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Redefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century

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***Redefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the
21st Century***
By Kevin Fleming

Kevin J. Fleming (2016). 223 pp, \$11.99

Reviewed by Meg Turley, Old Dominion University

Redefining the Goal: The True Path to Career Readiness in the 21st Century provides a powerful case why the education system needs to stop looking at the one path to success (which generally means college) and start aligning student interests and abilities with their future career. Dr. Kevin Fleming, who among several roles, supports over 40 career and technical educational programs as a Dean of Instruction at Norco College, explores the “one size fits a few” system currently in place. He argues our current education system is designed for college-bound students rather than matching students with careers grounded in relevance to their interests and abilities and the reality of the job market. His approach to identifying issues with the current establishment comes with solutions that might change the way we view pathways to education in society today. This book, written for counselors, teachers, and parents alike, proposes fresh ideas that transitions students away from the “college for all” mentality, and move more toward promoting education that better aligns with the needs of students as well as society. This book ties into Fleming’s earlier work with his video “Success in the New Economy”, where he explains how students should focus more on applied skills and industry-recognized certification to keep up with the demands of today’s economy. This is an issue that has come to the forefront of the education conversation within the career and technical education community, and this book lends credible conversation to the issue.

The primary idea in this book is that college is not for every student, but the college for all mentality is setting up students to attend college with no clear direction while accumulating student loan debt they cannot afford. Fleming uses California as the example for his research because it can be generalized to the population stating “As California goes, so goes the nation.”¹ The data for this study was collected between 2001 and 2011 (freshman year through college graduation), and shows 68.7% of freshmen graduated high school on time. In a survey of those students who made up the 31.3% that did not graduate on time, the reasons most often noted were boredom in school or lack of relevance. Pushing these students down the college path gave them little in the way of employability skills, making them less productive members of society. The author uses this data to make his case for implementing more employability skills in high school rather than push “college for all.”

Fleming makes a strong claim that of 100 students going through the California school system, 31 will drop out, 42 will go straight to the workforce, and 27 will enroll in college. Of the 27 that enroll in college, only 17 will graduate but 10 of the 17 will be underemployed. While these numbers agree with the Fleming’s thesis, his use of only state enrollment data limits the

1. Fleming, Kevin J. 2016. *Redefining the goal: The truth path to career readiness in the 21st century*. Author. 16.

strength of his argument. The data also does not account for career and technical education program completers who could have skills to be employable directly out of high school, which could affect the results of the research. Throughout the book the author discusses additional pathways to graduation to include technical high schools and career and technical programs, but there is no supporting data to help the reader better understand how those programs impact graduation.

Fleming does a great job linking how secondary education can be a catalyst for decreasing the skills gap in the United States by arguing that of all the students that graduate high school, only about 7% complete a 4-year degree. Of those that complete college, few will actually work in the field they studied. This ties into Fleming's thesis that students should be better aligned with career interests rather than leading them on one pathway to college. He does this by emphasizing that schools must not only teach students the basics (reading, writing and arithmetic, known as the 3 Rs) but advocates two more: relevance and reality². Fleming's data showed several students are bored in school and do not feel connected to the curriculum. Making the learning relevant to the student's interests could bridge this gap. The reality is there are only so many jobs in the market and students need to look at the jobs within the economy to help decide what they want to pursue. To make this point, the author states "Being well-educated is not the same as being employable."³

The one thing I would have liked to see more of in this book was a discussion about career and technical education programs and how they have potential to ease this college for all mentality. The very jobs the Fleming discusses (plumbing, nursing, etc.) are offered in most high schools through career and technical education curriculum and can provide employability skills for students who are not ready to start their college journey. This information would have strengthened the author's argument and could have been an example of how relevance and reality could be implemented.

This would be a great book for educators, counselors and, parents to better understand how they can help students find the pathway that aligns with their interests and connects to the reality of the job market. It really drives home the point that college is not for everyone and our education system should look for ways to match student ability with potential career pathways. Fleming notes that just because a student doesn't go directly to college doesn't mean they will never go to college. It just means there are opportunities to apply interest and abilities to a career path that will make students employable after high school and beyond.

References

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Meg Turley is a doctoral candidate at Old Dominion University studying Occupational and Technical Studies with a concentration in career and technical education.

2. Fleming, Kevin J. 2016. *Redefining the goal: The truth path to career readiness in the 21st century*. Author. 73.

3. Fleming, Kevin J. 2016. *Redefining the goal: The truth path to career readiness in the 21st century*. Author. 75.

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