

In education, career exploration is the process of researching, evaluating, and learning about modern work opportunities and how students can pursue the careers of their choice.

That makes career exploration one of the most important subjects in terms of long-term life planning for students in any grade.

How Does Career Exploration Work?

Different schools, education experts, and teachers all have a different way of teaching career exploration.

For the most part, they break down the four main steps that help students learn more about the working world around them.

1. Research
2. Evaluation
3. Discussion
4. Decision

Before jumping right into these steps, it's smart to start with a seed list of careers that are either common or popular in the world right now.

Careers like software developer, serial entrepreneur, social media strategist, and others are all great places to start for modern careers.

Each of these steps includes its own processes and procedures.

Career Exploration Step 1: Research

The research step of career exploration introduces students to specific careers that they want to understand more.

This is where students take seed list, choose a few careers that sound interesting, and learn more about them.

The most popular way is to have students go online to school-sanctioned websites to learn more. Another way is to lecture. This relies on knowledge of careers and traditional classroom resources (like textbooks).

A third way is to network with professionals in your area and have them come discuss their career with class.

This teaching method requires clearance from school and some degree of coordination with individuals outside school, which can get to be a lot of work on top of regular teaching responsibilities.

But if students seem drawn to one career in particular, a perfect opportunity to contact someone who actually works in that field to speak to class.

Career Exploration Step 2: Evaluation

The evaluation step of career exploration empowers students to analyse the research they've conducted so they can get a deeper understanding of their favourite jobs.

Part of that understanding may be learning that a career simply isn't a good fit for them at the moment.

That doesn't mean that students will completely disregard a career, especially if they're elementary- or middle-school aged students.

But it *does* mean that they can start looking into similar careers that may be more interesting to them.

The process tends to follow a similar pattern for any grade level in career exploration.

First, the students look at the career(s) that they chose to evaluate.

Then, they also look at the careers that support (or are supported by) their first career.

That lets students branch off from their initial career interest and learn more about a collection of careers instead of just one at a time.

This is especially useful for tech-oriented careers like a software developer.

Yes, software developers are highly in-demand right now, but to succeed, they need to work with information technology professionals, business professionals, quality assurance, marketing teams, and more.

In other words, a student may *start* the evaluation process by looking at a career that they think is perfect.

By the time they're done reading, they may have a different career aspiration, purely because they learned something new!

The important victory here is that you've expanded your students' horizons so that they can understand the breadth of possibilities in their futures.

Career Exploration Step 3: Discussion

The discussion step of career exploration encourages students to talk about what they learned with their peers.

This lets students compare the careers they chose, why they liked those careers, and other offshoot careers that they discovered.

Students may also learn about new job tracks from their peers. The student from our previous example could tell their friends about IT and how interesting it is.

Likewise, two students may find out that they have a mutual career interest and hit it off talking about the requirements and possibilities of the job.

Students may *also* disagree about which careers they like. This may sound like a problem on the surface, but it can actually lead to constructive and educational conversation.

Mediating the conversation, a little bit, each student discusses what they liked about one career and didn't like about another.

This helps students understand what interests can lead to other careers while providing them with a fresh perspective on careers in general.

Career Exploration Step 4: Decision

The decision step of career exploration revolves around students deciding which career they'd like to pursue more.

This *does not* mean that a student is choosing the career they'll be for their entire lives.

But — just like the first three steps of the career exploration process — it gives students a direction so they can follow their passion to a fulfilling career.

This phase is typically the fastest of the career exploration steps. You can set whatever requirements to help students move forward in their career curiosities.

Regardless, these four steps are the basics of career exploration.

So why go through all of this, anyway?

After all, if students are only for a semester or a quarter, can they really learn everything they need to improve their career outlooks?

The answer is yes!

Why Is Career Exploration Helpful?

First and most obviously, career exploration helps students discover the jobs that are available to them after they've graduated from school.

In addition, they also learn what level of education, work experience, and professionalism they need to succeed in their chosen career.

For example, someone who wants to go into marketing — a career available to individuals with or without a college education — requires significantly different requirements than someone who wants to pursue the decade of post-secondary education required to be a medical doctor.

Students also learn about the income they can expect from a career, how they can obtain that income, and how they can advance throughout the tiers of their career's expertise.

In other words, students get a head start on their post-school lives by learning about the real world.

After all, career exploration classes are responsible for creating internship, externship, co-op, and apprenticeship opportunities for students.

That's the final reason why career exploration is so helpful. With the right support and direction, students can actually start on their careers *today*.

They don't have to wait to graduate. They don't have to wait until they have a full resume of experience.

How Often Should Students Participate in Career Exploration?

First, measure the percentage of students in class who have concretely chosen a career they want to investigate further.

In other words, to keep track of how many students have a definite answer in the decide portion of career exploration.

For the students who don't have a definitive answer, have to follow up with them to get them engaged with the subject or a career that's more suited to their interests.

Another way to measure success is with a summative assessment given as a traditional test or essay.

The students who aren't quite feeling the career exploration class may have more difficulty. Again, this shows you that they didn't quite engage with the curriculum as you might've wanted, which gives the opportunity to circle back and engage these students in other ways.

With these two options, to run a career exploration class with a clear indicator of success!