

Research

R E P O R T

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YOUR CHILDREN – OUR STUDENTS:

Can Saskatchewan Parents And Schools Connect In Support Of Career Development Of Youth?

A Summary of a Master's Thesis by

**Vanessa Lewis
University of Regina**

Included in this summary:

Part 1: A Case for Career Development

Part 2: A Review of the Literature

Part 3: Key Findings and Discussions

Part 4: Recommendations for Practice

Part 5: Recommendations for Further Research

Executive Summary

Your Children – Our Students:

Can Saskatchewan parents and schools connect in support of career development of youth?

*A summary of a master's thesis by Vanessa Lewis –
University of Regina*

Research has identified parents/guardians as key influencers in the career planning process of adolescents. Despite this, limited research exists in regard to how schools and parents/guardians might connect in support of the career development process of youth. The purpose of this research was to explore what Saskatchewan parents/guardians do to support the career development process of their high school aged children, investigate what types of school-based supports parents/guardians deem most helpful in support of their children, and attempt to identify if and how parents/guardians and schools might connect in meaningful ways in support of the career exploration process of students.

The intended outcome for the study was to allow for informed reflection on current comprehensive career development programs offered in Saskatchewan high schools and possible ways to improve programming by connecting with the key influencers in the career development process of students, their parents/guardians. The study provided an opportunity to learn more about what Saskatchewan parents/guardians are doing to support the career exploration of their children and highlight possible intersection points for parents/guardians and schools in support of the process of the primary stakeholders – their children - our students. As leaders and decision makers of Saskatchewan School Divisions, you are invited to review this summary which includes:

Part 1: A Case for Career Development

Part 2: A Review of the Literature

Part 3: Key Findings and Discussions

Part 4: Recommendations for Practice

Part 5: Recommendations for Further Research

Please see thesis at <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/5418> for more detail.

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Introduction

Research has identified parents as key influencers in the career planning process of adolescents. Despite this, limited research exists in regard to how schools and parents/guardians might connect in support of the career development process of youth. The purpose of this research was to explore what Saskatchewan parents/guardians do to support the career development process of their high school aged children, investigate what types of school-based supports parents/guardians deem most helpful in support of their children, and attempt to identify if and how parents/guardians and schools might connect in meaningful ways in support of the career exploration process of students.

The study targeted parents/guardians of Grade 10, 11, and 12 students within the province of Saskatchewan in the 2012-2013 school year. The initial survey instrument was an online questionnaire involving both quantitative and qualitative components. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted to further explore various aspects stemming from the online results.

Findings identified specific school-based career supports deemed helpful, uncovered perceived gaps in career-related supports, identified the value of career conversations and communication, supported the notion of developing a common language for career development, and acknowledged the power of partnerships. Recommendations for both practice and research were presented in an effort to identify meaningful ways in which parents/guardians and schools may connect in order to help students develop the necessary career competencies to make informed decisions while creating and recreating their preferred futures.

The purpose of this research was to explore what Saskatchewan parents/guardians do to support the career development process and determine if/how parents/guardians and schools might connect in support of this process.

PART 1: A Case For Career Development

Career Development and the Canadian Scene

Internationally, nationally, and provincially, career development has been an area of interest by various stakeholders (Super, 1980; Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Pallandino, 1991; Hiebert & Bezanson, 2000; McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003; Bezanson & Renald, 2004; Lalande and Magnusson, 2007; Response to the National Career Development Strategy Green Paper: Career Development Association of Australia, 2012). The labour market is changing and becoming increasingly complex. Comprehensive career development programs, if designed properly, can help individuals better prepare for the future. Phil Jarvis (2003), a long-time advocate of career development within Canada, stated:

For too many Canadians the traditional vocational guidance paradigm is not working. It expects youth...to make an informed, long-term career choice before graduating from high school. Yet, when groups of adults are asked if they are now doing what they expected to be doing when they graduated, few raise their hands. (p. 3-8)

Jarvis (2003) went on to suggest the need for a model in which:

The new career management paradigm is not about making the right occupational choice. It's about equipping people with the competencies (skills, knowledge, and attitudes) to make the myriad choices with which adults are confronted continuously, in all aspects of their lives, lifelong. (p. 4-8)

The Canadian labour market has changed dramatically over the last few years. For most people, gone are the days of one job for a lifetime. "There is agreement that the 'old way' of 'one job for life' is no longer a reality for most people" (Hiebert & Bezanson, 1995, p. 105). Jarvis (2010) predicted a paradigm shift in which youth will experience multiple jobs in different occupations across varying sectors of the economy as they age. "Projections suggest that new labor market entrants are likely to experience a succession of work roles, with 12 to 25 jobs in up to 5 industry sectors in their working lives. (Alberta Learning, 1999)" (Jarvis & Keeley, 2003, p. 246). As a result, today's youth require specific competencies, including skills, knowledge, and attitudes, to effectively manage their careers (Jarvis, 2010). Workers of the future require " 'meta-competencies' such as learning skills, life management skills, and communication skills that are not occupation-specific and are transferable across all facets of life and work" (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003, p. 3).

For students, the transition from high school to life beyond can be full of uncertainty, excitement, and anxiety (Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Borgen & Hiebert, 2006; Campbell & Unger, 2008; Campbell, 2011; Vignoli, Croity-Belz, Chapeland, de Phillipis, & Garcia, 2005). However,

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there are many supports that can help students build necessary skills and competencies while in high school in order to cope with anxieties, better manage transitions, and make informed decisions. For instance, people, information, and resources can shape students' career decision making and impact their ability to develop skills and competencies. A Comprehensive Career Needs Survey (CCNS) by Magnusson and Bernes (2002) explored the career planning needs of students in Grades 7 through 12 in southern Alberta. Bloxom (2002) analyzed the grade 12 data from the CCNS to determine their needs in regard to career development support. A number of needs were identified, including the need for "people resources" in support of career planning (p. 95). Bloxom's research identified parents as the most significant influencers of the career path of their children. In fact, the study identified parents as the people Grade 12 students are most comfortable approaching for help with career planning. Other studies also recognized parents as key influencers in the career investigations of children (Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Young, 1994; Kracke, 1997; Trusty, Watts, & Erdman 1997; Campbell & Unger, 2008; Keller and Whiston, 2008). Parents have the greatest influence on their children's career path and are the people youth are most likely to converse with regarding career choices (Canadian Career Information Partnership, 2006). However, despite their influence, and "[w]hile parents are the ones that young people most commonly approach for help with career planning, they (parents) often feel ill-equipped to provide guidance" (Campbell, 2011, p. 265). The transition from high school to life beyond can be full of anxiety for parents as well as young people (Campbell & Ungar, 2008). Furthermore, "[p]arents want to help their children but often feel unable to so...[m]ost have been unable to keep up with the ever-expanding information necessary to make well-informed decisions" (Jeffery, Lehr, Hache, & Campbell, 1992, p. 240).

Career Development and the Saskatchewan Context

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) outlined four Provincial Priorities including Higher Literacy and Achievement, Equitable Opportunities, Smooth Transitions, and System Accountability and Governance (Pre-K-12, 2008). School divisions in Saskatchewan face the challenge of addressing the priorities of the CIF in ways that meet local needs. In addition, divisions must be accountable and report annually to the Ministry on progress. In 2007, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education announced a provincial Career Development Action Plan (CDAP) that focused on youth. Minister Deb Higgins acknowledged during the announcement that "...Saskatchewan's youth can expect to change occupations and career sectors numerous times over their lifetime. Students and their families need to be more informed about what their career paths might involve" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2007). The CDAP highlighted six areas of action including an increase in career development practitioners in schools in all school divisions, a mandatory 30 hours of career guidance for middle level

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students, development of students' personal career portfolios, the creation of Career Development action teams in each school division, development of partnerships in support of career development, and the provision of youth and family friendly web resources (Government of Saskatchewan, 2007).

At that time, the Ministry offered career development grants to school divisions willing to engage in short-term career development focused projects with results being shared provincially. In response to the CIF and CDAP, many Saskatchewan school divisions developed career development action plans in order to address Smooth Transitions and the key areas outlined in the CDAP. Although the approach to career development varies from school division to school division, numerous commonalities exist in regard to support offered to high school students based on my experiences.

Although parents are recognized as the key influence in regards to students' career decisions, "counsellors' and educators' attempts to enlist parents in positive ways often appear haphazard or incidental, rather than planned and purposeful" (Sinacore, Healy, & Hasson, 1999, p. 317). Research (Young & Friesen, 1992; Young, 1994; Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2005) has been conducted to investigate the role parents play in supporting their children with this process, but little has been done to identify ways parents and schools may collaborate to support the career explorations of children/students. Specifically, there is a lack of Saskatchewan-focused research in this area. Being that school divisions must address the priority of Smooth Transitions, of which career development is a part, the time is now for Saskatchewan-based investigations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore what Saskatchewan parents/guardians are doing to support the career development process of their high school-aged children, investigate what types of school-based supports parents/guardians deem most valuable in support of their children, and attempt to identify if and how parents/guardians and schools might connect in meaningful ways to support the career exploration process of children/students. Guiding questions included:

What are Saskatchewan parents/guardians currently doing in their role to support the life/career development process of their high school-aged children?

Do parents/guardians perceive current career development supports offered by schools as helpful to children and/or to themselves?

Are there any areas where Saskatchewan schools and parents/guardians might partner in support of the career development process of youth?

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PART 2: A Review Of The Literature

Secondary School Students and Career Planning

In order to better understand how secondary school students engage in career planning, it is useful to reference various career development theories. Holland's theory surrounding personality types and occupational choices (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, & Niles, 2009), Super's focus on the multiple roles one plays and their importance in life/career (Super, 1980, 1990), Savickas's concept of career construction (Savickas, 2005), Krumboltz's ideas regarding happenstance (Krumboltz, 2009), and Bandura's social cognitive research (Bandura, 1977, 1986) all have merit when considering the career planning of high school students. Establishing the importance of career development in the lives of secondary school students substantiates the need for the research and is investigated through an understanding of career theories as theories shape practice.

A detailed description of each of these career theories can be found in the full version of the thesis. In summary, the career theorists identified view career from a holistic perspective acknowledging a multitude of factors and influences which may play a role in the career-related decision making of young people. It is important to highlight career theories because they support the idea that secondary students need career planning guidance as well as provide various lenses for supporting youth with career investigations. Such theories help to explain "the relationship between individuals and their environments or their social contexts, as they undertake career development tasks" (Bloxom, 2002, p. 7). Secondary students learn and approach career planning differently and are at various stages of development (Jarvis, 2010). As a result one, or some combination of these theories, may be applicable in understanding and supporting youth with career related investigations. These theories help us to better understand the career development process and its importance in the lives of youth.

While grade level differences in terms of career planning needs may exist (Gati and Saka, 2001), high school students all explore and plan for post-secondary career options whether they be transitions to work, college, university, exchange opportunities, volunteer experiences, and the like (Tang, Pan, & Newmeyer, 2008). "An important task for high school students is to consider their future occupational choices. They are at an age when educational and vocational decisions are of utmost importance, and all students must decide if they will further their education or enter the workforce" (Witko, Bernes, Magnusson, & Bardick, 2008, p. 22).

The career development process and the transition between secondary school and life beyond is a significant and critical process in an individual's life. Because career involves a "combination of our experiences across our roles as workers, learners, citizens, family members, and leisurites"

(Bloxom et al., 2008, p. 83), there are many factors to consider during this time of transition for adolescents. Canadian students expressed concern about what they planned to do after high school (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006) and high school students recognized “the need for assistance in career/ life planning” (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006, p. 394). It is apparent the career development process is of concern to adolescents and that they seek help with career-related decisions.

Influence of Parents on the Career Exploration Process of Their Children

The study explored the role parents/guardians believe they play in their children’s career exploration process as well as what they actually do to support this process. As a result, it was important to investigate research surrounding the influence of parents on the career development of their children.

Young and Friesen (1992) conducted a qualitative study exploring the role of parents in the career development of their children. The study described the parents’ intentions as they attempted to influence their children’s career development. The overarching assumption of the study was “that parents engage purposefully in their interactions with their children” (p. 199). The study described intentional parental actions in influencing the career development of their children, such as taking a child to a university campus in hopes he or she will explore options, rather than on non-intentional interactions, such as whether or not the maternal family figure is employed and the influence that may or may not have on the child’s career-related decisions. Various categories of parental intention were identified. The current study asked parent/guardian respondents about intentional interactions by exploring what, specifically, they do to help their child with career planning.

An important finding was the influence of parental interest and support for young people, including their career questions and plans, proved more supportive of their career development than providing them with specific career-focused information.

Keller and Whiston (2008)

Keller and Whiston (2008) investigated the connection between specific parental behaviors and the career development of middle level students. The participants included children from three middle schools and represented urban and rural students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Psychosocial support, career action items, and non-loading questions were asked of participants. A panel consisting of young people, parents, and career professionals reviewed the results. The results of the study indicated “that perceived parental behaviors are associated with young adolescents’ career development” (p. 210) and that adolescents “may believe in their own career decision-making abilities only to the degree to which they think their parents believe in them” (p. 210). An important finding was the influence of parental interest and support for young people, including their career questions and plans, proved more supportive of their career development than providing them with specific career-focused information. In fact, family relational and attitudinal variables correlated significantly with a number of career variables for individuals of all ages. “More specifically, this body of research concluded that family environments characterized by

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warmth and openness, but also respect for differences and autonomy, are highly facilitative of career development” (p. 211). The findings indicated people who work with youth should inform parents/guardians of the influence they have on the career-related attitudes, viewpoints, beliefs, and goals of their children. The support of family was identified as an important influence in the career development of young people. Keller and Whiston determined information for parents on ways to support the career development of their children would be welcomed.

Further support was found in investigations by Amundson and Penner (1998) indicating family-functioning criteria as a stronger predictors in the career development of 11th grade children than many other predictors, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and educational achievement, although all may play a role. Kerka (2000) also acknowledged a link between career development and factors such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, and educational achievement, but presented a strong case for the importance of family functioning and family systems in creating a positive foundation for the career success of youth. Researchers have suggested parenting styles that are both demanding and responsive can help young people engage positively in career exploration (Kerka, 2000; Kracke, 1997). Family involvement processes relating to parenting, home-school relationships, and responsibility for learning are critical during the adolescent years (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007). “With family involvement processes in place during middle and high school, youth will be better prepared for smooth transitions to college and other post-secondary settings” (Harvard Family Research Project, 2007, p. 9).

In contrast, Trusty, Watts, and Erdman (1997) looked at how variables such as the amount of time teens live with the parents, number of people financially dependent on the parent, employment situation, life events, gender of teen, family composition, parents’ education, and socio-economic status are predictors of parent involvement in the career development of their children. Trusty et al. discovered that although such variables do impact parents, they do not necessarily affect parental involvement in the career development process of their children. Trusty et al. recognized the influence of parents and indicated families from all socio-economic backgrounds may benefit from counselor facilitated career-related support.

Similar ideas were presented in the work of Tang, Pan, and Newmeyer (2008) which suggested school counselors should consider individual variants (gender, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations) and contextual factors (socioeconomic status) in developing career interventions. Tang et al. suggested counselors should appreciate these variables in supporting the career interests and choices of high school students. Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, and Pallandino (1991) furthered this notion suggesting counselors should recognize the role of parents and consider family relationships when developing career-related supports and interventions.

To better understand the influence of parents on career development, the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC)

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(2011) surveyed Canadians about what kind of role parents played in their career development and what they thought parents should do to support the career choices of children. The results highlighted the fact that 54% of Canadian youth rated their parents as being “wonderfully supportive” of their career choices (p. vii). The younger generation valued the role of parents as only about 33% of the total respondents felt they had wonderfully supportive parents. The research highlighted the importance of the parent-child relationship as it is “the relationships they inspire, that also make a difference to Canadians’ ability to meet their career goals” (p. 17). The CERIC study also looked at how parents can help their children by having participants identify the roles they think are the most important for parents to play in shaping their child’s career choice. The top responses included “encouraging them to learn from experience (by succeeding or failing) (56%), or by exposing children to a range of character-building exercises such as sports and hobbies (51%)” (p. 18). Other responses included “helping children develop career related skills (39%), encouraging children to volunteer in a variety of places (32%), talking to children about career choices (31%) and exposing children to a variety of careers (28%)” (p. 18).

Parents understand their children’s strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes better than anyone else, and, as a result, their involvement is essential to the career development process of their children (Sage, 2004). Planned and intentional parental interactions are very important in preparing children for the future, but everyday positive and proactive family interactions may have the most significant influence in shaping the career exploration of young people (Kerka, 2000).

Career Development Challenges Faced by Canadian Schools

For years, Canadian governments have invested public funds into areas supporting the continuous learning of youth and adults. Lifelong learning is deemed possible when “different kinds of education and training are interconnected (primary, secondary, post-secondary education; classroom, workplace, and web-based learning); life and work goals are both served; individuals, institutions, organizations all have a means to plan and support continuous learning; and, learning is clearly situated in a career development process” (Career Development and Public Policy in Canada: Making Research Practice and Policy a Closed Loop, 2001, p. 1). In addition to lifelong learning, skill development has been an area of government priority in support of Canadians.

Provinces/territories are responsible for education in Canada and governments set their own curriculum and delivery standards for career development in support of lifelong learning and skill development. As a result, “career development varies significantly within some provinces and territories, and often from school to school. Until recently, career development has been regarded as ancillary to the academic function of schools - as valuable but optional” (Career Development and Public

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Policy in Canada: Making Research Practice and Policy a Closed Loop, 2001, p. 3). Some provinces have made career development courses mandatory because, when optional, enrolment tends to be low due to competing options. Schools, employers, and unions have all recognized that not enough has been done to connect young people to the world of work. However, in attempting to create career development opportunities for students, school personnel have faced various obstacles including employers stating they are unable to offer work placement experiences to students due to “health and safety regulations or union objections to the use of unpaid student help” (Career Development and Public Policy in Canada: Making Research Practice and Policy a Closed Loop, 2001, p. 12).

Canadian schools are faced with the challenge of helping young people prepare for a world of work involving ongoing skill development and constant change (Dussault, Fournier, Spain, Lachance, & Negura, 2009). Shifting demographics, technological advances, and globalization are also impacting the Canadian labour market (Saunders & Maxwell, 2003). Young people today must have the necessary competencies to make informed decisions and adapt to various transitions. This makes career development supports, including career counseling, important throughout their lifetimes. Today’s youth are faced with a broad array of options and training possibilities, making choices difficult, especially when combined with life and work goals (Dussault et al., 2009). “Young people require access to high-quality career development services to thrive in the 21st-century world of work” (Slomp & Bernes, 2012, p 33). Canadian schools can help students build competencies to self-manage their careers by supporting them in developing a positive self-image, engaging in lifelong learning, researching and evaluating information, understanding the changing labour market, being cognizant of work/life balance, building resiliency, reflecting on their abilities and interests, and “engaging in activities that promote self-recycling and self-renewing” (Slomp & Bernes, 2012, p 33).

Young people today must have the necessary competencies to make informed decisions and adapt to various transitions.

How Are Saskatchewan Schools Supporting Career Development?

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) with assistance from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) coordinated the Pan-Canadian Symposium in 2003 to gather together stakeholders who impact the career development process of workers and learners with the intent being:

Career Development requires a concerted effort on the part of everyone to be successful. This involves a shared responsibility of individuals, family, service providers, employers and the community-at-large. When these sectors work together co-operatively, the benefits to the individual and society are significant. (Working Connections: A Pan Canadian Symposium on Career Development, Lifelong Learning, and Workforce Development, 2004, p. 35)

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Information has changed slightly since the Pan Canadian Symposium study was conducted, but the study refers to career development related supports offered in the Saskatchewan K-12 system :

Career development course offerings are part of the K-12 curriculum for Grade 6-9 (Career Guidance) and 10-12 (Career and Work Exploration, and Life Transitions). As well, career development competencies are integrated in the more than forty (40) Practical and Applied Arts courses and the English Language Arts curricula. Career development competencies, based on the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs, are being infused across all subject areas over the next few years. The Saskatchewan Job Chart, Saskatchewan Job Futures, career fairs, career skills portfolio implementation, and the use of career tools and supports...provide additional resources for students, teachers, and counsellors. Job coaches and guidance counsellors provide information on pathways and supports for students to assist in school-to-work and school-to-school transitions. (Working Connections: A Pan Canadian Symposium on Career Development, Lifelong Learning, and Workforce Development, 2004, p. 35)

The provincial picture has changed since this symposium was held in 2003. Saskatchewan now has new middle level curriculum including mandatory Grade 6 to 9 Career Education (formerly Career Guidance) classes. The new curriculum is modeled on the broad goals in the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs. There continues to be Practical and Applied Arts course offerings with the focuses listed above. Although the “infusing” of career development competencies in curricula is still encouraged, it is not being highlighted in the newly written curricula in the same fashion. As new Saskatchewan curricula are renewed, the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs competencies are not explicitly outlined. Some of the “Broad Areas of Learning” and “Cross Curricular Competencies” support career development, but a specific framework for developing career competencies is no longer highlighted.

The Saskatchewan Career Development Sector Study (SCDSS) – Final Report (2006) offered a number of suggestions to improve career practice within the province of Saskatchewan. The study highlighted a number of concerns with current career services not only secondary school related but in relation to the overall provincial picture. The SCDSS involved an online survey directed at both career practitioners and managers/supervisors of a cross-section of career service providers including K-12 schools, post-secondary institutions, public/private agencies, and private practitioners. The SCDSS included the administration of an online survey to the two groups which was succeeded by focused follow-up questions. Results highlighted the importance of continuing to seek input from key stakeholders and in building inclusive communities. The current research addressed the fact that parents and schools are key stakeholders in the career exploration process of high school students. The SDCSS indicated

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a wealth of relevant and appropriate information available with a career development focus, but it is not always accurately or easily interpreted.

As mentioned, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education introduced the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) consisting of four Provincial Priorities (Pre-K-12, 2008). School divisions in our province are faced with the challenge of addressing the priorities of the CIF in ways that meet local needs. In relation to Smooth Transitions, many school divisions developed career development action plans. In 2007, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education announced the youth-focused Career Development Action Plan (CDAP). The plan outlined six areas including an increase in career development practitioners in schools in all school divisions, mandatory 30 hours of career guidance for middle level students, development of students personal career portfolios, the creation of career development action teams in each school division, development of partnerships in support of career development, and provision of youth and family friendly web resources. Through my network of school-based career professionals, I have been made aware of many different ways that school divisions have addressed the CIF and CDAP, yet commonalities exist in terms of action plans and career planning supports for adolescents. The online questionnaire developed for the current study listed a number of school-based career-focused supports and had parents/guardians rank them according to their perceived helpfulness. The list was not inclusive of all initiatives/supports within the province and not all school divisions offer all types of supports. However, it was a starting point for feedback. The list was derived from the Saskatchewan Career Development Sector Study as it identified a number of commonly offered career development services. As well, the list was vetted by professionals including career consultants and career development teachers from around the province before finalizing it.

Connections Between Parents and Schools

The literature supports the notion of a need for the involvement of parents in career development programs aimed at young people. Tang, Pan, and Newmeyer (2008) suggested school counselors work with community members to identify resources to assist and improve the career self-efficacy and skills of young people and that parents are an integral part of these plans. It was identified by Palmer and Cochran (1988) that “excluding parents from career programs is unwise, due both to parents’ strategic influence and their ability to devote intensive time to their child’s career development” (Amundson, 1998, p. 136). As well, Turner and Lapan (2002) stated “the role of parents and the role of professional school counselors go hand in hand in the career development of young adolescents” (p. 44).

Turner and Lapan (2002) suggested the role of both career counselors and parents as imperative in supporting the career development process of adolescents. Turner and Lapan (2002) used the Social Cognitive Career Theory of Lent, Brown and Hackett as a “model for understanding how the perceived support of parents and the confidence gained through student

participation in comprehensive guidance programs interact to support the career development of adolescents” (p. 45). Furthermore, “the literature suggested that in order to participate in a more intentional and self-directed way in their own career development process, young adolescents need both the support of their parents and involvement in a comprehensive school-based guidance program that develops confidence around such career-related competencies as career planning and occupational exploration.” (p. 45). Although this was an American study of 7th and 8th graders, the results reflect the importance of combined counselor/parent support in relation to the career development process. Findings indicated counselors can “assist parents in increasing their adolescents’ career self-efficacy” (p. 53) and that parents need to be provided an opportunity to better understand the multitude of career-related options available to adolescents.

According to Young and Friesen (1992), counselors will be most effective in helping parents if they focus on intentional and planned parental influence. Parental intentions are an important part of a counselor’s work (Young & Friesen, 1992; Turner & Lapan, 2002; Tang, Pan, & Newmeyer, 2008). Jeffrey, Lehr, Hache, and Campbell (1992) suggested young people who have solid relationships with their parents tend to be more open to seeking guidance from other sources. In addition, parents are an untapped resource that may be better able to help their children with career choices given the right support. “Parents, particularly mothers, are allies and resources for career counselors in facilitating the career development process” (Otto, 2000, p. 117). When surveying a cross-sectional group of juniors in six North Carolina county schools systems, Otto (2000) found young people “want to talk with their mothers; they want to talk with their school counselors; and they want to talk to their fathers” (Otto, 2000, p. 117) about their career plans.

The Comprehensive Career Needs Survey (CCNS) was designed to explore the career planning needs of students in Grades 7 through 12 in southern Alberta as it was identified that before designing effective career development programming for students, an understanding of student needs was critical. Because adolescent perceptions of the career planning needs of students may differ from that of adults, junior and senior students were surveyed and their results were compared to the perceptions of teachers, counselors, school administrators, and parents (Magnusson & Bernes, 2002). Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, and Witko (2005) analyzed data regarding parents’ perceptions of their role in the career planning of their children collected as part of the larger CCNS. Bardick et al. (2005) investigated parental perceptions of their child’s preparedness in regard to career planning, their role in their child’s career planning, help needed in fulfilling their role, and what gaps exist in career planning programs, services, and/or resources. The majority, 50.3%, of parents identified their child’s level of career preparedness as “somewhat prepared” with confidence increasing as grade level increased (p. 154). In regards to their perceived role in their child’s career planning, parents perceive themselves as providers of information and educators in terms of helping students assess

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choices and values. In addition, parents viewed themselves as facilitators in helping children navigate career planning decisions and secure related experiences. The parents of senior high school students expressed more specific needs than parents of junior high school students in relation to help required to fulfill their roles. Parents of senior students identified a number of areas of support including the need for more information in support of career planning, help in connecting with mentors, and assistance in the personality development of their children. High school parents perceived gaps in existing services, programs, and resources, as they identified the need for more specific career information from high schools, an increase in government funding/scholarships, and more emphasis on job fairs. Overall, they were satisfied with the career related courses and counseling services provided to students.

The literature established a connection between schools and parents/guardians as worthwhile. A portion of the study, therefore, investigated how schools and parents/guardians might connect in meaningful ways in support of the career exploration process of young people.

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PART 3: Key Findings And Discussions

Specific Career-Focused School-Based Supports Perceived as Helpful

In reviewing the results of the study, the top three priorities in terms of the perceived helpfulness of various career-focused school-based resources in support of children were Individual Career Counseling, Career and Work Exploration Classes, and High School Course Selection Support. The top three priorities identified as supporting parents/guardians in helping children were Individual Career Counseling, Career and Work Exploration Classes, and Financial Planning/Scholarship Information. Interestingly, the same top two priorities, Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration Classes, were identified as supporting both children and parents/guardians. This suggests if school divisions focus on these two types of supports, much could be done to help secondary school children and their families with the career development process. The challenge lies in better understanding what parents perceive as helpful in regards to each of these supports and what challenges might exist.

Respondents reported in the follow-up interviews that the delivery of Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration Classes varies greatly. The current study did not explore the realities of each school division's approach to career development or if and how career-related programs, resources, or supports are offered or implemented. However, it is highly likely such supports vary from school division to school division and from school to school across the province. In my own experience, I have been part of a provincial cadre of career development professionals for several years and have been exposed to various means of meeting provincial initiatives in regard to career development. As well, a Canadian study which explored how career development helps youth when accessing career pathways identified that career-development services across our country are highly decentralized with decisions about what and how to offer services made at school board levels (Bell & Bezanson, 2006). Also, in engaging in career conversations through the follow-up telephone interviews, some respondents observed and reported differences between career supports, such as Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration Classes, between rural and urban settings and between schools within the same school division.

Being that these two school-based supports were deemed helpful, further investigation could be done as to the successes and challenges of the various delivery approaches being offered across the province. As was evidenced in the past during the gathering of school division professionals at provincial career development meetings, there is significant merit in learning from others and then determining if and how ideas fit school division initiatives and local needs. These provincial meetings, originally

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sponsored by the Ministry of Education, provided individuals with similar roles, such as Superintendents, Career Development Consultants, Career Education Teachers, and Career Counselors, with the opportunity to network and share ideas and developments in the area of career development as well as present findings of government-funded career development projects conducted by provincial school divisions. However, funding for these meetings and career development grants was cut making it difficult for such focused discussions to continue. There are certainly alternate ways of sharing information and ideas, but it is difficult for all to stay connected without a key group in charge of leading discussions and providing a platform from which to do so. I believe the opportunity to share successes and challenges and engage in conversations with those involved in career development programming within our province's school divisions is a positive way to strengthen existing programs.

Although numerous school-based career development supports were perceived as helpful to children and/or parents/guardians, one wonders about those that received lower ratings. Are they worth the resources devoted to them? Is there a disconnect between what schools and teachers view as important in terms of career-related supports? The current study does not address these questions, but one can speculate that school-based personnel in charge of career-related programs and parents/guardians view programming differently. Therefore, varied perspectives should be considered when acting on key findings of the study. The current study is limited to providing insight into meaningful connection points between students, parents, and schools in relation to career planning.

Significant Gaps in School-Based Career Supports Exist

It was difficult to interpret why parents/guardians reported a lack of awareness of the various supports offered by high schools and the need for access to more real-world experiences to assist children with career exploration as gaps in existing school-based career supports. The telephone interviews attempted to further explore these gaps, but responses varied with most indicating agreement about the lack of awareness of career-related services while expressing uncertainty about the role of career counselors and concerns regarding perceived differences of career supports provided from school to school within our province. It may be that schools are already providing career-development supports deemed important by parents/guardians, but information may not be reaching them in a timely or adequate fashion, if at all. It seems that better communication about the role of the career counselor and the details of the career-related supports offered would go a long way in increasing parent/guardian awareness of the career-related supports offered by Saskatchewan schools.

In reviewing the results, parents/guardians identified the need for more school-based career supports to assist them in their role. In thinking about this, it may be wise to balance comments about not having the necessary

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career information to support their role and having an overwhelming amount of information. It may be that schools can find ways to help parents/guardians access pertinent information in a relevant and timely fashion. Parents/guardians obviously want to help their children and would welcome assistance from the school. A Canadian Career Development Foundation (2003) study supports this notion as parents indicated a desire to become “more involved in the guidance program if they had the information and coaching to do it well” (p. 26). They also valued the assistance of counselors in supporting their children’s career-related decision making. Because parents/guardians in this study perceived themselves as having a guiding role in the career development process of their children, ways of supporting their role as a coach and guide may be useful.

Respondents in the current study expressed a need to expose children to more real-world experiences such as Career and Work Exploration courses, job shadow opportunities, spend-a-days, and recognition of outside-of-school experiences. This key finding emphasizes the perceived importance of real-life experiences in support of career decision making. It seems Saskatchewan parents/guardians believe children can learn about occupations, work environments, and educational pathways as well as develop workplace skills and competencies through what they express as real-world experiences. This aligns with what Jarvis (2010) mentioned as he stated young people require specific competencies in order to self-manage their careers. Current labour market trends indicate today’s youth will experience constant change as they navigate through their working lives. Furthermore, a Canadian Education and Research Institute For Counselling (CERIC) (2011) study indicated responses regarding important ways in which parents can help children explore career goals. Of note was the importance of learning from experiences, being involved in character-building activities, helping children with skill development, encouraging volunteerism, and talking to and exposing children to a variety of career options. Finally, the plenary speaker of a youth panel as part of a career-focused Canadian symposium indicated experiential learning as critical for Canadian youth (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2013). As a result, having youth “be able to self-manage learning and work transitions and their own career development is critical. Career-management skills are no longer optional but are recognized as essential skills for youth today” (Bell & Bezanson, 2006, p. 2). It is evident that parents/guardians in the current study identified the same critical area of focus in supporting children with career exploration as supported in the literature.

Specifically, the current study explored what parents perceived as real-world experiences helpful to their children. Of note were suggestions for experiences including but not limited to Career and Work Exploration courses. Suggestions for shorter-term options such as job shadows, career fairs, and spend-a-days were suggested as these experiences would help expose students to workplace realities. As well, connections to and recognition for activities and programs students are participating in outside of high school would be welcomed and beneficial. These suggestions

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provide a useful starting place for reflecting on current career-related programming, future planning, and in helping young people develop necessary 21st century competencies.

Value of Career Conversations and Communication

Middleton and Loughead (1993) expressed caution in terms of well-meaning parental engagement in relation to the career exploration of youth, as the range of options may be limited by the parents' perceptions of what is acceptable. As Young et al. (2001) suggested, parental intentions could have undesirable outcomes. Despite this, the fact that open dialogue and communication between parents/guardians and children on career-related issues was expressed in the current study as something parents/guardians are doing in support of career planning is extremely encouraging as it is a solid starting place for career conversations. Perhaps school divisions could investigate ways to support parents with these important career conversations which are already occurring in the household. An attempt to do so was made in the follow-up telephone interviews as parents were asked what they do to encourage such conversations as well as if and how schools might be able to support such discussions.

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To generalize, open dialogue and communication appear to occur naturally within households as a normal part of parenting style as reported by the interviewed parents/guardians. This may vary greatly from household to household as expressed by some respondents who worried for families in which such supportive and natural conversations are not a part of everyday discussions. Some suggestions for connections between schools and home included the desire to learn about what other parents are doing to support their children with career exploration and the provision of home-based career conversation starters as provided by career counselors.

Respondents perceived connections between home and school regarding career conversations as positive. Because of this, further investigation into the research of Savickas (2002; 2005) surrounding the use of narratives and storytelling as tools for career development may be valuable. It has been recommended parents and children work towards a common ground and shared understanding of career goals in order to engage in effective career conversations and counselors can play a role in supporting this process (Young et al., 1997). Home can be an important place for career conversations with youth (Young et al., 2001) and well-informed and intentional parental interactions are significant, yet regular positive family conversations and interactions may have the most significant impact in shaping young people's career investigations (Kerka, 2000).

Although limited in scope, the current study contributes to the literature in terms of new findings. Research has been conducted to investigate the role parents play in supporting their children with this process (Young & Friesen, 1992; Young, 1994; Bardick et al., 2005), but little has been

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studied to identify ways parents/guardians and schools may collaborate to support the career explorations of children/students. Given the career-related priorities within the province of Saskatchewan and the limited research, the current study provides new findings in relation to possible connections between parents/guardians and schools. The need for improved communication was prevalent. Parents/guardians suggested the desire for improved three-way communication between students, parents, and career counselors on a multitude of career-related matters is a key connection point. The telephone interviews further explored possible ways to improve three-way communications.

Technology was identified as a useful communication tool, as respondents mentioned the utilization of student-reporting software as a mode of communication. In addition, email, websites and social media tools were provided as suggestions for sharing career-focused information and ideas. Opportunities for face-to-face interactions, such as three-way interviews or parent workshops, would also be appreciated. These thoughts provide relevant insight into decisions being made by Saskatchewan school divisions in the area of career development as the voice of the parents can be considered as validating current services, programs, and supports as well as making possible adjustments.

As a result, connections between home and school in relation to the career- planning process and progress of children/students as well as ways to improve three-way communication between parents/students/ career counselors can support positive dialogue and communication in support of the career investigations of young people. Support for ongoing career conversations and improved communication appears to be a logical connection point between schools and families.

Need to Establish a Common Language

As anticipated at the onset of the study, the results of the current study suggested varied interpretations of the meaning of “career”. Survey respondents expressed a variety of interpretations of career with common themes being work involving further education and/or training, work that is enjoyable and provides happiness, and work spanning a significant period of time. Most themes defined career as being some form of paid work. Although work is an important aspect of career in terms of the transition planning of secondary students, it is not as all-encompassing of an interpretation as is embraced by some researchers or as defined in this study. For instance, Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) do not define career as paid work. Instead, they view career as a combination of all one’s experiences in various roles which should be given consideration in career planning. As a result, in any attempts to improve career-related communication between parents/guardians, students, and schools, it may be worth considering and defining the term career so all stakeholders are talking a common language.

If career is interpreted as the combination of all one's life experiences and that "every person has a career which includes all of the individual's work, learning, recreational, community, and family roles" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 18), then such a definition should be communicated with parents. This broad definition of career was explored with parents during the telephone interviews. Feedback varied, but one telephone respondent provided a notable comment:

I understand and agree with the broad definition of career, but then I think there needs to be more communication and work done by schools in connecting to outside programs and resources if they can't be offered in-house. As well, taking a look at career this way may mean having to acknowledge experiences within our credit system to support students who are pursuing their passions. If we are trying to develop a holistic child, they need access to more opportunities.

As well, another respondent mentioned:

I think kids need more general life-skills classes dealing with finances and leading to a balanced lifestyle, including volunteerism, relationships, managing stress, learning, etc., as all are important.

Finally, an additional telephone interview participant acknowledged the presence and impact of many factors with such a broad definition of career and suggested the importance of "fostering curiosity" in our young people if interpreting the term this way encourages them to explore options.

Thinking about career this way may open up additional possibilities in supporting high school students and their parents/guardians with career development supports that help them build and develop the skills and competencies suggested by the Blueprint for Life Work Designs (Hache, Redekopp, & Jarvis, 2000) in regard to Personal Management, Learning and Work Exploration, and Life/Work building as needed to make intentional career decisions in the 21st century. Through a combination of paid work, unpaid work, educational experience, extra-curricular activities, and volunteer work, young people may develop essential skills to support career decisions. The challenge is in speaking a common language so all stakeholders are aware of the intended interpretation or interpretations of the term. Defining and embracing the term in a multifaceted way may lead to a more holistic approach to comprehensive career development planning and programming within Saskatchewan secondary schools.

Power in Partnerships

Past research has identified that connections between counselors/educators and parents tend to be hit and miss (Sinacore, Healy, & Hasson, 1999). Input into how parents/guardians and schools may collaborate to support the career exploration of children/students can guide policy makers in making informed decisions as to related services, programs, and resources in support of youth. It is certainly best practice for needs assessments to be conducted prior to programming, but such is not necessarily the reality.

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For instance, Bezanson (2004) argued that career development has often focused on what is supplied rather than what is truly needed. Although a few studies have addressed needs, Bezanson suggested it is time to shift from a supply-based focus to a demand-based focus for career-related programs, services, and resources. As well, Bezanson mentioned that counselors spend most of their time on 30% of the students and wonders how many more students might be helped with innovative programming. In thinking about the current study, it is advisable for school division personnel to explore the career development needs of youth from the viewpoint of various stakeholders, including parents/guardians. Doing so may lead to further ideas in regard to needed career-focused services, resources, and programs.

This study explored ideas surrounding possible connections between parents/guardians and schools in relation to career development supports for children/students. One of the online responses that resonates with me is “Ask me for an opinion on how to help. Don’t assume I’m clueless and start from that paradigm.” The current study was an attempt to do just that and so its results may be of interest to school divisions. There is power in collaboration, communication, and conversation. As Bezanson (2004) mentioned, it is time to shift to a needs-based system regarding the delivery and creation of career related services and programs. As well, in a Florida-based study that investigated high school counselor perceptions of school practices that included parents in career planning, Alford-Davidson (2009) used the Social Cognitive Theory of Lent, Brown, and Hackett to identify the importance of interaction between families and school in relation to students’ career planning. Alford-Davidson asserted that school personnel can “influence the quality of students’ home experiences by virtue of their support of parents and the quality of their programs for parents” (p. 117). Because parents/guardians are significant influencers in the life/career decisions of their children (Bloxom, 2002; Campbell & Unger, 2008; Keller and Whiston, 2008), partnering with parents/guardians and attempting to meet their needs may go a long way in supporting their children, our students, in a career development capacity.

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PART 4: Recommendations For Practice

Reflect on Current Models for Career-focused School-based Supports

Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration courses are often components of Saskatchewan school-based career-related programs. Both concepts may warrant further reflection when considering possible connections between home and school in support of the career development of youth.

Policy makers may want to consider an increase or improvement in one-to-one access between parents, students, and career counselors, as individual career counseling was identified as the top priority in supporting both the child and parents/guardians with career exploration while the child attends high school. This may involve identifying unique and innovative ways to address the need for a customized approach to career counseling while being sensitive to the realities of each school's needs, budgetary considerations, and other variables.

Within our province, the provision of career counseling services in secondary schools varies greatly. Although mandatory Career Education classes exist for Grade 6 through 9 students, provincial requirements for mandatory career counseling and career courses are not part of secondary school programming. Within Saskatchewan, many school divisions do offer some form of career counseling sometimes by trained professionals with a related counseling designation but more often by teachers with an interest in career counseling. School-based career services may not be currently accessed by all secondary level students. For instance, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) (2003) reported that a Canadian provincial study indicated about one-third of secondary students access career counseling and that most are post-secondary bound. Being that such a multitude of career options are available to young people, not all involving post-secondary studies immediately following high school, it is important for all secondary students to access school-based career counseling. This may mean rethinking how career-counseling supports are currently being offered within Saskatchewan high schools in order to ensure equitable access.

Finding unique ways to engage and support students and their parents/guardians through individualized career counseling can help young people develop necessary skills and navigate through the wealth of career-related information as they explore their options. This recommendation is substantiated by past research in that, the CCDF (2003) study found young Canadians indicated a need for more time with career specialists and a preference for one-on-one assistance in relation to career related services and supports. In addition, parents place high expectations on guidance counselors. Parents highly value school guidance programs in which

Policy makers may want to consider an increase or improvement in one-to-one access between parents, students, and career counselors.

“counselors are known to be interacting with the students and parents get a chance to be involved in some way” (p. 26). Parents also appreciate school programs that include parents in planned activities. Reflecting on current practices and determining meaningful ways to include all secondary students in career planning while also supporting and encouraging parent/guardian involvement can help students navigate their preferred futures.

Career and Work Exploration classes are a Practical and Applied Arts offering available to high school students within Saskatchewan. They must be taught by an individual who possesses a valid provincial teaching certificate and must adhere to specific placement-monitoring requirements. The theory-based and practical components of the courses aid in the career exploration process of students by helping them gain transferable skills, enabling them to investigate an occupation of interest, allowing for networking opportunities, and building related career competencies. However, offering the courses can prove challenging. For instance, if students have to travel for relevant workplace experiences, timetables must be adequately scheduled in order to allow teachers time to provide adequate supervision. Travel arrangements and costs for the teacher and students must also be considered. Some school divisions have made some combination of Career and Work Exploration courses mandatory, but for the most part, they exist as one of a multitude of optional Practical and Applied Arts electives. From my experience, the success of Career and Work Exploration programs rests with the school division personnel responsible for programming. In order for these courses to serve their purpose, it is important to make them accessible to all students while, at the same time, allowing for the necessary supports in terms of scheduling and monitoring. Accessibility, placements which suit the needs and interests of students, and adequate supervision and feedback are necessary in order to provide young people with the opportunity to investigate occupations of interest while developing transferable skills and 21st century competencies.

In this study, Career and Work Exploration classes were recognized as helpful but concerns, such as timetabling conflicts and a lack of variety of relevant work placement opportunities, were identified. Policy makers should reflect on current practices and include various stakeholders in brainstorming creative solutions to the perceived challenges in order to offer Career and Work Exploration courses. Given their perceived helpfulness, it is necessary to make these courses accessible to more young people. As well, it is important these classes allow students to investigate areas of interest while acquiring work-related competencies.

Despite research showing the benefits of work experience programs in helping high school students make decisions about the future, these programs are often targeted at academically challenged students (Campbell, 2011). Within some Saskatchewan schools, Career and Work Exploration classes might be presented in this manner or perceived this way by students and parents, whether or not that is the intent. Parents/guardians in this study are supportive of Career and Work Exploration classes, but there is

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definitely room for policy makers to consider how to improve the offerings. These classes offer students a real-world opportunity to explore an occupation of interest in a safe and supportive learning environment, which can lead to informed decisions regarding career choices. Providing funding for students to travel to other communities for the work experience, offering theory components by distance learning, making one or some combination of the course offerings mandatory, forming unique partnerships with various businesses to offer relevant work experiences, and/or providing adequate teacher training at the post-secondary level within our province might be ways of addressing these concerns while realizing specific monitoring requirements must be met.

Policy makers at the provincial level could reflect on this information in considering any future adjustments to the Saskatchewan Career Development Action Plan (CDAP). In the meantime, policy makers at the school division level should revisit and reflect on the current delivery model for both Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration classes. There may also be ways to offer additional secondary level career-focused courses or further infuse career education competencies, career counseling, or work exploration opportunities into other curriculum areas in a planned and purposeful way. Regardless, both Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration are critical areas of consideration for Saskatchewan secondary schools as they are perceived as helpful in terms of supporting the child directly and in helping the parent/guardian support his/her child with career exploration.

Exposure to “Real-World” Experiences

In addition to Career and Work Exploration classes, other ways of helping students acquire meaningful work experiences should be examined. For instance, school division policies regarding career investigation supports such as job shadows, informational interviews, portfolio development, exit interviews, and/or apprenticeship opportunities could be revisited or developed. Paid employment, extracurricular activities, and volunteer opportunities can also inform career-related decision making (Campbell, 2011). Because parents/guardians know the interests and abilities of their children and have time to devote to their development (Amundson, 1998), it makes sense to involve parents/guardians in support of real-world experiences.

Just as important as the real-world experiences are ways to help children/students reflect on them. To learn from exposure to real-world opportunities, young people must consider these experiences in terms of their own interests and abilities. Reflecting on experiences can have a significant impact in helping young people make informed choices about future career pathways because learning is enhanced through reflection (Bell & Bezanson, 2006; Campbell, 2011).

Of note is the fact that the creation of career development portfolios did not receive an overly high rating in terms of importance from a parent/guardian

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perspective. The development of personal career portfolios was identified as part of the Ministry's Career Development Action Plan. If used properly, research suggests career portfolios can be excellent tools for reflection. According to Morrissey et al. (2008), a career portfolio involves a collection of materials representative of one's academic, leisure, and career development activities while showcasing skills, learning, and strengths. Such portfolios involve reflection in relation to one's interests (Morrissey et al., 2008). If properly utilized, portfolios can help young people reflect on real world experiences as they develop new skills and engage in informed decision making. Schools, parents/guardians, and students could all play an important part in this reflective process by establishing a connection between the relevance of such career portfolios and the career exploration process of students.

Training for Individuals Delivering School-based Career-focused Supports

Respondents also identified adequate training of those delivering career development services, programs, and resources as important. Despite efforts to address the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education's Career Development Action Plan and the priority of Smooth Transitions as highlighted in the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF), very little has been done to educate and/or train individuals in the area of career development. It is recommended that those who are involved in career counseling, teaching Career and Work and Work Exploration courses, or making decisions pertaining to school division plans for career development have sufficient background and preparation to provide legitimate experiences for students and parents/guardians.

Within the province of Saskatchewan, a teaching certificate is necessary to teach curriculum, but educators do not have to have specific background in order to teach Career and Work Exploration courses. As well, approaches to career counseling within Saskatchewan secondary schools vary. In my experience, career counselors within our school division consist primarily of teachers with an interest in career development. It is not required that they have specific post-secondary training other than being qualified to teach within Saskatchewan. For example, within Sun West School Division, itinerant Career Development Teachers in smaller rural schools are responsible for teaching various combinations of middle level Career Education courses and Career and Work Exploration courses in addition to performing Career Counselor duties. Within larger schools, lead Career Development Teachers serve as Career Counselor and act as the key contact for Career Education and Career and Work Exploration Teachers within their school. The Career Development Teachers meet with me, the Career Development Consultant, several times per year in a professional development capacity. In other provincial school divisions, various approaches exist because elements of career development may be carried out by individuals designated as career counselors, or by administrators, teachers, youth counselors, or some combination.

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Parents/guardians of the current study acknowledged career counseling as being an important role, but one requiring training. The most effective way to provide training is debatable; different schools of thought exist in support of both formal and informal training of career counselors (Niles, Engels, & Lenz, 2009; Burwell, Kalbfleisch & Woodside, 2010). Discussions at a joint symposium in 2007 held by the International Association for Education and Vocational Guidance, the Society for Vocational Psychology, and the National Career Development Foundation focused on the training of researchers and practitioners while exploring the need for public policies, greater competency standardization, and innovative training programs in support of career development (Niles, Engels, & Lenz, 2009).

Although a certificate or diploma from one of the many programs offered in Canada or elsewhere could be beneficial, I do not personally believe career counseling in our Saskatchewan schools requires a professional counseling designation. However, there are key elements worth exploring in support of training. In addressing the concerns of parents/guardians in this study, it seems reasonable to investigate ways to ensure all those involved in the delivery of school-based career-related services, programs, and resources share common knowledge, recognize key career-development competencies, and speak a common language in order to deliver consistent career information and messages to students and parents/guardians across our province. Numerous career models and studies identify secondary school as an important time in the career planning of young people (Super, 1990; Savickas, 2002; Tang, Pan, & Newmeyer, 2008). In addition, theories provide insight grounded in research into the career planning process of individuals. An in-depth understanding of career-related theories may not be required by all stakeholders, but it may be useful for those involved in school-based career development supports to have a solid understanding of related theories. Having an understanding of the standards and guidelines for career development practitioners is essential in order to offer effective and ethical career-related supports (Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners, n.d.).

A model worth consideration is one offered at the University of Lethbridge in which preservice teachers are provided with career education training. The program is entitled Career Coaching Across the Curriculum: Integrating Career Development into Classroom Instruction (Slomp & Bernes, 2012). Research was conducted surrounding this pilot project created to train teachers to infuse career education competencies into K-12 curricula. Training consisted of an introduction to career theories, strategies for assessing student career-planning needs and involving students in the career-planning process, insight into the world of work in the 21st century, introduction to career assessments, and the like. As part of the course, preservice teachers were required to design unit plans and deliver lesson plans integrating career outcomes into their primary subject areas. Results were positive in terms of the career-focused learning of preservice teachers and the benefits to their students as meaningful career-related learning experiences were created (Slomp & Bernes, 2012).

This pilot project might be worth consideration in Saskatchewan. It may not be the model best suited for our province, but could be used to initiate discussion as to the importance of specific of career-related training in existing Education programs at the University level. As well, similar training could be accomplished in additional ways. For instance, relevant training might be offered through an existing or newly formed provincial organization in support of career development, the re-establishment of career-focused provincial school division sessions as were once available in Saskatchewan, the development of a provincial career-related website incorporating the needs of career practitioners as well as other stakeholders, the creation of formal career-focused training for aspiring teachers studying at post-secondary institutions, the delivery of related in-person or on-line professional development at the school division level, or some combination. Regardless, some form of common background and training is viewed as helpful in acknowledging and addressing the inconsistencies in the delivery of career-related services, programs, and resources expressed by parents/guardians in this study.

Creation of Partnerships and Importance of Ongoing Communication

The formation of partnerships between students, parents, and schools in relation to the career planning of secondary students within our province is recommended as a worthwhile initiative. Partnering in a variety of ways may make it possible to address areas of career concern, such as the need for improved three-way communication and exposure to more real-world experiences. As mentioned, results from the current study revealed Individual Career Counseling and Career and Work Exploration Classes as first and second priorities respectively in support of the career planning process. These two priorities are consistent with the expressed need for improved communication between schools and parent/guardians and the need for more real-life work experiences which were perceived as significant gaps in the available programs, services, and resources.

Young people need to develop relevant skills and competencies needed to navigate through an ever-changing world. Today's youth are likely to experience constant change and various jobs throughout their lifetimes (Hiebert & Bezanson, 1995; Jarvis, 2010). They need to be able to think critically and creatively in order to make informed decisions. Collaboration and communication are important skills for youth to develop as well as essential tools for the establishment of solid partnerships. Thus, in order to address the ideas presented by parents/guardians in this study, it is beneficial for Saskatchewan high schools to collaborate and communicate with parents/guardians, students, and community-based stakeholders in support of career planning. The formation of partnerships in support of meaningful real-world career exploration opportunities for young people can be beneficial for all involved including students, parents/guardians, industry, post-secondary institutions, and schools.

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Students, themselves, have identified career-planning as an area in which they want schools to focus (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2003) and parents are key influencers in the life/career decision making of young people. Knowing young people approach their parents above anyone else for career-planning purposes (Bardick et al., 2005) supports the importance of considering parental perceptions in regard to the career planning and exploration of youth. As Bardick et al. mentioned, “Examining parents’ perceptions of their role in adolescent career planning is important in order to better meet the career development needs of adolescents” (p 152). Also, parents have the ability to invest significant time in their children’s career development (Amundson & Penner, 1998), and it has been found that young people believe in their career-related decisions and abilities in correlation to the degree their parent’s believe in them (Keller & Whiston, 2008). Finally, Alford-Davidson (2009) indicated “the involvement of parents can be a possible resource for educators to utilize as they assist students in making educational and occupational choices” (p. 10) and “parents are not only their child’s first teacher, but... have the best understanding of their child’s background, abilities, and interests” (p. 10). Because of the time parents/guardians can potentially devote to supporting their individual child with career-related decisions and the significant influence their perceptions of their child’s career choices have, it is reasonable for schools to connect with families. This message was reiterated in one of the telephone interviews in which a participant welcomed the sharing of career-related information from the school and career counselor yet states, “My child is MY child. The career counselor has 300+ students to help, anything they can do is great, but it is my responsibility to help my child.” The Pan-Canadian Study of Career Practices in K-12 Public Schools (2009) indicated a high ratio of students to counselors in the K-12 school system and suggests the responsibility for career-related support needs to be shared among such stakeholders as schools, parents/guardians, and community. Therefore, it makes good sense for schools to consider how to ensure access for all students and how to involve families when determining career-planning supports.

The intense demands on career counselors and the varied interpretations of career were among the areas of career concern presented by parents/guardians in this study. Perhaps creative uses of counselor time and ways of including parents/guardians in the career-planning process can help share the load, improve lines of communication, and further support the career exploration process of all young people.

It may be beneficial for policy makers at the school level to provide programs geared towards providing parents/guardians with the knowledge, skills, and information necessary to positively support the career development process of their children (Campbell, 2011; Witko et al., 2008). There are various programs and resources in existence which may be utilized by school personnel.

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There is great value in communication and collaboration. Policy and decision makers at the provincial, school division, and local school levels are encouraged to revisit the current plan for career development within Saskatchewan while engaging in career-related conversations and exploring partnerships with various stakeholders. The goal is to devise a delivery model that supports the development of the necessary skills and competencies today's youth require in order to navigate the 21st century in order to create and recreate their preferred futures. "Young people require access to high quality career development services to thrive in the 21st century world of work" (Slomp & Bernes, 2012). Given the influence parents/guardians have on the life/career-planning process of adolescents, forging partnerships in support of their children, our students, is deemed a worthwhile endeavour.

PART 5:

Recommendations For Further Research

Continued career development research is important in order to shift from a supply-based to a demand-based system as suggested by Bezanson (2004). Parents/guardians in the current study identified the lack of real-world experiences as a gap in current school-based services, programs, or resources. Further research on ways to provide children/students with real experiences in support of career investigations may be worthwhile as work experience, job shadows, guest speakers, apprenticeship opportunities, spend-a-days, hands-on opportunities, volunteer experiences, field trips, extra-curricular participation, project-based learning experiences, dual credits, skill development, classroom connections, infusing career competencies into curriculum, or related simulations may be possibilities. Other ideas may be uncovered which were not identified in the current study. Regardless, localized needs assessments of parents/guardians and children/students may better inform schools as to areas of need from which innovative and effective supports could be accessed, implemented, or developed. Further research and creative solutions will support young people in building career-development competencies.

When asked about what parents/guardians need to better fulfill their role in helping children with career planning, many reported being uncertain about what would be useful. The response of being unsure was very hard to interpret as it could mean they feel they are currently fulfilling their role, do not know what to ask for, or have a limited view of “career.” This theme is similar to past research conducted in which parents/guardians reported active involvement in the career-related decision making of their children yet were uneasy, unsure, and/or unprepared as to how to be effectively involved. (Downing & D’Andrea, 1994; Campbell, 2011; Jeffery, Lehr, Hache, & Campbell, 1992). Further exploration into this response through qualitative research may uncover what parents are truly thinking and what they need in terms of helping them further fulfill what they express as being an essential role.

It may be worth replicating this study or designing a similar one in a few years time in order to compare results and try to reach a larger and more diverse population. For instance, the majority of respondents were females reporting high-income levels and various training and educational experiences of their own. Therefore, parents/guardians of this study perceived scholarship and post-secondary information as important, which is logical given the strong majority of respondents reported the likelihood of their child going on to full-time post-secondary studies immediately following high school. Further research with families whose socioeconomic level is different from the respondents of the current study may be useful as their perceptions are worthy of consideration when policy makers at the school division level are considering adequate career-related supports for students and their parents/guardians. As identified in the literature review, Trusty et al. (1997) acknowledged the influence of parents and suggested

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families from all socio-economic backgrounds could benefit from counselor facilitated career-related support. Further Saskatchewan-based research into relevant career-related supports for marginalized groups such as new Canadians, impoverished families, indigenous people, and the like should be explored to better inform practice.

This study provided more information on Saskatchewan parent/guardian perspectives as to what they are doing to support the career development process of their high school-aged children, what career-related school-based supports parents/guardians deem helpful, and how parents/guardians and schools might connect in meaningful ways in support of the career exploration process.

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