

Public Abstract

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Title:COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS: EXPLORING RIGOR THROUGH RELEVANCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH ADOLESCENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The purpose for this study was to examine the relationship between adolescent identity development, relevance, and rigor among high school students. The premise under investigation is rooted in the concept of building rigor through relevance. Students who have engaged in personal exploration and commitment to certain ideological and interpersonal issues, specifically personal and occupational identity (Erikson, 1982; Marcia, 2002; Super, 1980) are purported to find increased relevancy in their coursework (Crumpton & Gregory, 2011) and in turn engage in more rigorous studies. This study used a profile of high school seniors to explore the relationship between adolescent identity development, student participation in relevance building activities, and engagement in academic rigor.

This cross-sectional study utilized quantitative methods to analyze archival survey, transcript, and performance data on student engagement in relevance, rigor, and identity producing activities (Fink, 2009). A Midwest school district, granting access to archival data, had engaged in extensive research on relevance, rigor, and identity. A review of literature resulted in the emergence of six factors related to college and career readiness. The focus on career exploration, adult guidance and support, career planning, occupational identity status, academic intensity, and performance benchmarks were aligned with the research questions for this study.

Findings of the study revealed students had positive experiences with adult guidance and support and career planning. Students reported parents or guardians and teachers as having a significant influence on their career aspirations, while counselors were viewed in a less significant role. Perceptions of career exploration experiences were reported low, however a lack of workplace experience was found as a key factor in that finding. Students in the study were found to have engaged in overall low levels of academic intensity which was consistent with the literature on academic rigor. A key finding was that adolescent identity status matters in relation to academic rigor and relevance. Exploration of individual passions and interests followed by commitment to an occupational identity was found to be related to engagement in rigor and relevance.

The study provided insight into the relationship between adolescent identity development, relevance, and rigor among high school students. However, additional questions about this relationship emerged during the study. Further research into the role of school counselors as leaders, impact of workplace experience on occupational identity development, exploration of how identity develops over time, analysis of career exploration variables related to identity, and exploration of findings for ACT composite will support more clarity in the arena of college and career readiness.