagement' are identified as effective delivery means of career-related learning among primary-age children in the UK.

Under the contexts of current international discourse of career-related learning in primary schools as well as the wisdom gained from the ten-year project, CLAP@JC which influenced over one-third of Hong Kong secondary schools, this paper aims to explore key concepts and principles for Hong Kong primary schools to design their own primary LPE (or career-related learning, CRE).

Interface Matters: Primary LPE as Precursor for Secondary CLD

Apart from the six above-stated principles derived by the UK practitioners, global experiences suggest that *good interfacing with secondary school CLD provisions* is the most essential principle that no primary school practitioners or planners should ignore. First, it is undesirable for a young person to repeat similar types of CLD activities (e.g., completing Holland's code assessment, workplace encounter activities) year after year, both in primary and secondary school. Second, good learning activities should be 'spiraled' upwards, notably from simple to complex along different levels of education. According to Bruner, who famously highlighted the importance of spiral curriculum that enable learners to obtain the most "fundamental understanding" of a certain subject 'with solid grasp' before introducing more complex topics of the subject (Bruner, 1960, p. 31). Such a spiral curriculum design perspective, which is usually coupled with the emphasis of 'horizontal knowledge' of a subject, such as specialized language, frameworks, and a special mode of interrogation (Bernstein, 1999, p. 162), dominates the school sector worldwide (Hooley, 2021, pp. 12-13), while most 'educators from different fields' are more inclined to adopt a *non-linear, network* model of curriculum design orientation as an alternative to the conventional spiral model (Ireland & Mouthaan, 2020).

Considering building 'spiral curriculum' learning in LPE, it is generally expected by schools that a common development-stage framework for LPE (primary) in specifying expected knowledge³ and 'soft skills'⁴ gained at each level when a child migrates from primary education to secondary education.

³ Includes 'horizontal knowledge' of a subject such as its terminologies/ 'language', frameworks/ broad structures of concepts.

⁴ Including values, attitudes and generic skills.

In search of a *good interfacing* issue, our key question is, what are the expected outcomes of Upper Primary LPE as foundation that enables students to benefit from secondary LPE? Do we expect schools to launch an ‘*early start*’ of the CLD processes like those in secondary schools, which are concentrated in career counselling, workplace experiences and decision making? Or should schools regard Primary LPE as a ‘precursor’ of secondary CLD education in the current system? The above two positionings are mutually exclusive or dichotomic; however, primary school educators should take the positioning of ‘*Primary LPE as precursor of Secondary CLD*’, based on two well-supported reasons. First, it is about age-appropriateness. According to Super (1996), primary-age children (in this case, aged 8-12) are in the latter phase of the ‘*Growth*’ career development stage (ages 0 to 14), during which they are generally not ready in full-scale career exploration, but more in *developing* their self-concept and attitudes towards work or future study life. Therefore, the emphasis of Primary LPE should be on holistic personal development, rather than narrow decision-making. Students should be encouraged to learn about *work* in general, develop vocational interests, and begin to understand their own needs and limitations, under the big theme of self-understanding and personal development. Instead of extensively exploring different career roles and making early career choices in Primary LPE, educators should concentrate on developing *positive mindsets* towards their own future to cultivate own soft skills for expanding their own future career possibilities.

Second, the ‘precursor’ positioning is found to be more aligned with primary curriculum than the ‘start-early’ orientation, which expects independent ‘transplantation’ of secondary CLD activities with minor activity-age adaptations, to primary school contexts. Such a ‘*copy and paste*’ (or ‘bolting-on’) style of LPE could be controversial when young children are coerced to make up their minds about their future dreams/goals and subsequently requested them to devise plans. On the other hand, the precursor orientation encourages young children to familiarize the specialized language, conceptual frameworks, and a special mode of interrogation under CLD. In Bruner’s terms, the ‘horizontal knowledge’ of CLD would then prepare young children for entering another new chapter of schooling in which they would emerge in different secondary career guidance provisions under a broad-brush spiral curriculum design. Ill-structured, network-based curriculum design in early stages is not appropriate because studies showed that non-spiral (or the non-linear, network model) design often carries the risk of introducing too much complexity at the early stages of learning (Efland, 2002). This is applied particularly to non-factual or value-laden topics, such as arts subjects (Ireland & Mouthaan, 2020; Perkins, D., 1989) and a hybrid approach is usually deployed. Clearly the ‘precursor’ mode would give certain level of spiral design to the LPE in terms of good interfacing with secondary education, under the curriculum design perspective. So, what’s to be precursive learning in upper primary education?

Mindset Matters: Preparing Children for Career and Life Planning

Prominent philosophers in education, such as Dewey and Freire, advocated that education itself is about unlocking individual potential through experience and interaction with the world, rather than pre-destining their futures with ‘fixed mindsets’ (Dweck, 2006). Growth-related mindsets are often developed with impacts in early school life experiences, according to Dweck and school researchers (Savvides, H., & Bond, C., 2021). With Primary LPE positioned as the precursor to Secondary CLD, educators can begin discussing what exactly is to be cultivated through LPE. According to Super and leading theorists (e.g., Savickas), children in this age range need to be nurtured with *mindsets* that prepare them for the career exploration life stage, for forming their own career identity as they progress through later life stages. Considering the interface experiences with the well-established secondary schools’ CLD programs and the common systematic HKBM framework of the CLAP@JC⁵ project (Holman, J. & Yip, S.Y.W. 2020; Yip, Wu & Chun, 2024), three major mindsets are derived as essential learning for primary students as precursors of their future secondary CLD (Yip, S. Y, W., 2023) (See Appendix 2). They are:

- Mindset 1: building a positive sense of future (Future-Me)
- Mindset 2: nurturing a sense of journey in life (Journey-Me)
- Mindset 3: sustaining an active sense of self-development for reaching personal goals and dreams (Future-ready-Me)

Chan and Lee (2023), in the EDB-commissioned review presentation of primary LPE, highlighted *three* components to prepare young children for the workplace: (1) Mindsets/worldviews (including views on vocation), (2) skills, and (3) knowledge (Lee & Chan, 2023).

⁵ CLAP@JC – Clap for Youth @JC project is a ten-year large-scale project in HK and Hong Kong Benchmarks for Career and Life Development (HKBM) is developed to facilitate improvement in CLD among secondary schools.

Such a mindset-based approach to Primary LPE is well-chosen in a way that it blends well with the recipients' age and career development stage (Super, 1996) and aligns with various local government policy guides, which strongly emphasize positive values and attitudes in the developmental design of LPE (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2021; Yip, S. Y. W., 2023). It also aligns with international practices, such as those in the UK, which emphasize learning about the future and personal career and life possibilities as the core - the focus for primary schools should not be on 'careers advice' but on 'career-related learning' (Chambers, 2018). The three precursor-oriented mindsets underpinned the need of adopting relevant frames of mind at this age group: the relationships between Future and present me, Life journey/ paths and present me, as well as becoming future-ready and present me.

The following chapters will cover the three prerequisite mindsets of secondary CLD interventions, with discussions on their theoretical foundations and, where applicable, illustrative examples from global practitioners.

Mindset 1: Building a positive sense of the future

“Through ... a tool for quality reflection, students can further develop their life planning skills, career aspirations, and sense of future” (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2020, Primary Education Curriculum Guide, Booklet 7 on Life-wide Learning and Experiential Learning).

Few studies specified 'sense of future' as a key notion in the field of career education and guidance; however, the meaning behind this notion is a prominent core for helping young people to embrace the dynamic change in the VUCA era⁶. In the school education field, 'sense of future' has at least two major dimensions of meaning. First, it refers to the futuristic account of the world that young learners would likely encounter, notably after their compulsory education, which includes lifestyle/societal changes due to fast-advancing technology and environmental shifts. Such a futurist dimension is essential for curriculum designers to map essential elements (e.g., competencies, soft skills, and hard skills) into whole-school curriculum frameworks, to enable learners to be 'future-ready' (Lam, A.M.H., 2023). Jacob Bronowski, through his book "A Sense of the Future," published in 1978, and many other scholars and agencies, including Yuval Noah Harari (2015, 2018, 2025) and the OECD Learning Compass 2030 (2023), advocated for necessary reforms in education under the *content-oriented* dimension of the sense of the future.

On the other side of the coin, 'sense of future' could be interpreted as the *literacy* and *disposition* of a person facing their own future, irrespective of what the changes might be ahead in personal life. In the book by Rick Szostak, *'Making Sense of the Future,'* it conceptualizes the sense of the future as involving five interlocking *process-based* concepts (2022):

- Setting Goals
- Plotting Strategies to Achieve Goals
- Predicting Plausible Futures
- Coping with Surprises
- Achieving Desirable Futures

In addition, 'future thinking' or 'future anticipation/management' has been recently highlighted as essential human endeavor with ever-increasing importance (Christian, D., 2022). Different modes of future thinking may likely create anxiety or hope. It is found that "slow" (or "elite") future thinking mode that featured by more focused consciousness, step-by-step process, and checks of conclusions, is better with optimized performances, than the "fast" (or "popular") future thinking which are *ad hoc* and often with effort-consuming outcomes, according to brain research (Kahneman, D, 2011).

These concepts broadly echo Savickas' career construction and life design theories (Savickas & Pouyaud, 2016), which suggest that the personal future has room for active individual sophisticated intervention and reactions in the present sense within dynamic career world contexts. One of the most successful educational exemplars in helping primary children develop a positive sense of the future is the international "**Drawing the Future**" (Chambers, N. et al., 2018) project supported by OECD and Education & Employment, which asked primary-age children (ages 7-11) to draw out their future careers/jobs with afterwards explanations. The survey revealed that only 1% of participants were aware of a job opportunity presented by someone visiting the school. 36% of participants based their career aspirations on someone they know, with 45% being influenced by TV, film, social media, and radio.

⁶ VUCA – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

Studies also revealed that a positive sense of future (or career aspirations) is limited among disadvantaged children between the ages of 7 and 11. The 'Drawing the future' study could be adopted as an effective pedagogical tool to enable children to talk about their career dreams that could pave the way to secondary-level career guidance intervention. Schools should create more meaningful experience for young children to *think about their future* with positive dispositions, to build a 'sense of future' mindset.

Mindset 2: Nurturing a Sense of Journey towards Life

Life as a journey is a commonly used metaphor that helps people to view life as an *ongoing/progressive*, and *non-mechanistic* process. Philosophically speaking, under such metaphor, time can be viewed as either 'a river' or 'a map' which would affect our worldviews of determinism and life-event causation (Christian, D., 2022, p19-38). Previous work has suggested that people who have successfully navigated challenging times tend to adopt a more flexible and interpretive view of life experiences 'as a journey'. It is suggested that *'thinking of life as a journey might help people cope better with their negative experiences in general, such as feeling older'* (Oh, 2019). Some empirical evidence also suggests that the more life is conceptualized as a journey, the smaller the detrimental effect of subjective age on subjective health in aging studies. In sum, a 'journey mindset' should be introduced at a younger age, especially in school education to build a concrete foundation facilitate people for future life planning.

In the field of career psychology, studies have shown the importance of using *life journey maps* (Table 3) as a holistic and reflective approach to capture career identity experiences in the engineering field (Young, A. et al., 2023). Such a journey-based metaphoric tool (Dagg et al., 2019) often leads to greater job satisfaction and career commitment (Sheppard et al., 2015). In addition, the journey-map approach can help young people explore resilience and **perseverance** as a process in which participants *rewrite* their pasts and *reimagine* their futures (Neale, 2017).

Table 3: Journey-map approach in career psychology: a case example

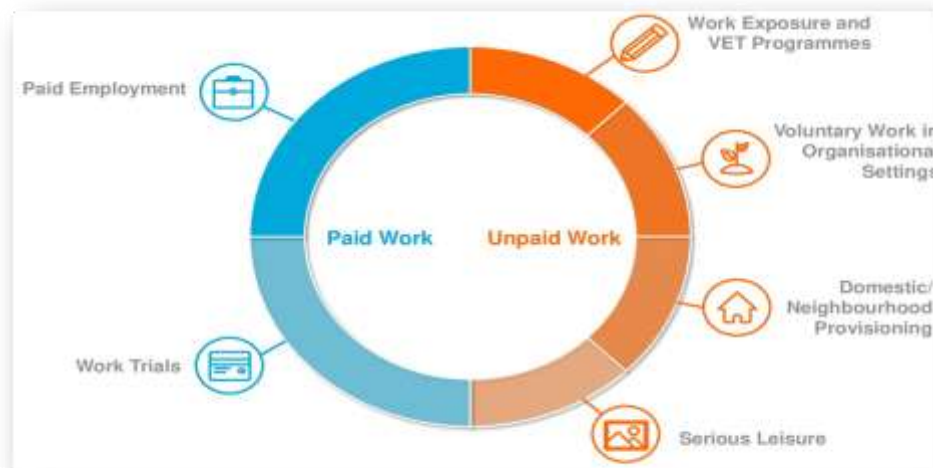
Decade	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2008 Crisis	2010s	2015 Rescue
Economic trend	Stagnation	Growth	Growth	Recession	Growth	Growth	Recession	Stabilisation	Growth
Age range	0-5	6-15	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	About 55	56-60	About 60
Larry	Childhood	Adolescence. Awareness of family problems.	Leaves school. Apprenticeship. Marriage. First Child.	Moves to civil service occupation. Three children born.	Dealing with childhood memories. Separation. Moves to commuter town.	Builds house in rural area. Meets second wife.	Birth fifth child.	Austerity cuts. Retires. Sixth child born. Critical financial difficulties.	Struggling to accept decision to sell house and moves in wife's family.

Such a journey-map approach is broadly supported by Super, who highlights the progressiveness across different career developmental life stages. In a nutshell, Super's career development theory perceives a career as a journey through 'life stages,' emphasizing self-concept development and lifelong learning. The theory identifies five to six key stages of lifelong development: *growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, decline, and disengagement* (Super et al., 1996), which are influenced by various life roles and contexts. Super's "Life span, Life space" theory highlights the dynamic interplay between an individual's self-concept, life roles, and the external factors that shape their career path over time. The Life-Career Rainbow is a visual tool to represent these roles and their salience at different points in time. According to the theory, primary school-age youngsters are in the later stage of 'growth,' heading to the dawn of career and life *exploration* and such metaphoric tool and its journey-map mindset would be useful for young children to imagine their possible futures.

In late 2025, as a spin-off pilot from the CLAP@JC, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust launched a small-scale project, known as “**I am an explorer,**” partnering 22 primary schools pairing with several non-government organisations (NGOs). It highlights the ‘explorer identity’ that comprises courage, *learning, appreciation, and passions* as the core development goals of upper-primary LPE. In a nutshell, the pilot project comprises 12 sessions in pilot schools, incorporating curricular/life-wide learning/co-curricular activities for all Key Stage 2 students. The program is designed to enable participants to embrace key identity concepts for career and life explorers. The process principle is to enhance *student agency* through a youth-led orientation, well-tested in HKBM implementation in secondary schools, through which addresses the local socio-cultural contexts in a Confucian Heritage Culture society (Yip, Holman, & Lam, 2024; Zou et al., 2016).

In sum, nurturing *a sense of journey in life* among primary-age students is notably defined as a journey-map mindset with a strong sense of building ‘explorer identity’. In addition, a board game, titled ‘**Every Step Counts,**’ was designed by a group of student ambassadors in the CLAP@JC's Joint School CLD Club, as a resource production co-created by the Education University of Hong Kong and partner NGOs. The board game incorporates several essential concepts from CLD in the project to foster a progressive sense of journey towards life among younger students. The first concept is the Extended Notion of Work (ENOW) (Figure 1), which helps young people understand that the notion of ‘work’ encompasses a broad spectrum of definitions, ranging from paid work and voluntary service to household work and serious leisure (Wong & Yip, 2019). The second CLD concept (developed by CLAP@JC; CLAP@JC, 2024a) is about personal attributes categorized by Values (V), Attitudes (A), Skills (S), and Knowledge (K) that could be matched with different vocational careers (CLAP@JC, n.d.; OECD, 2024). Participants of the board game are asked to collect V.A.S.K. cards (with desirable ENOW cards) and make decisions when opportunity cards are drawn. The board game and the applied concepts may be suitable for upper primary students, with some adaptations.

Figure 1: Extended Notion of Work (E.N.O.W.) (developed by CLAP@JC)



Mindset 3: Sustaining an active sense of self-development for personal goals and dreams

According to Côté's *identity capital* model (1997), childhood experiences are grounded in the construction of identity; observations of attitudes towards work within families, cultural stereotypes, and examples in the media may influence children's understanding of work and the range of pathways to the future and, in turn, their occupational identities (Schleicher, 2018; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). Career-related learning (also known as Learning about the World of Work or LPE) at an early age can serve as a tool to guide and assist children in understanding who they are and in shaping a strong, purposeful sense of identity (Côté, 1997).

A sense of self-development for pursuing personal goals and dreams is crucial in both individual career development and life-long learning journeys. It energizes young children to explore wide range of opportunities from the outside world, and to develop a ‘better me’ in opening more personal possibilities in individual future career journeys. Additionally, it addresses the *trap* of 'over-early specialization' through pre-matured career decision-making among primary-age children. Gottfredson (2002) emphasizes that during early development, children engage in a process of ruling out career options.

As they progress through the growth stage, they start dismissing certain jobs, roles, and interests based on their self-image—sometimes in ways that may limit their potential or reflect negative self-perceptions. Consequently, children might restrict their learning and career options during a stage when their perspectives are still developing and their exposure to different possibilities is too limited to make well-informed decisions. LPE in primary schools should never be in a way that coerces children to make premature choices over 'fixed' future careers and 'fixed' personal attributes. Instead, it should be a process of personal development that encourages children to encounter a multitude of career options in terms of now and future, as well as emphasizing the value of developing a 'better-me' in pursuing personal aspirations and dreams.

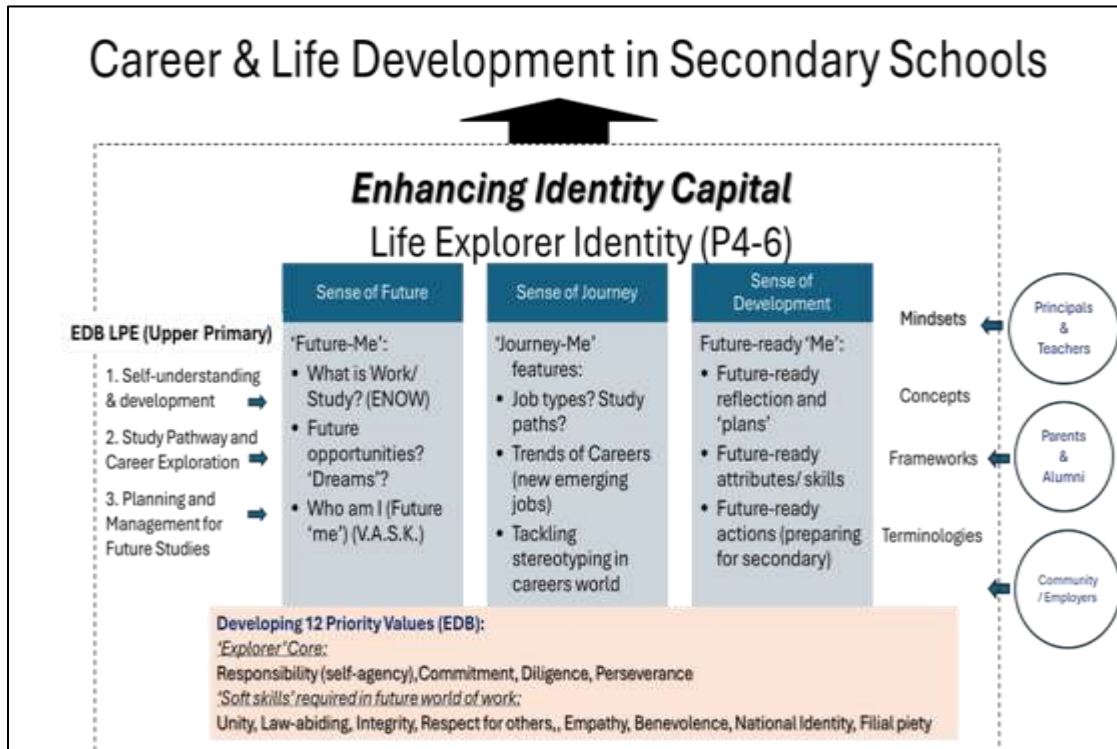
Many educational examples aim to help young children gain momentum to develop themselves for fulfilling their own career and life dreams, through making meaningful encounters with specially selected persons from outside school, who usually have non-conventional and non-linear career trajectories. In the CLAP@JC project in Hong Kong, secondary schools are encouraged to collaborate and organize joint-school (hub-based) events, such as **V.A.S.K. Human Libraries** and career expos. The V.A.S.K. Human Library approach involves the conventional idea of human libraries for career development (The Human Libraries, n.d.) that aims to invite people from diverse professional backgrounds ("Human Books") to schools, libraries, or community centers to share their CLD experiences under the framework of V.A.S.K. with "readers" (students or career explorers) in both a personal, conversational format and in an experiential learning format (e.g., bringing in some tools, tasks, or friends from everyday workplace). Readers also need to self-assess their V.A.S.K. and aspirations before attending the event for post-activity reflection. The effect and dynamics are still needed to be explored through rigorous research.

Constructing *Life Explorer Identity* through adopting senses of future, journey, and development

According to Super, upper primary students are entering into the later stage of growth in the career life rainbow. In this life phase, they are typically learning to construct life roles, both present and future. By developing a strong sense of self-concept, career-related learning, in whatever form it takes, can help individuals align their choices with their evolving abilities, interests, and life circumstances, leading to a positive future with greater job satisfaction and a more fulfilling career path. It aligns with Côté's '*identity capital*' model, which encompasses expansive social networks, self-efficacy, motivation, financial support, adaptability, and resilience, all of which contribute to personal career development (Côté, J.E., 1997). Such multifaceted capital could serve as an exploration base for children at the primary-education phase and inform a sense of what is possible in own future (The Research Base, 2021).

A curriculum framework for LPE for upper primary students is suggested in Figure 2, based on the literature and conceptual review presented in this paper. It comprises the core of the three fundamental mindsets that are necessary for building a 'life explorer' identity under Côté's '*identity capital* model' (Kashefpakdel, Rehill & Hughes, 2018, p1-2) that could be summarized or unpacked by three questions: Who am I? Me and Future me (sense of future); What will be out there for me? Now and Future (sense of journey); How to be future-ready? Now and beyond (sense of self-development). By synthesizing the three 'precursive mindsets for life explorers' with the expected outcome components (i.e. self-understanding and development, study path and career exploration, planning and management for future studies) mandated by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, an outline of the curriculum framework for Upper Primary LPE is constructed with key stakeholders' inputs (e.g. teachers/school leaders, parents & alumni, and enterprises/community) and alignment with policy imperatives of values education in schools (e.g. 12 priority values). The learning objects are taxonomies into four levels: mindsets, concepts/ knowledge, Frameworks/ categorization and vocabulary and 'language' as the **horizontal knowledge** of LPE curriculum (Bruner, 1960).

Figure 2: Outline of Curriculum Framework for LPE (Upper Primary)



The above literature review synthesizes various sources of theories, research and practices related to 'career-related learning' in primary schools. It helps to propose the aforementioned curriculum content framework demonstrated as a **precursor to secondary-level career guidance** under the Hong Kong LPE policies (Appendix 2). The following chapters will cover the preparedness, approach, and support needed by schools and teachers in delivering quality LPE.

Good Implementation in Schools: Whole-school curriculum-oriented approach for LPE (Upper Primary)

Embedding CLD elements in the school curriculum and successful leadership of a school are two of the six fundamental principles for implementing CLD in primary school contexts, according to recent experience with career-related learning in the UK (Kashefpakdel, Rehill & Hughes, 2018). These principles align well with secondary CLD data in Hong Kong, and the study shows that both *visible school policy*⁷ and *leadership and capacity building of the career team*⁸ are making a significant impact on students' career readiness in the schools. In this light, the programmes related to cultivation of the three precursive mindsets (i.e., senses of future, development, and journey) are not ideally delivered in standalone activities, as if the learning is unrelated to those happening in the mainstream school curriculum. As a matter of facts, many essential elements of LPE are already existing in the current school curricula, under the reform of 'Learning to Learn 2.0+' (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2022). In view of the *totality* and *spiral progressiveness* of student experiences in career-related learning, schools need to map these elements (e.g., mindsets, core elements, relevant priority values) against curriculum links as illustrated as school-based example in Table 4.

⁷ Represented as Benchmark (BM)1 in HKBM.

⁸ Represented as Benchmark (BM)2 in HKBM; Both BM1 and 2 are designed as the Core component.

Table 4: Curriculum Mapping of LPE (Upper Primary)—Core Elements, Mindsets & Values

Primary LPE Mindset	Exemplary Activity	LPE Core Element (EDB)	Possible Priority values (EDB)	Curriculum implementation & links
Positive sense of Future	Draw the Future "I am Explorer"	- Self-understanding & development	Responsibility (self-agency)	P4 Personal growth lessons/ life-wide learning/ cross- curricular project/day/week Future Career life as worker; building extends from P3 Hum 3.5 (Community Life)
Sense of Journey towards Life	Every Step Counts boardgame Workplace visits 'Life Snapshots' Life event approach "I am Explorer"	- Study Pathway and Career Exploration	Perseverance Responsibility (self-agency) Commitment Diligence	P4, P5 Personal growth lessons/ life-wide learning/ cross- curricular project/week/day Career stereotyping (gender, VPET, ethnicity) (Hum 5.1.2, 3,7, etc)
Active sense of development towards personal goals/ dreams	"I am Explorer" VASK Human Libraries/ Case-based learning from stories Simulated interviews for future study/jobs	- Self-understanding & development; - Planning and Management for Future Studies	Commitment Responsibility (self-agency) Diligence Soft skills in future workplace: Unity Law-abiding, Integrity Respect for others, Empathy, Benevolence National Identity, Filial piety	P4, P5, P6 Personal growth lessons/ life-wide learning/ cross- curricular project/week/day Common good as career aims in Hum 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 (Smart money, Economy of HK, national development) + 6.5, 6.7 (Care for HK, Exploring the World)

School Survey: Roles and Preparedness of Primary Teachers towards LPE

From the above discussion, we conclude that (i) no matter what name it is called, LPE, career-related learning, or CRE, it is about *learning*, not about advice or decision making. (ii) LPE (Upper Primary) is best viewed as the *precursor* of secondary CLD, not a simple start-early provision. (3) LPE (Upper Primary) should have strong *connectivity* (or embedment) with the school curriculum, especially values education that would synergies the cultivation of positive life explorer identity through developing senses of future, journey, and self-development. It is not difficult to realize the importance of roles and preparedness of teachers' (and school leaders') in LPE (Upper Primary).

Since 2022, the Education Bureau has been encouraging primary school leaders and teachers in LPE to attend 21 hours of professional training provided by teacher training agencies, e.g., the Education University of Hong Kong. A survey on school preparedness in LPE was conducted in the 2023-24 academic year (n = 101). Three parts of the questionnaire are (i) agreement to the policy of LPE (Upper Primary); (ii) degree of preparedness; and (iii) receiving support in implementing LPE.

Views on the expected learning outcomes of LPE (Upper Primary) framework:

Teachers were asked to comment on the *degree of agreement* on the ten expected learning outcomes. The results are tabulated in Table 5 below. Overall, primary teachers generally agree with the objectives of the LPE framework, with an aggregated agreement rate of 91.8%. Most teachers agreed that LPE could help their students' self-understanding (e.g., ability, personality, interests, aspirations) (98.5%). Teachers tended to agree less with the EDB framework, expecting that primary LPE could help students face challenges from rapid societal change (85.3%), tackle gender stereotyping & job biases (88.2%), and prepare them to transition to secondary schools (88.2%).

The ten items are categorized into three life explorer mindsets and the mean score of each mindset (highest score is 5) is listed below:

- Sense of future: 4.15
- Sense of journey: 4.14
- Sense of self-development: 4.20

The result shows that schoolteachers support more on 'LPE as self-*development*' objectives in comparison with the LPE as *future-thinking* and as *journey-map thinking*. This indicates that the conceptual training and lobbying of 'LPE as precursor' is not sufficient and many may mis-interpret LPE (Upper Primary) is to coerce young children to make pre-matured career decisions via offering 'advice' by teachers. The positioning of LPE (Upper Primary) requires stronger clarifications from the authority to ensure better support from teachers.

Table 5: Teacher views on LPE (upper primary) expected learning outcomes

Core elements and expected learning in LPE (Upper Primary)	Teachers' views
A. LPE helps students with self-understanding (e.g. personality, interests and aspirations).	4.29 (0.55) > 98.5%
B. LPE helps students in setting personal goals, motivates them in preparation for study and life	4.16 (0.73) > 94.1%
C. LPE helps students in tackling gender stereotyping and job biases.	3.99 (0.84) > 88.2%
D. LPE helps students to know secondary education systems, language medium and subjects etc; prepare them to migrate to secondary levels.	4.18(0.84) > 88.2%
E. LPE helps students to understand the connections between job types and school subjects	4.16 (0.66) > 91.2%
F. LPE helps students to understand the rapid societal change/ trends and assists them to face challenges	4.01 (0.87) > 85.3%
G. LPE helps students to discover personal dreams; through self-understanding to realize the relationship between study path choices and dreams.	4.22 (0.60) > 91.2%
H. LPE helps students to share their aspirations and expectations in future study/ work and lifestyle.	4.16 (0.64) > 89.7%
I. LPE helps students to choose prospective secondary schools and set appropriate goals for preparation.	4.18 (0.57) > 91.2%
J. LPE helps students to cultivate positive values and attitudes (e.g. punctuality, responsibility, integrity) and understand the importance of these virtues in future study and careers.	4.34 (0.64) > 94.1%
Composite score/Overall percentage (N=101)	4.17 (0.69) > 91.8%

Preparedness in schools and among Primary Teachers:

Teachers were asked to describe the degree of readiness in implementing LPE (Upper Primary) against each expected learning outcome. In parallel, they also rated the preparedness of their school to deliver LPE similarly. Overall, only roughly half of the teacher respondents (54.4%) think they are prepared to deliver LPE against the expected learning items, and relatively fewer (45.9%) think that their schools are prepared to deliver. Individual items showed that teachers are relatively *more prepared* in (i) cultivating positive values and attitudes related to the future world of work (63.2%), (ii) helping students to discover dreams (61.8%), and (iii) tackling gender stereotyping and job biases (57.3%). Teachers found that they are less prepared in (i) helping students to understand and cope with a rapidly changing world (45.6%); (ii) helping students with self-understanding (e.g., ability, personality, interests, aspirations) (47.1%). On the other hand, regarding school preparedness, teachers believe that their schools are better equipped to help students choose appropriate schools (61.8%) and cultivate positive values and attitudes (57.4%). Similar to teacher readiness, teachers believe that their schools are seriously less prepared to help students understand and cope with a rapidly changing world (33.8%). Similar pattern is found when items are grouped into the three mindset categories. The mean score (highest score is 5) are as follows (Table 6):

- Sense of future: 4.15
- Sense of journey: 4.14
- Sense of self-development: 4.20

Teachers are more prepared in helping primary students in building the sense of self-development and less ready to enable students to reflect and imagine their own futures or future life journeys.

Table 6: Teacher and School preparedness in LPE (upper primary) expected learning outcomes

Personal preparedness to deliver LPE	Core elements and expected learning in LPE (Upper Primary)	School preparedness to deliver LPE
3.32 (0.85) > 47.1%	A. LPE helps students with self-understanding (e.g. personality, interests and aspirations).	3.09 (0.97) > 38.2%
3.46 (0.82) > 54.4%	B. LPE helps students in setting personal goals, motivates them in preparation for study and life	3.32 (0.78) > 44.1%
3.41 (0.93) > 57.3%	C. LPE helps students in tackling gender stereotyping and job biases.	3.09 (0.94) > 38.2%
3.46 (0.89) > 55.9%	D. LPE helps students to know secondary education systems, language medium and subjects etc; prepare them to migrate to secondary levels.	3.46(0.85) > 54.4%
3.32 (0.94) > 51.5%	E. LPE helps students to understand the connections between job types and school subjects	3.28 (0.84) > 47.1%
3.16 (0.99) > 45.6%	F. LPE helps students to understand the rapid societal change/ trends and assists them to face challenges	3.03 (0.88) > 33.8%
3.56 (0.84) > 61.8%	G. LPE helps students to discover personal dreams; through self-understanding to realize the relationship between study path choices and dreams.	3.32 (0.76) > 44.1%
3.35 (0.84) > 51.5%	H. LPE helps students to share their aspirations and expectations in future study/ work and lifestyle.	3.28 (0.81) > 39.7%
3.60 (0.76) > 55.9%	I. LPE helps students to choose prospective secondary schools and set appropriate goals for preparation.	3.65 (0.81) > 61.8%
3.65 (0.88) > 63.2%	J. LPE helps students to cultivate positive values and attitudes (e.g. punctuality, responsibility, integrity) and understand the importance of these virtues in future study and careers.	3.54 (0.80) > 57.4%
3.43 (0.82)>54.4%	Composite score/Overall percentage (N=101)	3.30 (0.85)>45.9%

Receiving support for delivering LPE:

Respondents were asked to report where the school receives support in implementing LPE (Table 7 and Table 8). 36.6% of schools received support from community NGOs, and 26.7% received support from the Education Bureau. Some claimed to have support from their school's sponsoring bodies (16.8%) and alumni (11.9%). Only 8% of respondents found the support to be sufficient, and nearly 60% found that the support on LPE to be insufficient. Three key areas for support are teacher training, curriculum/cross-curricular frameworks, and resources (including teaching and learning materials and financial support).

Table 7: Support of LPE in primary schools

<input type="checkbox"/> Education Bureau (26.7%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Community groups/ NGOs (36.6%)
<input type="checkbox"/> School Sponsoring Body (16.8%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Alumni (11.9%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Charitable organizations/ business partners (4, 4%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (e.g. uniformed groups__ (6.9%)
<input type="checkbox"/> Parents (7.9%)	

Table 8: Open-end suggested comments on the support of LPE in primary schools

<i>Do you think the existing support is sufficient?</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sufficient (8 %)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sufficient (57.4%)
<p><u>Future support strengthening suggested:</u> Teacher training, seminars (8) Curriculum and cross-curricular framework (5) Lesson time organization (1) Enhancing parent education and understanding (2) LPE activity information and channels (1) Resource support (e.g. financial and learning) (4) Activity exemplars (1)</p>	

Conclusion

Career education (also known as career-related learning, career-related experiences, LPE and CRE) in primary schools has been thriving in school sectors around the world over the past decade. Recent evidence from a UK study, '*Starting Early: Building the foundations for success makes the case for career-related learning in primary schools*' (Percy & Amegah, 2021), suggests that 82% found the pragmatic connections between subject studying and future jobs. 84% of children were helped in tackling gender stereotyping through career-related learning. 78% of them were boosted with self-confidence and a positive sense of the future with possibilities available for them (ibid). Hong Kong uses the term 'Life Planning Education' (LPE) to promote such career-related learning among younger children, partly because of the successful implementation of LPE in secondary schools, which has been progressing with social impacts (Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, 2025; Ngai et al., 2023), and cross-sector recognition over the last decade.

From the literature review and its conceptual framework construction, it is concluded that 'Life explorer identity' needs to be systematically nurtured from young through broad-based curriculum innovations, and their effectiveness requires further empirical validation and/or reality checks in schools. It consists of *mindset building*, namely a positive sense of the future (**Future-Me**), a sense of journey towards life (**Journey-Me**), and an active sense of self-development (**Future-ready Me**). Through well-designed learning activities, which include meaningful encounters with the world of work and experiential learning to develop self-agency, dispositions and 'soft skills' e.g., empathetic collaboration, leadership/teamwork/unity, integrity, and rule-abidingness, LPE (Upper Primary) should be organically embedded into the broad-spectrum school curriculum such as subjects or Key Learning Areas, values education, the Primary Humanities subject, the Primary Science subject, national security education. The proposed common LPE (Upper Primary) **mindset learning** framework requires rigorous articulation in delineating how year groups in upper primary progressively engage in various experiences and expose students to further education paths, transitional pathways, and the world of work, including links with future employers/ employees of some newly emerged careers. Future study is expected to confirm the impact on young people's **identity capital**.

Regarding teacher preparation, a clearer professional development framework with tangible, expected roles for primary teachers should be issued by the authorities. One of the essential objectives of professional development is about the positioning of LPE as the precursor of secondary career guidance through mindset preparing, when survey findings show teachers are less prepared in these aspects. Strong school leadership is necessary to support teachers in integrating LPE elements into various components of school education, both within and outside of the classroom (Education and Employment, 2019). This involves another dimension of leadership skills that value networking and coordination within and *outside* schools with external agencies, alumni, parents, and experts from various vocational fields (CLAP@JC, 2024b). It is therefore important to professionalize the teaching force systematically, including initial teacher training and in-service professional development programs with fair exposures in the modern workplaces. Deep and community-oriented networking with secondary schools is an essential professional support for the emerging primary LPE initiative under the concept of 'school hubs for CLD,' which embodies the essence of community of practice, professional learning communities, and quality circles (Yip, 2025; Ngai et al, 2025). Further studies and projects are required to explore what 'good looks like' (Holman, 2014; Holman & Yip, 2020) in primary LPE on preparing students to be good life explorers.

Appendix 1: Career-related learning across the globe: *typical international examples*

1. Canada (Cahill & Furey, 2017; Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2017)

Across Canada, career-related learning can be broadly categorized into three strands (Godden et al., in press). Some provinces and territories have embraced a kindergarten to grade 12 (K–12) approach to career education. In other areas of the country, career education begins to emerge in grades 5 and 6, and in some regions, no formal career education is currently in place at the elementary level. Where formal curricula exist, they provide valuable pointers to worthwhile career-related learning that is easily adaptable and transferable to many contexts. Suppose you are in a jurisdiction with a more limited curriculum. In that case, it is worth examining what is happening in other parts of Canada to support your career-related learning practices.

2. Australia (Percy & Amegah, 2021).

Starting Early: Building the foundations for success makes the case for career-related learning in primary schools.

3. United States (e.g., State of Georgia) (District Administration, 2022).

Grades 1-5

Activities are designed to assist students and their families with answers to the following questions:

Who am I? (Aware of the world of work; the concept of work/vocation; work opportunities; career-related assessments; exposed to all career options*)

Where am I going? (Exploration during the middle grades / Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) by the end of 8th grade)

How am I going to be there? (Career-related information; career planning portfolio; coursework selection)

4. Singapore (Ministry of Education, n.d.; Catholic High School, n.d.)

Under the framework of Education and Career Guidance (ECG), students (usually P5 onwards) are guided to make use of the 'MySkillsFuture' portal to explore various education and career pathways. Through this exploration, pupils will gain accurate and comprehensive information, appreciating the value of education and occupation choices and how they can contribute to society. School-based programs, e.g., 'Teach me to Fish' (TM2F), are encouraged to provide our pupils with a more enriching and meaningful career learning experience. The framework consists of three dimensions: (1) Discovering purpose—Who am I?; (2) Exploring opportunities—Where do I want to go?; (3) Staying relevant—How do I get there?

Appendix 2: Pre-requisite learning in Upper Primary for CLD in HKBM-adopted secondary schools

HKBM (secondary schools) – What good looks like? (from CLAP@JC)	Expected pre-requisite concept learning in primary levels	Expected pre-requisite mindset learning in primary levels
Core		
A Stable and Visible Career and Life Development Policy (BM 1)	Not applicable	
Professional Competencies and Leadership (BM 2)		
Student-focused activities		
Learning from Multiple Pathways Information (BM 3)	E.N.O.W., job stereotyping, VPET, Life-long learning	Sense of Journey
Address the Needs of Each Student (BM 4)	V.A.S.K. (My Possibilities)	Sense of Development
Student Engagement and Co-creation (BM 5)	Y.D.I.F. (self-agency, imagination)	Sense of Future
Personal Guidance for Developing Career Roadmaps (BM 6)	Y.D.I.F. (goal setting, dream management) E.N.O.W. V.A.S.K.	Sense of Development Sense of Future Sense of Journey
Enabling Environment		
Linking Curriculum Learning to Career and Life Development (BM 7)	E.N.O.W. V.A.S.K., VPET, job stereotyping	Sense of Future Sense of Development
Meaningful Encounters with the Workplace (BM 8)	E.N.O.W. (incl. new job types) V.A.S.K., work ethics/ values	Sense of Future Sense of Journey
Meaningful Encounters with Further and Higher Education (BM 9)	E.N.O.W. (incl. new study paths) V.A.S.K., life-long learning, VPET	Sense of Future Sense of Journey
Meaningful Encounters with Further and Higher Education (BM 10)	Not applicable	

V.A.S.K – Values Attitudes, Skills, Knowledge

ENOW – Expanded Notion of Work

YDIF – Youth Development Intervention Framework

VPET – Vocational Professional Education and Training

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