

The pitfalls of adolescent career decision making and how we can help



Is career planning daunting or exciting for a student? It should be the latter, it's often the former.

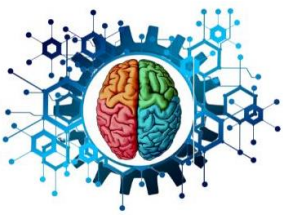
In this series of posts, I have been discussing the role of student self-assessment and how we can better support students with the tools they need to make better informed decisions and remove factors such as ambiguity and stress from the activity of career planning.

In this post I'll discuss a biological factor that underscores the fact we need to provide students with better tools.

Adolescents do often differ from adults in the way they behave, solve problems, and make decisions, but there is a biological explanation for these differences. Studies have shown that brains continue to mature and develop throughout childhood and adolescence and well into early adulthood.

There is a biological process in the development of the brain during adolescence and into adulthood which influences decision-making. The frontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. Indeed, this part of the brain is still changing and maturing well into adulthood.

Brain scan images of the brain in action also show that adolescent brains function differently than adult brains when they make decisions or solve problems. Adolescents tend to rely more on the amygdala, the part of the brain associated with emotions and reactions, rather than the frontal cortex, which is responsible for thoughtful and logical decision-making.



Reliance on the amygdala can explain why adolescents might sometimes be perceived as making poor choices or being indecisive.

How does this affect career decision-making?

Ambiguity and uncertainty exacerbate the emotional component of student decision-making. Vague self-assessment outputs and ambiguous matches to system-generated career options don't help a student to arrive at a thoughtful, balanced, accurate career decision.

What can we do about this: simple neuroscience overcomes vagueness and ambiguity to provide strong evidence-based insight about the student and about their match to specific careers. Simple neuroscience is the science of precision. Just as precision-guided missiles are laser-focused on a target, we can empower students with tools to get laser focused on career options.

The more evidence we can provide, the less the influence of emotion.

A better evidence-based approach bridges the biological gap between the adolescent brain's emotionally driven decision-making and the ability to make rational, informed decisions.

Decision-making is a biological process. If we accept this simple principle, we can empower our youth with the tools they need to plan a future of promise and opportunity with confidence and excitement.

Mosaic Solutions: what we're about:

We work in the intersection of education and the workplace. Our formula is simple: the right pathway into the right job for the right student/candidate. We think and act holistically, recognizing that to make this formula a reality requires connectivity of the workforce ecosystem and all its stakeholders.

Practical neuroscience generates robust data about the two fundamental components that drive the workforce ecosystem: data about people and data about jobs.