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Advanced Project

Competence Statement (F-12): Can Contribute to Early Career Mentorship Through Literature.

How Early Literature Can Impact Career Development During Adulthood

Determining a career path upon entering adulthood has critical implications on both an individual and societal level. On an individual level, matters such as financial security, personal satisfaction and occupational stability are all relevant considerations. On a societal level, individual career-related choices can result in adding vital contributions to society, creating social waste, or perhaps in some cases, detracting from societal progression. Furthermore, it is no mystery to consumers that companies with highly motivated employees generally provide the highest quality service, and create the highest quality goods. If these points are true, then businesses, which straddle the bridge between the individual and society, clearly have a vested interest in understanding how and why individuals choose careers.

While technological advancement tends to marginalize the importance of labor, which is often viewed as mundane or physically taxing, this advancement might not be possible without clean streets, the delivery of goods, and the performance of routine services. All occupations that fulfill the actual needs of society are inherently contributory. When considered in this way, there is nearly an endless array of dutiful and worthy occupational paths, which can serve society, and befit the talents and desires of the majority of individuals. This train of thought might suggest that it is primarily important that members of society purposefully and vigorously pursue career paths, which fulfill both individual needs, and the needs of society. Moreover, there is a collective need for society to acknowledge the vital nature of all work.

In this work, I will assess certain reasons why many adults may fail to maintain a progressive career path, or become dissatisfied in their careers. I will then propose a solution centered upon introducing occupational possibilities through children's literature. After first calling attention to

evidence for these problems, I will examine early educational methods, and explain why children's literature may be a viable solution. I will then introduce a personal work of children's literature that serves as an adaptable model for bolstering career exploration during youth. My work entitled, *One Plane Day,* describes the occupational environment of a professional pilot using vibrant color imagery and descriptive dialogue. This work allows readers to explore and grasp what the work environment of a professional pilot is actually like, and draws upon my own personal experience in the field. My analysis of current problems with career progression, and use of literature to provide early career mentorship, cannot single-handedly prevent career dissatisfaction. However, the critical nature of this subject demands thoughtful examination and potential solutions. Without question, the children of today will both mobilize and advance the world of tomorrow. Even the smallest of initiatives, which strives to hone the skills and talents of each and every individual in society, might well be one of the most progressive steps that individuals, businesses, and society as a whole, can take in cultivating the unique abilities of each person.

Assessing Career Progression and Dissatisfaction

While there are continually new occupational paths arising as a result of technology and societal progression, some research is suggesting that there are signs that many adults are having significant difficulty in pursuing the career choices that are available. In order to alleviate this problem that may have relevant implications on both an individual and societal level, it will need to first be made clear what is causing this result. As Yorke's 1999 research explained, the top reasons for ceasing to pursue a field related to mere difficulty in choosing a specific career path (19). An equally troubling and related dilemma concerns career dissatisfaction. While career satisfaction can be difficult to quantify, since it is often associated with spillover stemming from life satisfaction, some research is suggesting some surprisingly high rates of job and/or career dissatisfaction, which do not seem to be merely related to compensation or working conditions (Cotton and Tuttle 68). For example, the results of the Shanafelt et al. study, which fielded job satisfaction among nearly eight thousand surgeons, showed that roughly a

third stated that they would have chosen different careers. These participants also provided quality-of-life scores below the national average (466). Additionally, only 50% stated that they would recommend their field to their children. These results seem to suggest that a significant disconnect exists between many early perceptions of occupations, and the reality which surrounds them. This would explain both why Yorke's research demonstrated difficulties with career choice, and why the Shanfelt et al. research demonstrated unexpected examples of career dissatisfaction.

Betz and Hackett's 2005 research offers an additional example of how career choice can be stifled, and lead to the derailing of individual career aspirations. Their research was largely inspired by an apparent void in women pursuing careers in math and sciences in the late twentieth century (3). Betz's original research in 1978 identified correlating factors relating to societal stereotypes. These factors may have created perceptions of inferiority concerning women placed in math and technical domains of study. Additionally, these perceptions may have caused low numbers of women to have actually pursued careers in math and science (Betz 441). If Betz's research is accurate, then this indicates that societal pressures lacking any merit could potentially lead individuals to pursue, or not pursue, a career path in large numbers. This could potentially not only cause individuals to unnecessarily avoid a career path, but also lead other individuals to pursue career paths for the wrong reasons.

If problems with career choice and career dissatisfaction are related to inaccurate perceptions generated prior to embarking on a career, then an effective solution would need to hone in on a behavioral strategy that would counteract indecision, disenchantment, and the societal pressures cited in the research described already. Betz's 1978 research that examined the relationship between female self-efficacy and career progression, led to more recent research, which examined the correlation between self-efficacy and the career development process of all individuals. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's judgments of his or her capabilities to perform given actions (Schunk 207). Self-Efficacy Theory is an appraisal of future performance capabilities dependent upon reciprocating individual determinism, which is based upon influences within the cognitive, affective, and biological areas (Betz and Hackett 6). In other words,

under Self-Efficacy Theory, the will of the individual is the behavioral domain that determines future performance, and can persevere through dysfunctional pressures imposed on the individual. Under the theory, the cognitive, affective, and biological areas are divided into four data groups, which are used to predict efficacy strengths and weaknesses. These data groups include, performance accomplishments (mastery experiences), vicarious learning (modeling), physiological and affective states (emotional arousal), and verbal persuasion (encouragement).

Additional research, which followed Self-Efficacy Theory created additional criteria, which then transformed the Self-Efficacy Theory into Career-Efficacy Theory. Under Career-Efficacy Theory, Betz applied five decisional competencies (self-appraisal, occupational information, goal selection, planning, and problem solving), and applied specific factors that related to each competence. Individual results could be applied to the same confidence response continuum that was used under the original Self-Efficacy Theory. The continuum could then be measured on the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale. This scale focused specifically on the behavioral areas that had the greatest significance with career progression and career satisfaction.

The Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale was designed to generate results, which as Betz and Hackett postulated, led to "approach" versus "avoidance" behavior (Betz and Hackett 4). If the results were accurate, then adults would approach or avoid a career path based largely on their perception of themselves, which could lead some adults to avoid pursuing fields that initially inspired interest. When the original designer of Self-Efficacy Theory, Albert Bandura, used his theory to assess career trajectories in children based on self-efficacy, his research yielded results that were in line with Betz and Hackett's "approach" versus "avoidance" theory (190). Bandura's results were generated using 272 children, and demonstrated that the perceived self-efficacy of the children studied was found to be the largest determinant of occupational progression. This factor even outweighed socioeconomic factors and academic achievement. This outcome suggests that children hesitate to approach a career path without believing within themselves that progressing along a specific career path is possible. Furthermore, if

supporting positive self-efficacy can outweigh socioeconomic and academic factors in terms of career progression, it might also outweigh the adult pressures discussed earlier, such as career-related disenchantment, and harmful societal pressures. It seems clear from all of the research discussed then, that the key to invigorating career progression in adults lies in instilling and supporting self-efficacy during youth.

Evaluating Educational Methods

Examining early education methods is also quite revealing in terms of identifying issues that relate to self-efficacy during youth. Kevin Rathunde's comparison of traditional education methods and the Montessori Method suggested that a sharp drop in motivation during middle-school was due to an increased need during adolescence to engage in self-definition and receive relevant peer feedback (15). As Eccles et al. points out, these needs create a significant mismatch between typical middle-school methods and adolescent developmental needs (93). As adolescent development creates a desire in students to evaluate and define themselves as individuals, the rigid structured middle-school environment provides an inadequate level of autonomy and freedom of choice. As Eccles et al. points out, rather limited opportunities for collaborative work also limit opportunities for substantial peer feedback. Eccles et al. also adds that teachers and counsellors in traditional educational settings are often seen as remote and impersonal gatekeepers of grade-centered evaluations during a time when adult mentorship is most critically needed.

As Rathunde explained, a key element of the Montessori Method that is non-existent in traditional educational methods, is the infusion of Optimal Experience Theory. Optimal Experience Theory suggests that when a student is engaged properly in learning, their learning experience is elevated, and feels relatively effortless, even when higher than average levels of physical or mental concentration are exerted (Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi 134). Montessori activities tend to offer more challenge and engage student concentration, enjoyment, and interest at higher levels than traditional educational activities, such as note-taking. Montessori activities tend to lead to meaningful inquiries that go beyond the classroom. This approach is thought to achieve a more optimal balance than that which occurs in

traditional education. Some research is also suggesting that Montessori students experience greater enjoyment, motivation, self-esteem, and overall engagement, since they tend to perceive themselves as being more active, in control, and competent than students exposed to traditional educational methods.

Rathunde's research revealed significant differences when an Experience Sampling Method (ESM) was used to assess the quality of learning in Montessori students, versus those in a non-Montessori setting (46). Interestingly, the ESM elements were very similar to many of the elements in Bandura's self-efficacy measurements. The ESM focused on measuring feelings of self-importance and happiness. Since the Montessori students reported significantly greater positive experiences using the ESM, this suggests that the Montessori method may be telling in terms of its relationship between education and student self-efficacy. Moreover, this suggests that a focus on supporting more autonomous learning, such as that which exists in Montessori schooling, has a positive effect on student self-importance, overall educational experience, and most likely self-efficacy. However, Rathunde points out that the ESM study results were believed to only relate to the students' academic activities, since non-academic activities were outside of the central mission of both the Montessori and traditional schools used for this study (49).

While this research may be very telling in terms of understanding relevant factors concerning early self-efficacy, and may speak volumes as to how Montessori methods can be used to support career trajectories early in development, career progression specifically is not a central focus of the Montessori Method (Rathunde 52). However, if allowing students to direct their own learning more has a positive impact on student self-efficacy, even when concentration levels are higher and challenges are more robust, then the Montessori research might offer relevant information for administering career progression through early education. If career progression is largely reliant upon individual self-efficacy, and if a highly autonomous, focused, and challenging environment results in higher student self-efficacy, then early education clearly has a critical impact on adult career progression. This might also suggest that introducing substantial career-focused challenges during youth would allow young learners to both develop self-efficacy, and create a bridge between self-efficacy and career progression as adolescence and adulthood approach.

Why Fostering Career Mentorship Earlier is Critical

During youth, learning originates from several places outside of the classroom setting. Children learn from their parents, peers, cultural icons, and from extracurricular literature. Some of these areas of learning have been shown to impact learning in ways that may have a significant impact on early behavior, as well as the intellect. Research conducted by Goldstein and Russ considered relevant mechanisms for children averaging seven years of age for coping with negative feelings using fantasy-oriented literature (122). Their research determined that the children with the most concise understanding of the fantasy-oriented literature provided to them during the study, were also able to best cope with sample problems that they were given following the literature. This suggests that early literature can be used as a mechanism to develop strategies for coping with decisions in the real world.

If fantasy-oriented literature can help early readers cope with decision-making in the real world, then early literature might also be an instrumental vehicle for preparing children to cope with a variety of struggles and issues that tend to accompany adolescence and adulthood, including their career progression. It could also likely be a suitable medium for introducing the inherent challenges of various occupations to early readers, which might inspire children to understand these challenges. The Montessori research discussed earlier suggests that challenge and concentration tend to positively impact the learning experience when students have control over their learning, as opposed to merely overwhelming students with information and mundane tasks. Children's literature seems to offer a strong medium, which can present the excitement of career aspirations in a self-directed and uniquely challenging form.

There are numerous reasons to believe that nurturing career aspirations in children through literature and/or other forms is beneficial not only to children, but also to occupational fields, nations, businesses, and society as a whole. A 2006 study by Tai et al. examined concerns over a noticeable sparseness in U.S. students pursuing careers in the field of science. This research found that significant numbers of pre-adolescent students that stated intentions of pursuing fields in science, did in fact actually

pursue science-related college degrees and careers in science after college. Even among students who had lower test scores, nearly one-third who intended to pursue a science field did in fact do so. Nearly 70% of high math achievers who intended to pursue a physical science or engineering career as early as eighth grade, did in fact do so. This suggests, at the minimum, that when children's intentions to pursue a career are combined with factors that strengthen self-efficacy, such as good grades, there is a high likelihood that these children will transform their career aspirations into reality.

Career mentoring and nurturing also have a significant impact on business. Consider the impact that early career mentorship might have on females that are inspired as children to enter fields dominated by males. Betz and Hackett's research explained earlier how societal pressures had a pronounced negative impact on women entering math and science fields. If, as Tai et al. points out, there is an increasing shortage in students pursuing science fields, then failing to transcend an unnecessary gender divide in science may leave U.S. science-related businesses without an adequate supply of eligible employees to hire. Research by Scandura and Ragins, which examined the impact of early mentorship on nurturing female Certified Public Accountants, also substantiates the ability to transcend gender-related barriers to career advancement through mentorship (253). Several studies also cite early career mentorship as a significant aid in supporting long-term career satisfaction, which serves to benefit all occupational fields (Dreher and Ash 539; Fagenson 312).

There seems to be several worthwhile reasons to foster and nurture career development well prior to career initiation, and even college. Cultural, racial, and gender-related barriers could be diminished sooner, before students begin deciding to avoid a career path unnecessarily, and simply grasping the inherent challenges of career progression could be a self-efficacy exercise. Nations, industries, and businesses might be able to secure a sufficient work force that is purposefully engaged. Such results would also likely generate sustainable increases in career satisfaction across multiple occupational areas. Traditional and non-traditional education alone cannot be expected to bear the full responsibility of this type of early development. Rather, creative forms of supporting such development must be undertaken

by all individuals. Unique and versatile mediums, such as literature, will need to be employed to secure a viable method for progressing and supporting career mentorship for all individuals in all fields of work.

Examining Mentorship in Works of Children's Literature

Examining works of children's literature will demonstrate that it can be a viable medium for providing occupational-related education and mentoring using an entertainment-based platform. Consider Margaret Wise-Brown's *Goodnight Moon.* The mere title suggests to readers that its primary function is to serve as a bedtime story. However, upon closer examination, its details tell a larger story. It pulls both adult readers and young listeners in by entertaining them with a colorful bedroom, and rather unconventional dialogue. How can anyone fail to take notice of a picture of three bears sitting on chairs hanging on the wall, or a toy house with lit windows, and a rustling fireplace set peacefully in the background? Wise-Brown's restless sleeper is a young bunny, not a boy, set next to an old lady rabbit rocking in a chair knitting and hushing the young rabbit to sleep. In the young bunny's restlessness, he finds himself wishing his unfinished porridge, his socks, and even "nobody", goodnight.

Wise-Brown's creative background does more than simply help young readers to nod off peacefully. It reassures them that young sleepers can learn to sooth themselves. When parents leave their children's bedrooms, and there is nobody left to say goodnight to, then Wise-Brown asks, why not say goodnight to "nobody"? It should be pointed out also that *Goodnight Moon's* unique bedroom setting is both kept and unkempt. The hanging socks are neatly placed on a clothesline and the floor is free of clutter. However, there is a half-eaten bowl of porridge sitting next to the bedside table. This teaches young readers that keeping order is important as the day comes to an end, but also that retiring for sleep with unfinished business is a normal part of life. When these aspects of Wise-Brown's work are considered, *Goodnight Moon* is still left intact as an effective tool for settling young readers to sleep. However, it also becomes apparent that it can effectively guide children through other facets of life.

Another work of children's literature, which can open the perspectives of young readers through exhilarating and amusing storytelling, is Colin McNaughton and Satoshi Kitamura's, *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day.* In McNaughton and Kitamura's book, like *Goodnight Moon*, an entertainment-

centered platform was used to enlighten the minds of young readers on the power of thought. In their story, a teacher named Mr. Gee asks his class to simply listen to music, close their eyes, and allow their minds to wander where ever the sound takes them. For one boy, this encompasses soaring through clouds, being pulled through ocean waves by a dolphin, and realizing the capacity and reach of his inner thoughts. By the end of the story, the young boy realizes that neither he, nor the world he resides in, is ordinary, as he initially thought. This message is not only illuminating for children, but also a tribute to talented and influential teachers, and reminds children that learning can be rewarding on countless levels.

Finally, Shel Silverstein's, *The Giving Tree*, reminds all readers of the potency for delivering entertainment, education, mentorship, and new thought through children's literature. Silverstein's book tells a story of a child that continually visits a tree. As the boy becomes a man, the playful friendship that they first had transforms into the transferring of each part of the tree to the boy in order to assist him through life. The tree is happy all along just for the chance to give all that it contains to the boy who rarely affords the tree any appreciation. Finally, an old man returns to the tree that has become nothing but a stump with nothing to offer. The tree is pleased just to offer the boy he once loved to play with a resting place. The message of unrelenting and selfless love delivered from Silverstein's straightforward dialogue and unenhanced and colorless imagery solidifies the immense reach of children's literature. Silverstein's compelling message even transcends age. Even the adults that read his book to children are forced to reexamine their own understandings of patience, forgiveness, and love itself.

Examining *Goodnight Moon, Once Upon an Ordinary School Day,* and *The Giving Tree* substantiates the versatility and usability of extracurricular literature in guiding young readers, if not all readers, through the struggles of life. While direct adult mentorship, peer relationships, and portions of traditional education can certainly help to develop career and vocational aspirations in children, the adaptability of extracurricular literature seems to be an effective and added tool, which can also achieve this result. Since the research examined earlier reveals apparent voids in career direction, and unexpected instances of career dissatisfaction, employing new mechanisms prior to adulthood may be a worthwhile strategy. Both relevant research focused on career progression and educational methods reveal that

perceived self-efficacy is a critical underpinning, which can largely impact career development and a child's educational experience. Bandura defines perceived self-efficacy as "people's beliefs that they can exert control over their motivation and behavior and over their social environment" (9). Upon examining children's literature, it becomes clear that this is precisely what it has been designed for. The works examined by Wise-Brown, McNaughton and Kitamura, and Silverstein instruct children how to exert control over their sleep, inner thoughts, and treatment of others. Therefore, children's literature is already a tool employed heavily for strengthening self-efficacy, which is a critical component in exerting direction and control over career progression. However, few works of children's literature use career-related themes.

In my work, *One Plane Day,* I will demonstrate how all of the excitement and awe that children's literature produces can be used to introduce a career path to young readers. *One Plane Day* portrays elements of becoming and being a professional pilot through photographic imagery combined with fun and simple dialogue. As I will demonstrate next, *One Plane Day,* can serve as a template for exposing several careers to young readers, which can also help to develop self-efficacy through the wonderful and enjoyable medium of children's literature.

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***One Plane Day:* Career Mentorship for Children**

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I will examine three unique aspects of my work, *One Plane Day,* which exhibit specific techniques that can be used to deliver a career-focused message to young readers. These aspects include a strategic introduction, the inclusion of new terminology, and the provision of new perspectives. In conclusion, I will clarify how the specific design of this work is intended to not only portray its particular career theme, the pilot profession, but also support self-efficacy and career mentorship in the general sense. The cover of my work, shown below, attempts to substantiate all of the awe and wonder that aviation transmits to most people, and certainly children. The cover on the following page depicts one of the largest aircraft that exists, a Boeing-747, in one of the most exciting moments of every pilot's and passenger's day, which is the takeoff phase. The cover captures the thrill and romance of airmanship with stunning takeoff imagery. However, my title, *One Plane Day,* is intended to reassure children that the

exhilaration that flying places in their hearts can be controlled, understood, and transformed into a normal day.
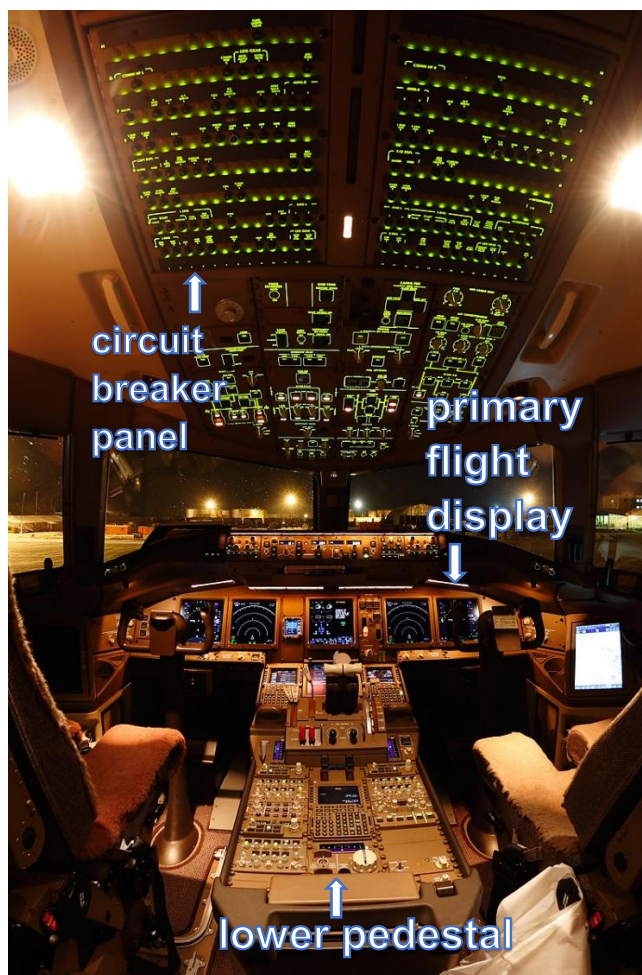

One Plane Day

The second aspect of my work exposes children to new terminology, while providing a basis of understanding. Children, and some adults, understand the ocean and air to be distinct forms. In the world of physics, while each has distinct nuances, they work in much the same way. My work refers to the air as an "ocean of air". This is intended to offer children a new and unique way to refer to the air and to understand it. This rather simple phrase offers children a new way to understand the transparent, but responsive, air mass that rests below them when they fly in airplanes, and to realize that many things beyond their sight do actually exist, work in a specific way, and can be understood and controlled.

"These wondrous places are far away. In order to get to them you

have to embark into an ocean of air …"

The use of special terminology is employed again later in my work, as I expose children to the terms used to describe parts of an aircraft flight deck, or cockpit. The terminology is designed to partially make sense, and partially leave children wondering exactly what it means. This is intended to entice children to learn more about the exciting worlds surrounding careers.

Lastly, *One Plane Day*, provides children with an uncommon perspective. Most adults can recall a time when the world looked and felt much different, than when they were a child. Adults may have

looked even older, buildings even bigger, and tasks may have appeared to be more challenging. This

point, regarding perception, resonates strongly with taking flight. One of the first things that people tend

to notice when they take their first flight is how small the earth and everything placed on it actually is.

The relevance of this point is probably overlooked by most adults that have had several years to absorb,

understand, and form their perceptions of the world. However, for a child this realization might impact

their perception in ways that adults cannot even begin to imagine. I have attempted to provide an

alternate view for young readers in order to impact their perception in an endless variety of ways. This

was demonstrated in my photograph with an overhead view of downtown Chicago, followed by a

corresponding dialogue.

"One day you will look down at the world that felt so big and realize that it was actually so small."
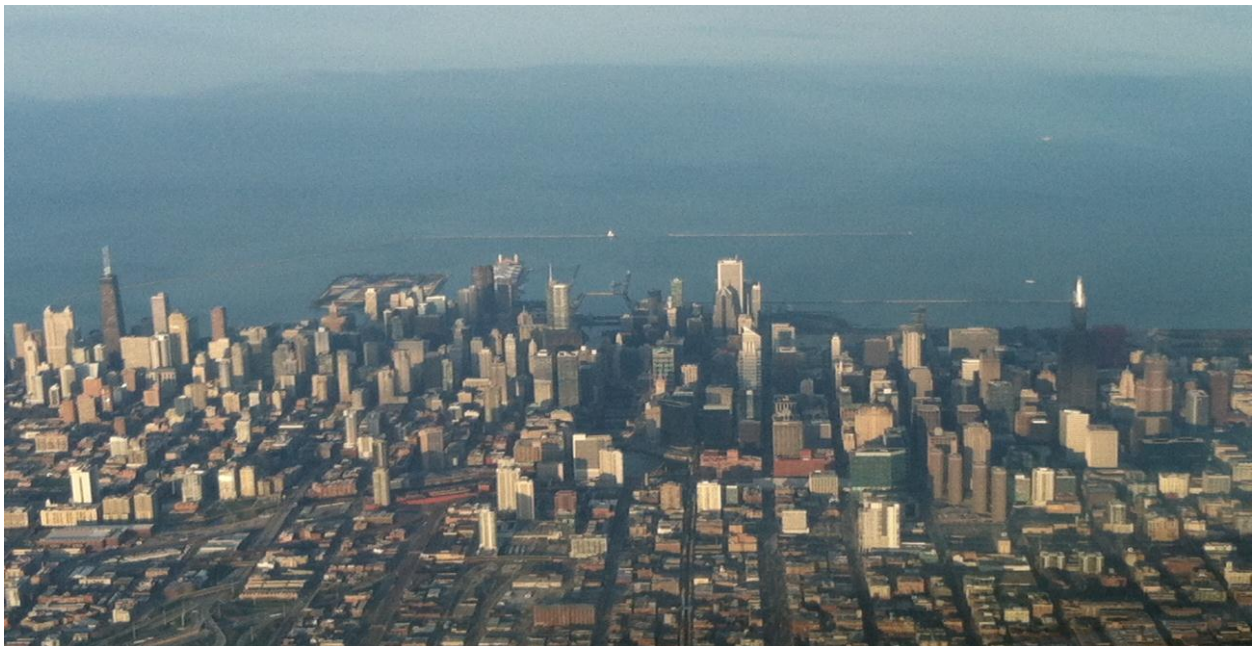
One Plane Day employs unique strategies, which help to deliver its career-related theme in a way that is fun, challenging, and yet palatable for young readers. Using photography rather than drawings helps to ensure that children associate this work with events in the real world, as opposed to a strictly fictional world. The reality of fields, such as aviation, might seem obviously real to adults. However, to a child, the ability to take flight or even drive a car might seem even harder to imagine than subjects that are clearly confined to fiction. The dream-inspiring images used in this work are intended to keep the imaginative flames that children have in their hearts burning, but also give them a manageable dialogue to mull over, and ask questions about. It is my hope that after reading *One Plane Day,* children think of the air ocean when they see the easily visible liquid ocean. I hope that children think of the upper lay of a cloud when they see one from the ground, and that they imagine what the tops of the skyscrapers look like as they see them from the sidewalks.

One Plane Day is primarily intended for readers ages 3-5. However, in a greater sense, the book is intended for all who dream and wish to explore. By the age of three, children have already been pointing, examining, and most likely referring to airplanes. If they have taken their first flight, then they are likely aware of the fact that taking flight is controllable to some extent. By the age of five, they can already form questions, and discuss their interests with their friends, and of course, ask their parents to visit an airplane cockpit as they deplane. Therefore, *One Plane Day* can become a catalyst, which begins a question-and-answer sequence that can present healthy challenges for young minds. This work gives children just enough information to begin asking questions about how and why airplanes fly. As they begin to feel like they understand the answers to such questions more, they begin to realize that they themselves can learn to control airplanes, and therefore their imaginations and aspirations. Perhaps, in some cases, *One Plane Day* will do nothing more than teach children to consider no subject beyond the possibility of inquiry and exploration. When considered this way, this work goes far beyond the confines of the pilot profession, and becomes a device for developing self-efficacy, which may benefit development in unimaginable ways.

I mentioned already that while *One Plane Day* is written for young readers, it is intended for everyone. Whether adults are satisfied, dissatisfied, or simply feeling spiritless over their careers, they generally know how it felt to be charged and inspired to eventually take on an occupational role. As time goes by, countless distractions work to detract from this early excitement. These distractions often come in the way of money, status, complicating life factors, diminished self-confidence, lack of peer support, etc. As adults consider the strong impact that these factors can and do have on eventual career paths, it is incumbent upon them to communicate to children that sustainable passion for a career is possible, and that early experiences, such as those conveyed through early reading, significantly impact a young person's eventual motivation and confidence to pursue their dreams. For this reason, parents and mentors must utilize tools, such as literature, to communicate and nurture career dreams and aspirations.

It is also incumbent upon businesses and employers to nurture early career aspirations by various methods, such as organizing visits to workplaces, so that young people can see, hear, and experience occupational life. The value of *One Plane Day* is only as great as its ability to communicate to children, adults, businesses, and all who work, that career passion impacts society as a whole. Passion drives the employee beyond the merits of wealth and status toward craftsmanship, excellence, and pride. It drives entrepreneurs to innovate, which creates future careers that are currently unfathomable. Let us also consider the impact that nurturing career aspirations in youth has on public relations, consumer behavior, and advertising. Consumers are continually becoming more philosophical about the way they sponsor businesses. Companies that support and create opportunities for young people to have career experiences will also generate public-relational value. Consumers are much more likely to support businesses that are willing to support society through charitable action. Any effort businesses make to educate and inspire children, fills this niche. Businesses that sponsor such efforts create a distinct and significant mechanism that can be implicitly or directly expressed through advertising. Such a message would likely resonate strongly with all consumers. Imagine how consumers might feel about a hospital that offered free educational tours of an operating room, or a grocery store that held free cooking classes for children, or an

airline that offered free monthly tours of its airport operations for children. Businesses and industries that communicate with children also communicate with adults whether intended or not.

While *One Plane Day* is targeted at introducing young readers to the pilot profession, it also has a larger purpose. It is designed to embark into a territory that stretches beyond any specific profession. It is a book for everyone, in the sense that it is an exemplary communicatory tool for conveying the beauty and specialty of work. *One Plane Day* offers a strategy for capitalizing on those areas that are most important to children, so that they can understand what it feels like to enter the career world, make their presence in society, and form themselves as adults through their eventual occupation.

How *One Plane Day* and Children's Literature Can Become a Business Communication Tool

When most people try to imagine effective forms of business communication, they might think of traditional forms of advertising, such as catchy commercials or ads. They might think of company mottos, which boast product quality or company ideals. Or they may think of a business plan, which explains a company's mission, value proposition, and competitive advantage. Children's literature probably would not come to mind as a form of traditional business communication. However, I will explain why a children's book, such as *One Plane Day,* and other unlikely mediums can effectively communicate with individuals outside of a business or industry, help to strengthen employee morale, and distinguish a company from competitors.

If a business executive took a stand during a board room meeting and said, "I have a new idea for effectively communicating with our customers, employees, and shareholders." The room would immediately fill with curiosity. What if that executive then said, "Our Company needs to begin creating children's literature, which educates children about our industry, assures our customers that we care about our community, and inspires interest in young people to pursue careers in the oil industry." My guess would be that the initial curiosity that filled the room would be replaced by confusion. Notice that I neglected to first mention that I chose to use an industry in my example that has often generated

astronomical profits, while also leaving most consumers feeling bittersweet, if not disgusted, about spending their money at the gas pump. As I will explain, even the assurance of profitability does not relieve businesses of the need to effectively communicate with those outside of them. Of course, oil industry profits have been consistently large because vehicle owners, airlines, and shipping companies have had no choice but to contribute to oil profitability. Now think of some of the first thoughts that people have when they think of the oil industry. I think it is safe to say that some descriptions might include greed, collusion, environmental detriment, and perhaps, even ties to terrorism. These negative feelings might not matter at all when most of the world is totally reliant on oil for fuel. However, as soon as another fuel became a viable option, consumer behavior would assuredly change. The point here is to demonstrate that businesses in every industry have a vested interest in developing a positive relationship with consumers regardless of how profitable an industry or a company is. This is especially the case in a free market, where fierce competition and dramatic changes are the norm.

Even if all businesses do need to strive to convey a positive public image, how could a children's book be an appropriate medium for doing so? A children's book is certainly not the only way to do so, and the need for effective communication has certainly not escaped many individual businesses. Furthermore, a children's book seems just as unlikely a business communications tool as a reality television show characterizing the daily operations of a company. However, the only U.S. airline to record thirty-nine years of record profits, with industry leading turn-around times and customer satisfaction, did just this (Schlanger). Southwest Airline's show "Airline", ran for three seasons, and often showed the less appealing side of Southwest's service (IMBD). For example, Southwest has been, and still is, the most militant airline when it comes to requesting that its overweight passengers purchase more than one seat. Southwest also communicates an extraordinary message with its employees. Consider the following quote by Herb Kelleher, Southwest's iconic CEO: "Years ago, business gurus used to apply the business school conundrum to me: 'Who comes first? Your shareholders, your employees, or your customers?' I said, 'Well, that's easy,' but my response was heresy at that time. I

said employees come first and if employees are treated right, they treat the outside world right, the outside world uses the company's product again, and that makes the shareholders happy" (qtd. in Hyken). Clearly, Kelleher and Southwest had an effective non-traditional strategy for communicating with employees, consumers, and shareholders.

While business plans are generally designed to portray a company in a positive light to investors, they don't necessarily guarantee that a company's philosophies are demonstrated clearly, that a company's product is deemed valuable, or that a company has a competitive edge. These attributes of a business must be communicated by some means, secondary to the goods and services produced, which distinguishes a company from competitors, and demonstrates that both leadership and front-line employees have invested their hearts in the company. This is precisely why something, which seems irrelevant to a business operation, such as a reality TV show or a children's book, can be an effective business communication tools. These mediums set a stage for employees to demonstrate their zeal for their occupations and roles within their organizations. This not only impacts the way consumers feel about a company, but also reinforces the love the employees feel for their organization and respective roles within it. Imagine a child that takes a tour of a firehouse. While the child enjoys the chance to explore a new world with lights and buttons, the firefighters are reminded why they love their careers. This is also why Southwest Airlines was able to achieve the same result with a reality TV show. The mere act of being a Southwest Airlines employee became something worth talking about, both within Southwest, and outside of it, and was brought about by a CEO that helped create an environment that elevated the overall role of the employee.

While all of these examples and points might help to place value on non-traditional communication strategies, allow me to explain exactly how my book, *One Plane Day,* and others similar to it, can be used to effectively communicate with consumers, fortify employee pride, boost morale, and create product value. Imagine if an airline provided all of their young travelers with a book that had wonderful aircraft imagery, explained exciting tidbits about flying, and gave them something special to

remember their first flight. This would imply to all of that airline's customers that the company is passionate about the flying experience. It would let customers know that the airline is willing to add simple value-added features to their service, for the mere sake of being excited about what they do. When smiling children deplane with their book in hand, it might remind flight crews and gate agents that their occupational world is an exciting place, which inspires the curiosity and imagination of both children and adults. This simple strategy would also remind employees that their company's leadership intends to do something greater than simply generate profits. Strategies, such as this, transform a mere place of work into a special experience. This demonstrates how something small and simple can convey a multiple of positive messages within a company, and outside of it. It also challenges businesses to examine whether the missions they state, values they describe, or advantages they boast of, actually exist.

Southwest Airlines demonstrated that employees don't necessarily become excited when a company becomes profitable. Rather, companies become profitable when the employees become excited. Whether the device, which does this, is a TV show or a children's book is irrelevant. These devices can simply be used to transform mere goods or services into special experiences and communicate to both employees and customers that a particular business or industry is worth being passionate about.

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