

Why was the *Career Choices* series designed in a way that requires the student to use both a textbook/workbook and the online My10yearPlan.com?

By Mindy Bingham, author of the *Career Choices* series

The *Career Choices* curriculum is unlike any other teaching tool used today. In contrast to the didactic prose of other textbooks that deliver knowledge in a passive “tell-me” format, the *Career Choices/My10yearPlan.com* model is a series of interactive charts, activities, questions, and surveys in a carefully developed scope and sequence. Using the Socratic method of questioning (on paper) rather than lecturing (in straight text), this approach fosters the development of the critical thinking skills required today.

The textbooks and online material walk students through a step-by-step process that provides the foundation for determining – with confidence – their routes to the life, career, and education plans that match their personal goals and ideals. In this course of action, they learn a decision-making process that can be used throughout their lives when making any life-defining choices.

Understandably, this is a complex process that requires the application of higher-order thought: analysis, synthesis, creativity, and strategic thinking. As they make what are probably some of the most important decisions of their lives, learners are required to continually review the information and personal data collected in earlier chapters (Section One: Who am I? Section Two: What do I want?) and apply that knowledge and understanding in later chapters (Section Three: How do I get it?) while developing their quantitative and meaningful 10-year plans.

Therefore it is important for the learner to understand where he or she is going. The book provides the opportunity to “flip through the pages” and more easily conceptualize what that process looks like.

During the beta tests of the online program, we got feedback from teachers and students alike that the mere act of writing in the *Career Choices Workbook & Portfolio* prior to going online and entering responses into My10yearPlan.com was important to both the understanding of the methods taught and the development of critical thinking skills. Students reported that they refined their responses once they went online. As they thought further about the activity they were working on, their plans changed and grew in scope.

Students’ writing improved, as well. Because what they were working on was of great personal importance to them, they were willing to put more effort into it. The workbook became their first draft and their online work was rewritten to better reflect and articulate their understanding of what motivated them and their resulting plans.

It was also observed that students who arrived at the lab with their workbooks completed had a much easier time interacting with the computer than those whose workbook pages were blank because they hadn’t done their homework. The intermediate step of

completing the workbook prior to going online allowed students to more fully experience and interact with the online tool.

An online experience is different from the traditional textbook experience. *Career Choices* and My10yearPlan.com were designed to compliment each other using what we know about digital learning. Combining the two into an online-only model would be a disservice to the learner for these two reasons:

Reason 1: The dense background text required to fully understand the concepts presented would have made the online experience overwhelming. One of the most essential rules of online design is “Keep it as simple as possible.” (Do you ever wonder why the homepage of Google is so basic?) People are not careful readers of content when it is online. They habitually jump around. If there are buttons to push, links to click on, or surveys to interact with, the users will do so. This multi-tasking ethos has been proven to hinder the in-depth understanding so necessary for learning.

Reason 2: The background text found in the textbook only needs to be read once to understand the foundation concepts. The activities and exercises, however, were designed to be used over and over by the learner, updated throughout the course and then regularly over the coming years, and this updating is most efficiently accomplished online. After all, the career choice of today may not even exist five years, ten years, or twenty years into the future. What is critical is the understanding of the self-discovery, decision-making process taught by the format and activities in the *Career Choices* series.

Academic Innovations is a mission-oriented publisher: our passion is the development of self-sufficient individuals. That is why we can keep our prices lower than traditional textbook publishers. As social entrepreneurs, we reinvest our profits to advance that cause by expanding our extensive list of professional development resources, offering readily available curriculum and technical support, and, most recently, developing the online 10-year plan.

Keep in mind that My10yearPlan.com is not an e-book. It is a digital, data-driven computer program that collects personalized data throughout the course and transforms it into a variety of valuable documents. These include:

- *My 10-year Plan summary page* that can be quickly reviewed by instructors and advisors to personalize their work with each student.
- The student’s *10-year Plan and Portfolio* report that can serve as an authentic assessment for grading/midterms/finals in addition to rich content for interviews, personal essays for college, and workforce recruiting.
- *My Skills Inventory*, which is a dynamic digital chart that collects data throughout the course and helps students develop a ...
- Skills-based *Education Plan* related to their chosen career paths.

From an economic standpoint, the delivery of interactive, data-driven online content that requires extensive writing of code and development (unlike the more static e-book format that most traditional textbooks will be delivered in), is very expensive not only to create,

but also to continually deliver, maintain, support, and update. The cost of an online-only version of *Career Choices* would not bring the consumer's costs down.

We are in an exciting time for education. Digital applications will help transform the learning experience for students. But it is important to remember that the most important part of THIS course is not the textbook, the workbook, or the online program; it is the interaction between the student and the instructor. The classroom discussion, so necessary to the success of a comprehensive guidance course, is the “high touch” of this high tech experience. Sitting students behind a computer screen in a computer lab to complete an online-only version is not an acceptable way to teach this program. This is a true hybrid course, which research studies clearly show is the best way to learn. To structure it differently would be doing a disservice to both student and teacher alike.