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Critical thinking over career path

Posted: Tuesday, September 9, 2014 8:5200 am

“Students are encouraged to start thinking about careers in the sixth grade, and by the time they are freshmen in high school, begin scheduling classes they need for their chosen field,” Chuck Mason wrote in a front-page story on the new ‘career readiness’ approach in Kentucky.

I agree with the basic premise; i.e., we need to do a better job of aligning the educational process from kindergarten through college. I have some reservations, however, about asking students to make key decisions about the future course of their lives when they have yet to hit adolescence.

Neuroscientists are telling us that the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that gives us the capacity to realistically contemplate the future and exercise good judgment, is not fully developed until at least age twenty-five.

What we are talking about is basic maturity. In my case, I had a general idea of what I wanted to do occupationally when I was a teenager, but it was not until I was in my mid-twenties that I found my true calling.

Most certainly, I would not have spent four years of my life studying biology had I not been pressured into declaring a major when I was a seventeen year old incoming freshman.

What parents, school administrators, legislators and taxpayers in general often fail to understand is that the process of preparing the next generation for the world of work is complex, dynamic and continually evolving.

Instead of providing students with content-specific skill sets and guidance toward particular professions, we need to be endowing them with the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making competencies they will need in order to succeed in a globally integrated workforce that increasingly demands constant learning and re-learning.

True ‘career readiness’ entails more than just alignment; it will require us to re-think everything.

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