

# Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

*Building parent-school partnerships*

WORDS Lakshmi Singh

## Which subjects should I choose?

Subject selection, career direction and planning for the future can put pressure on secondary students. Lakshmi Singh outlines a step-by-step approach to making this process as stress-free as possible.

Subject selection, career direction and planning for the future are all hot topics in high school kids' lives at this time of year.

Understanding interest areas, strategically planning how many subjects to study, keeping an eye on current industry trends, while listening to advice from family and friends, may all seem like an overwhelming amount of information to take on. However, with the right support, a bit of confidence and instilling trust in their own reasoning, the decision making process doesn't have to be painful for high school students.

### THE PARENT TRAP?

Parents always want what's best for their kids, however, it is important that parents stick to their role as advisors and allow kids some space in this regard, says Dr. John Taccori, Careers Counsellor from [www.careersdoctor.net](http://www.careersdoctor.net).

"Sometimes, [parents are] overwhelmingly keen to the point that it suffocates the child's ability to freely choose their own subjects," he says. Instead of making decisions for

them, parents should let children "own their decisions" and not overly try to influence their child with their beliefs and prejudices, he says.

"For example some parents view the world and their knowledge of education from a narrow perspective. This may result in giving the child the wrong advice. Ultimately it's they who need to sit for the exams and do the HSC [or the equivalent]. Most students are quite savvy or knowledgeable about what they need to do - they just need a little more advice on tweaking those subjects for maximum benefit."

### USING THE SCHOOL'S RESOURCES

It is worthwhile taking a three-pronged approach to seeking out information about the subject selection process, advises Dr. Taccori.

"Firstly, attend the subject selection evening at your child's school. You would be very surprised to know that a lot don't attend."

"Secondly, make an appointment (for the child and parent) to see the school's career adviser. Have a list of questions you would like to ask."

It doesn't matter if the aim is to just clarify a career path they've already chosen and running the chosen subjects by as validation or if the conversation takes on a more "I have no idea what I want to do" tone. Career advisors are trained for various scenarios and can also guide students who have changed their mind to make sense of how they can achieve something positive and vocationally meaningful if and when the need arises, he says.

Finally, the child should discuss with specific subject teachers to gain insight into the course they would like to do.

Dr. Taccori also says it would be beneficial for the child to speak to students who are already doing the course in Years 11 and 12. This can help them assess whether the content of the course is something of interest to them.

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## ... Which subjects should I choose? ...



### OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Several publications, outlets and services now exist specifically to help guide students navigate the subject selection period.

Books such as the UAC guide, portals like the MyFuture website, and services and events like career expos and private career advisory practices allow students to explore options, express concerns, seek guidance and even get a taste of what their future career could look like.

Certain types of psychological tests offer students a glimpse into their own psyche and can help them discover their own intrinsic interests and tendencies. Services like Psych Press's Career Interest Test can provide a comprehensive look on what work skills, job interests and career values can match the student's personality.

### INTEREST AREAS

It should come as no surprise that a child's interest in a particular subject will and should influence what they choose. Even if they don't see themselves as having a career in that area, they should still pursue it, says Dr. Taccori.

"For example if a student loves history, then they should do it. It does not mean that they are going to be historians. One of the aims of schooling is to gain an all-rounded comprehensive education."

Complementary and necessary subject areas that are related to their career intentions also need to be considered, he adds.

"If [they] want to be a physiotherapist then they should be thinking of doing mathematics and a science."

### STRATEGY

Strategy plays a big role in children selecting what subject they are going to do and how many they are willing to take on, says Dr. Taccori.

"We know that if a child loves a particular subject and does it, then they are most likely going to get much better grades than if they did a subject they hated."

Similarly, choosing to do different subjects to cover all allotted units of study during Years 11 and 12 may be considered a good insurance policy for some. Not doing well in one subject may be negated by a better performance in another. Or having done a subject that incorporates Vocational Education Training (VET) may mean doors to certain apprenticeships are open, allowing for more careers to choose from.

There are also options for participating in special programs offered by universities where students can undertake vocational studies that contribute to their school leaving certification. For example, Swinburne University offers the Vocational Training and Education in Schools (VETiS) program that contribute to units to be completed as part of Years 11 and 12 and also allow the student to receive a formal Certificate from the university.

### TAKING THE PLUNGE

It is important to consider different information sources and the advice from

teachers, parents, careers advisors and peers, but Dr. Taccori says, above all, students should listen to their own inner voice of reason.

"Once you have gathered this information, then make a decision. If you have questions about that at the end, then talk to mum and dad and the career adviser (just to finalise your decision). Then take the plunge and just do it. You can only make the best decision based on the resources and advice you have at the time. You have done your best so it's important not to have any regrets. Any minor mistakes can be ironed out later."

There is no such thing as a wrong subject choice.

### FURTHER READING:

- PsychPress, Talent Management Psychologists, Career Interest Test - [www.psychpress.com.au/psychometric/talent-careeringahead.asp?subject-selection](http://www.psychpress.com.au/psychometric/talent-careeringahead.asp?subject-selection)
- Swinburne University's Vocational Education and Training in Schools - [www.swinburne.edu.au/study/diplomas-certificates/pathways/vocational-education-training](http://www.swinburne.edu.au/study/diplomas-certificates/pathways/vocational-education-training)
- HSC and Careers Expo - [www.hscandcareers.com.au](http://www.hscandcareers.com.au)
- MyFuture website - [www.myfuture.edu.au](http://www.myfuture.edu.au)
- Universities Admission Centre - [www.uac.edu.au/](http://www.uac.edu.au/)

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