

STEM FUTURES: EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH CAREER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING THAT EMBRACES CRITICAL REFLECTION

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In today's shifting STEM landscape, students need more than discipline and technical knowledge to build the skills they need for their future careers. The changing world of work, with technological growth and disruptions, newly emerging roles, non-linear career paths and more global interdependence has resulted in the need for STEM graduates to adapt, reflect and grow. They must also have a strong sense of professional identity and understand how to cultivate their professional brand, navigate real-world workplaces, translate their skills, and confidently enter diverse career pathways. Thus, shaping the future with STEM education also requires a focus on career development learning.

Career Development Learning (CDL), as described by Bridgstock, Grant-Iramu and McAlpine (2019), refers to structured experiences that equip individuals with the skills, knowledge, and self-awareness needed to navigate their professional journeys. These experiences include career identity formation, employability skill-building, decision-making, and industry engagement. When embedded in the curriculum, CDL activities help all students connect academic learning with real-world opportunities. The inclusion of opportunities to also critically reflect on CDL activities within the curriculum has benefits for building students' self-awareness and career-related values and identity so they can make informed decisions about their future and create and sustain work (Developing Employability, 2023).

Career Development Consultants (CDCs) are uniquely positioned to support the inclusion of CDL activities as they operate in the "third space" between academia, industry, and students by connecting, translating, and building career capacity. One of the roles of the CDC at Curtin University is to embed CDL into curriculum. This can be through career resources, recommended CDL activities and workshops aligned to Curtin's Career Development Learning Framework, which is based on the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (National Careers Institute, n.d.).

We present examples of the incorporation of critical reflection on CDL within the taught curriculum in an undergraduate experiential learning unit that is delivered in an international setting. Students are guided to reflect on their professional identity through scaffolded tasks and assessments incorporating reflection on career capabilities and exploration of personal values, strengths and areas for improvement. We also discuss how student reflective practice is further reinforced in co-curricular workshops that focus on students' future career identity and professional brand within their discipline.

REFERENCES

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