

# Career Development at the Starting Gate: Target Ages 3-5

by Dr. Janet E. Wall

**Abstract:** *How early is too early when it comes to career development? Many activities, guidelines and programs have been developed for high school and middle school students, and adults. Career development professionals are starting to emphasize career awareness and preparedness for the world of work at the elementary school level. This article proposes that preschool is a legitimate place to start incorporating relevant concepts.*

The National Career Development Guidelines are organized around a framework of three domains including: Personal Social Development, Educational Achievement and Lifelong Learning, and Career Management. The framework and its associated goals offer a continuum of skills for young people and adults that should help them develop skills necessary to get the most from education life and work. Though the guidelines are not associated with particular grade levels, most of the supporting activities are geared to high school and middle school students.

A few years ago I was asked to coordinate the development of a document that would outline standards for education at the Pre-K level. The process brought together several nationally recognized early childhood experts for the purpose of developing a comprehensive body of work that would offer guidelines for the education of children ages three through five. The multi-year effort resulted in the production of *Pre-K Standards: Guidelines for Teaching and Learning*. The standards serve multiple purposes from offering a framework for developing Pre-K programs, to identifying and monitoring student progress, to evaluating the quality of pre-K programs. The standards can be used by teachers, parents, educational organizations, and institutions.

The *Pre-K Standards* are divided into three major domains:

- I. Self Knowledge, Social Skills, and Motivation to Learn**
- II. Basic Symbol Structures of Each Child's Culture**
- III. Knowledge of the World in Which They Live**

Domains II and III tend to focus on ideas that are more academically oriented involving literacy, numeracy, science, social studies, technology, etc., but Domain I clearly and strikingly maps on to the National Career Development Guidelines with its two domains of Personal and Social Development and Educational Achievement and Life-Long Learning. This alignment provides support that career development could and should start at a very early age.

Domain I of the Pre-K Standards, the areas of Self Knowledge, Social Skills, and Motivation to Learn, is further subdivided into several guidelines including:

- Children will develop knowledge of self
- Children will develop knowledge of others and social skills
- Children will gain an intrinsic motivation for learning



For each guideline, the document provides several key sections to include goals, objectives, needed experiences, benchmarks, and vignettes. The experiences suggest what must happen with children in order to help them reach the goals, the benchmarks give indicators of progress and status of accomplishment by the child, and the vignette gives a concrete example of what a teacher or parent might do and observe.

As an example, Guideline 1, **Develop Knowledge of Self** involves

**Goal:** Self Knowledge

**Objective 1:** Children will develop a healthy self-concept

**Needed Experiences:**

- Teachers who know children's names and use them frequently.
- Adults who recognize children's physical growth and development. "You're getting taller."
- Mirrors so children can see themselves, keep records of physical growth.
- Talk about children's physical accomplishments, "You learned to use scissors, good job!"
- Opportunities to try out, practice, and develop physical skills.

**Benchmarks:**

- Tell you their first names and by five their given and last name.
- Recognize their physical growth and development "How tall am I? I'm growing."
- Develop responsibility for self and their things. Hanging up clothes, washing, toileting, eating by self.
- Gradually develop the ability to self-regulate self, expressing emotions appropriately, knowing when they need to rest.
- Talk about their specific abilities and characteristics, including physical growth. "Look, I can write my name."
- Develop a sense of personal identity knowing what they can do and what they have yet to learn.

**Vignette:**

*Four-year old Domingo was having trouble putting a new puzzle together. After several tries, his teacher sat with him, saying, "Let's see what we can do with this." Holding up a piece she said, "This piece is mostly red and has this little bump here. Where else is there something red that this piece would go with?" Domingo looked at the puzzle pieces again and said, "Here, it goes here, it's red here and here's the place the bump goes." "Yes," replied the teacher. You're a good learner."*

*"I know," said Domingo. "I'm learning a lot. I can ride a bike, and run and jump and skip, and next year I'll learn to do all the puzzles and I'll learn to read too." Supported by his teacher and family members, Domingo demonstrated that he knows something of his abilities, what he can do now and what he expects to do in the future.*

Other objectives within this goal include:

**Objective 2:** Children will develop healthy self-esteem

**Objective 3:** Children will view themselves as efficacious, capable individuals who can set goals and achieve them.

These objectives are strikingly similar to the National Career Development Guidelines goals of a) Develop understanding of yourself to build and maintain a positive self-concept, b) Develop positive

interpersonal skills including respect for diversity, and c) Integrate personal growth and change into your career development.

For those of you thinking about incorporating career development concepts into early childhood education or needing a justification to do so, *Pre-K Standards: Guidelines for Teaching and Learning* can be useful. It is a free document provided by CTB/McGraw-Hill, and it can be viewed at <http://www.ctb.com/media/articles/pdfs/resources/PreKstandards.pdf> or from <http://www.home.earthlink.net/~sagesolutions> (free downloads). It's really is never too early to start.

**Dr. Janet E. Wall** is President of Sage Solutions, a small company that offers consulting services in the areas of career development, career and educational assessment, program evaluation, and technology. She is a certified Career Development Facilitator Instructor and author of six books related to career development or assessment, including *What Do I Like to Do?: 101 Activities to Identify Interests and Plan Careers* and *Measuring Up: Assessment Issues for Teachers, Counselors and Administrators*, both published by ProEd Inc., and *Jobseekers Online Goldmine: A Step-by Step Guidebook to Government and No Cost Web Tools*, published by JIST. She is past president of the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education and is an officer in the Maryland Career Development Association and the Association for Counselors and Educators in Government. Reach her at [sagesolutions@earthlink.net](mailto:sagesolutions@earthlink.net).

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