Ontario Students' Perceptions of Career Development Experiences: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine Ontario post-secondary students' perceptions of their career development experiences. The overall expectations of career education in the last two decades in Ontario have included: understanding personal competencies and interests, becoming successful and contributing members of society, and more recently, learning how to make informed life choices (MOE, 1999; 2013; 2019). This qualitative research uses Stake's (1995) case study approach, which considers four main perspectives: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic, and will be utilized to investigate and analyze seven individual interviewed cases of post-secondary students' perceptions, and experiences of career development in Ontario. The data show the role of educators, extra-curricular activities, and specified events and influences as critical to participants' development, and recommendations. Participants shared recommendations including: wanting increased options for personalized learning, more transitional and career-related information provided, and the need for a better understanding of transferable skills. Overall, the research reveals that Ontario students require additional support for a smoother transition to post-secondary pursuits.

Keywords: career development, 21st century skills, student support, transition, Ontario, case study

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List of Acronyms

BA	=	Bachelor of Arts
BSc	=	Bachelor of Science
ECA	=	Extra-Curricular Activities
GTA	=	Greater Toronto Area
HWDSB	=	Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
MA	=	Master of Arts
MOE	=	Ministry of Education
MPA	=	Master of Public Administration
MSc	=	Master of Science
NRC	=	National Research Council
OCDSB	=	Ottawa Catholic District School Board
OPSBA	=	Ontario Public School Boards' Association
OSSD	=	Ontario Secondary School Diploma
PhD	=	Doctor of Philosophy
STEM	=	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (as subjects of study)

Chapter 1

Introduction

Career development for students is imperative for a meaningful, worthwhile, and equitable educational experience. My passion for pursuing an approach in which all students have equitable access to resources and supports, educational opportunities, and practical career-development stems from my personal experience in having access to extra-curricular activities (i.e. sport teams, musical training, student government), and course electives that enabled me to develop strong leadership skills. In grade eleven, I was in a course where each student was paired up with a previously identified at-risk grade nine student to provide mentorship to these grade nine students throughout the semester. During this time, I remember driving home with my Dad one day, and saying something along the lines of, "I can understand why some people refer to high school as the best days of your life, but what about all of those who can't?" From that moment forward, my guiding motivation through high school, my undergraduate degree, and beyond has always been: how can I use my skills to provide accessible and equitable opportunities to all students?

That leadership course in grade eleven was one of my first opportunities to have a real, tangible effect on others around me. While my section was slotted for the second term, due to the mentorship program, we had group meetings to attend and responsibilities to fulfill all year long. In one of those meetings, I learned of the culminating assignment for the following semester. In small groups, students were required to design and implement a project that positively influenced the local community. For my project, I had an idea that in addition to weekly meetings between mentors and mentees, all students could meet bi-monthly for an afterschool program. These activities would be optional, and alternate between social and academic-based events. I decided to run it by my soon-to-be teacher to determine feasibility, and he immediately encouraged me to apply for funding through an Ontario Ministry of Education program called SpeakUp Projects. Our application was successful, and the project received funding to supply food, support social activities, and provide academic resources to students through our bi-monthly events. While not everyone in the mentorship program participated (upwards of 100 mentors and mentees inc.), on average we had 20-30 students show up to each event. Almost all students had made at least one appearance by the end of the term, and the academic-focused nights had established a supportive space, and network for grade nine students to seek valuable assistance. Facilitating these events

empowered me to continue pursuing positions that would equip me with the skills and resources to partake in student programming for years to come.

After taking a couple years to transition into the daily routines of university life, I applied for a third-year representative position in my Social Sciences' Faculty Society, which would enable me to plan and host events for students in my academic year. The Faculty Society was funded through the Faculty, and received a pre-determined amount of tuition money from each Social Sciences' student. However, most students rarely took advantage of the resources and events facilitated through the Faculty–events paid for by their own tuition money. While I had my third-year representative position, I planned two career panel events, each with four professionals from different fields in social sciences. I wanted to get as many students interested and involved as I could. After successfully facilitating a few more events, I was considerably immersed into the student life at my university. The following year, I was elected to lead, plan, and supervise all students programming within the Social Sciences' Faculty. This allowed me to engage and work closely with students from all years, welcome week facilitators, program coordinators from other Faculties, the Faculty Office, the Faculty's Experiential Education Office, and the Student Union as a whole.

Through these experiences, I began to understand how inaccessible university-driven initiatives felt to the majority of students. I also learned about the differences in opportunities offered among programs and faculties. Prestigious programs within the university such as Health Sciences, Engineering, and Kinesiology provided a considerable amount of personalized learning opportunities; while students from other faculties had no idea that such opportunities could have even been an option. Mandatory first year courses that equipped students with professional development, etiquette skills, and career related opportunities were simply not available for students on the other end of campus. Meanwhile, I noticed that professors commonly assumed that students had learned particular relevant classroom skills in high school, and had no space in their syllabus to facilitate learning that they believed to be fundamental, and thus out of their domain.

After identifying these gaps in the education system, and differential learning opportunities in general, I began to consider the impact that centralized, and mandatory public education can have on students. This led to my goal of developing career education curriculum for the Ontario Ministry of Education, in order to propose changes that would provide students

with increased, personalized support earlier on in their education. However, as a result of my experience in this Master's program, I decided my next step would be to enroll in teacher's college instead. One night, while I was reading up on research for a class assignment, I realized that although productive and purposeful curriculum is critical to students' learning, how teachers decide to implement it is really what makes the difference. After that, I realized there was no other pathway for me. That being said, my decision came from the same heart and motivation that steered my interest in pursuing this Master of Arts in Education program and conducting my research in the first place: all students deserve accessible and equitable opportunities through their education.

Through my research, my goal is to learn, discuss, and consider the perspectives of other students and their experiences with career development. As such, my study is to examine Ontario student perceptions of their career development experiences. Student feedback is critical in determining effective pedagogical approaches and necessary improvements in curriculum content to best serve the needs of students in our rapidly evolving society. While I do have personal motivations for this research, career education has also simultaneously become a timely research topic with the current trends and priorities of Canadians. Canadians understand that students need to be equipped with the skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary education and career pursuits. To aid in developing a strong understanding of the historical evolution of career education in Ontario, the trajectory and development of past policy and curriculum is discussed next.

Evolution of Career Education in Ontario

Curriculum and Policy Released in 1999

Prior to 1999, career education curriculum in Ontario was presented as a section of The Common Curriculum: Policies and Outcomes, Grades 1-9 (as cited in MOE, 1999a) of 1995. Similarly, guidance and career education program policy was included in: Transition Years, Grades 7, 8, and 9: Policies and Program Requirements, 1992 (as cited in MOE, 1999b). As of 1999 however, the MOE released both guidance and career education curriculum for grades nine and ten, and program policy for grades nine through twelve (MOE, 1999a; MOE, 1999b). Likely, this educational reform emerged as a result of the neoliberalism movement in Ontario (Sattler, 2012). While a separate document was released in 2000 on the Ontario guidance and career education curriculum for grades eleven and twelve, there is no archive available on the

government website. As such, the replacement curriculum released in 2006 will be discussed later on.

The Choices Into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools (MOE, 1999b) was the first policy to focus specifically on the purpose and importance of Ontario's guidance and career education program. It provided a rationale for the program, citing the need for students to develop effective work habits, and healthy life skills for their educational, social, and career success in the twenty-first century. It also identified key features of the program such as: career exploration activities, annual education plans, a teacher-advisor option, and a program-effectiveness survey conducted every three years. Policy goals included the development and application of skills that will contribute to constructive student, interpersonal, and career development. It offered techniques for proactive assessment and evaluation tactics, and outlined roles and responsibilities for principals, teachers, students, and parents. To conclude, it charted an implementation schedule from years 1999-2002.

Likewise, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Guidance and Career Education (MOE, 1999a) curriculum started off by addressing the place of guidance and career education in the curriculum, subsequently providing an overview, information on teaching approaches, curriculum expectations, strands, and an achievement chart. The curriculum outlined two open courses: Learning Strategies 1: Skills for Success in Secondary School in grade nine (optional), and Career Studies in grade ten (compulsory). Through the Career Studies course, students would begin preparing for a complex and evolving world. Elements such as: time management, identifying personal strengths and weaknesses, and plans for post-secondary education and work were highlighted. While the document did touch on teaching approaches, it only offered about two paragraphs worth that took up half a page. It included suggestions such as: direct instruction, one-on-one teaching, experiential learning, and case studies, etc. It only however, expanded on one approach in particular, which was the continuous inquiry process–emphasizing the positive effects of students' exploratory and reflective nature.

Three strands were given to guide the grade ten program and its curriculum expectations: interpersonal knowledge and skills; exploration of opportunities; and preparation for transitions and change. Within each strand, both specific, and overall expectations were provided. Some examples of specific expectations included: to develop a profile outlining personal interests, strengths, and personality traits; to document responsibilities and demonstrate effective time

management skills; to explore post-secondary and work opportunities; and to set goals and practice decision-making techniques. Whereas, overall expectations included: to show an understanding and application of strategies for success; to identify future work opportunities; and to apply marketing and networking practices. Finally, the achievement chart provided for guidance and career education detailed four categories of knowledge and skills: knowledge/understanding, thinking/inquiry, communication, and application. The knowledge/understanding category outlined: knowledge of facts; understanding of concepts; and understanding of relationships between concepts. The thinking/inquiry category outlined: critical and creative thinking skills, and inquiry skills. The communication category outlined: communication of information, ideas and experiences; use of language and visuals; communication for different audience and purposes; and use of various forms of communication. The application category included: application of ideas and skills; transfer of ideas and skills; application of current technology; and making connections. The document concluded with definitions of terms and explanatory notes for teachers and parents/guardians.

Curriculum Released in 2006

As of 2006, the MOE had released two separate documents addressing guidance and career education in grades nine and ten in one, and grades eleven and twelve in the other (MOE, 2006a; 2006b). The grade nine and ten curriculum included a new grade ten open course titled: Discovering the Workplace, as well as added a grade ten option: the Learning Strategies 1: Skills for Success in Secondary School course (MOE, 2006a). Optional courses were also included in the guidance and career education program for grades eleven and twelve (MOE, 2006b). These comprised of: (1) Designing Your Future; (2) Leadership and Peer Support; and (3) Advanced Learning Strategies: Skills for Success After Secondary School for grade eleven, as well as a section of the latter course for grade twelve, and a (4) Navigating the Workplace option. Except for the initial section in grade nine, all learning strategies courses were to be taken based on recommendation by principal (MOE, 2006a; 2006b).

In 2006, the MOE continued to maintain the number of strands in the Career Studies course at three: personal management; exploration of opportunities; and preparation for transitions and change. Subcategories of each strand were briefly expanded on, but were still centered on the same information as prior curriculum (MOE, 2006a). For example, the three subcategories under the 'preparation for transitions and change' strand in the 1999 curriculum

were: managing change; searching for work; and setting goals and planning action (MOE, 1999a). Whereas, the three subcategories under the 'preparation for transitions and change' strand in the 2006 curriculum were: developing a career plan; managing change; and searching for work (MOE, 2006a). While the MOE did add more courses to the guidance and career education program through the 2006 curriculum, the Career Studies course remained as the only compulsory career education class in Ontario. Next, a brief synopsis of each course will be given.

In both the grade ten and twelve courses: Discovering the Workplace, and Navigating the Workplace, respectively, students are given the opportunity to learn essential workplace skills, as well as provided with hands-on practical experience (MOE, 2006a; 2006b). Through the grade eleven course: Designing Your Future, students explore post-secondary options based on their interests and skillset (MOE, 2006b). In contrast, the grade eleven Leadership and Peer Support course is offered with the goal of supplying students with leadership and peer support role opportunities. Finally, the grade twelve Advanced Learning Strategies course appears to build on skills outlined in the grade nine Learning Strategies course, however, is more focused on preparing students for post-secondary pursuits. Each course included three to four strands, with specific and overall expectations, likewise to the Career Studies course.

The MOE 2006 documents included several new subtopics such as: secondary schools for the twenty-first century; planning for experiential learning and cooperative education; programs leading to a specialist high-skills major; antidiscrimination education in guidance and career education; and literacy, numeracy and inquiry/research skills. While these two documents focus on the courses under only their respective grades, the other halves of each document are word for word identical in their subtopics and descriptions. In depth topics such as: roles and responsibilities in guidance and career education; assessment and evaluation of student achievement; and some considerations for program planning in guidance and career education appear the same in each document. In comparison to the 1999 curriculum, the content of similarly titled subtopics are more or less the same (MOE, 1999a; 2006a; 2006b). The 2006 curriculum entailed a bit more detail, and emphasized intentions and goals through improved formatting and increased content (MOE, 2006a; 2006b). For example, assessment and evaluation of student achievement was described in greater detail, and offered more guidance around the process and accommodations necessary for fair assessment and evaluation of students. The 2006

curriculum also provided more information on the categories and definitions included in the achievement chart (MOE, 2006a; 2006b). Similar to the 1999 curriculum, the grade nine and ten document concluded with a glossary of new terms (MOE, 1999a). While there has been another iteration of the grade 10 Career Studies curriculum released in 2019, the 2006 curriculum remains as the current curriculum for grades nine, a couple of ten, eleven, and twelve career education courses.

Policy Released in 2013

In 2013, the MOE released a document titled: Creating Pathways to Success, An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools: Policy and Program Requirements, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (MOE, 2013). This document was released to supersede the program policy discussed earlier from 1999. The new policy offered an improved career development policy for Ontario schools. Its opening chapter titled: Career Development in the Twenty-first Century was the first time academic references were employed in the Ontario career education program. It cited research that addressed the importance of developing tools for decision-making, skills for effective career planning, and positive outcomes associated with career/life planning programs. This was also the first time the MOE provided the meaning of career, and explored its various aspects. In this updated policy, the MOE identified program goals through the development of an 'All About Me' portfolio that included utilizing a four-step inquiry process to ensure students develop important life skills, and engage with opportunities both in the classroom, and out in their local community. The four-step inquiry process offered the following framework: (1) knowing yourself; (2) exploring opportunities; (3) making decisions and setting goals; and (4) achieving goals and making transitions. This framework is to be used from kindergarten to grade twelve, and can be applied in different areas of learning throughout all developmental stages. Each step has an associated inquiry question, and knowledge and skills area of learning outlined. For example, knowing yourself asks 'who am I?' and is to be applied by identifying personal characteristics, influential factors, and to initiate self-reflection tendencies. Students are also asked to create an Individual Pathways Plan (IPP) in grades seven to twelve, which have the potential to guide structured learning, and serve as records throughout their educational career.

The MOE also offered suggestions for transitional planning, and how teachers can provide effective support and learning opportunities for students' development. Some of these included

examples for career/life exploration activities, experiential learning, and cooperative education programs. This document also highlighted the positive effects of extra-curricular activities, community involvement, and part-time employment. Its concluding chapter outlined program development, implementation, and evaluation strategies. It recommended that each elementary and secondary school create and maintain an Education and Career/Life Planning Program Advisory Committee to ensure these procedures and strategies are followed. This included establishing parent and student engagement, as well as monitoring and measuring program effectiveness. Students are then required to complete student exit surveys at the end of grade eight and twelve. This 2013 policy remains as the directive for career education in Ontario (MOE, 2013).

While there have only been a couple of curriculum and policy advancements of career education in Ontario, this is the historical evolution of its program. Admittedly, the MOE continues to improve their direction and detail, but a key element is still missing: do schools and teachers effectively implement this career education program? Moreover, are they adequately equipped and trained to do so? Next, the current state of career education in Ontario is addressed.

Current State of Career Education in Ontario

Curriculum Released in 2019

The Ontario Curriculum, Career Studies: Grade 10 Guidance and Career Education (MOE, 2019) presents a considerably revised, and new version of past career education curriculum. In their vision of this revised Career Studies course, the MOE acknowledges the technological, social, and cultural changes in the current global economy. Moreover, it recognizes and identifies several post-secondary pathways including: apprenticeship, college, community living, workplace, or university. The document then provides a brief overview, including curriculum expectations and supporting elements to be included. The learning strands have also been revised: (A) developing the skills, strategies, and habits needed to succeed; (B) exploring and preparing for the world of work; and (C) planning and financial management to help meet post-secondary goals. Next, education and career/life planning elements from the 2013 policy are outlined, including the four-step inquiry process, as well as an updated achievement chart (MOE, 2013; 2019). In past curriculum documents, each learning strand is covered in one-two pages, however, in this forty-one-page document, almost three-quarters are used to explain

the three learning strands. Each strand includes overall and specific expectations, examples of strand topics, teacher prompts, and instructional tips.

Strand A: Developing the skills, strategies, and habits needed to succeed offer examples such as: importance of adaptive and coping skills, and suggest habits to be applied at school, at work, and in life. Teacher prompts include applicable topics to include in lessons, discussion questions for students, and end off with instructional tips of pedagogical approaches to use. Multiple subtopics within each strand are identified, and each topic includes relevant expectations, examples, prompts, and tips.

Strand B: Exploring and preparing for the world of work employs a specific expectation for students to identify current technological, economic, and social trends. Again, an example: trends that affect the work we do, is provided with teacher prompts, and instructional tips ensuing. Within strand B, three subtopics are given: (1) exploring work trends and the importance of transferable skills; (2) preparing for future opportunities; and (3) identifying possible destinations and pathways. After multiple examples, and teacher prompts are provided, instructional tips include ideas of how to better support students, such as: inviting industry experts, and employers in; distributing helpful websites; and finding job shadowing opportunities for students.

Strand C's: Planning and financial management to help meet post-secondary goals first overall expectation is to help students develop a plan for their initial post-secondary year. Subsequent examples, instructional tips, and teacher prompts then provide useful suggestions on relevant resources and pedagogical approaches.

In combination with the Creating Pathways to Success Policy and Program Requirements released in 2013, this newly revised 2019 curriculum is the current state of career education in Ontario. The 2019 curriculum was released in the fall of 2019, and one year later, in the midst of a pandemic, it is unclear how realistic or effective its implementation has been. However, engaging with this material excites me. Every time I read over the teacher prompts, instructional tips, and useful pedagogical instructions, I feel like this will finally be a strong enough foundation to guide students toward a successful future. While I believe this to be the best career education curriculum in Ontario yet, proper professional development and implementation are still critical pieces to consider. Both teacher, and student feedback will be imperative to determine how to effectually move forward in the future.

Rationale for the Study

As my data collection was completed prior to the release of this 2019 curriculum, it was impossible to know what new curriculum would bring. While there are various participant recommendations that are somewhat reflected in this new curriculum, there is still a great deal to be learned through student feedback. Participants in my research offered considerable perspective, as they have the hindsight to understand how their career development experiences have affected their personal trajectory. They not only discussed the effects of career education in Ontario, but also provided insight on their career development experiences with educators, extra-curricular activities, and other influential lessons. To guide my study, I ask: what are Ontario post-secondary students' perceptions of their career development experiences?

Chapter 2

Introduction

Career development experiences are not only critical to the foundation and growth of a student's development, but often, the impact of these experiences is also relative to the learner's perspective. A qualitative research approach offers the in depth recognition and appreciation for all types of career development experiences that students may undergo. To gain relevant context of students' career development experiences over the last decade, it is necessary to understand the progression of career education literature and curriculum in Ontario. Career education literature is comprised of an array of subtopics and key terms, ranging from: life skills, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, cognitive skills, workforce skills, social and emotional skills, transferable skills, professional skills, and soft skills to lifelong learning, deeper learning, active learning, global competencies and 21st century skills (Beckett et al., 2017; Giammarco et al., 2020; Justice et al., 2009; NRC, 2012; Silva, 2009). For most of the 2000s, research literature on career education and its effects on students was limited and unclear, in part due to countless vague terms that attempted to cover the wide range of topics under career development (Borwein, 2014; Hughes et al., 2016; Lamb et al., 2017; Silva, 2009). Over the last few years however, '21st century skills' has notably become the most common term referenced throughout the literature, and is directly coupled with the neoliberal plan for education (Sattler, 2012). 21st century skills can be understood as "an integrated approach to skills, technology, and learning that recognizes that computer-based devices are a central and critical part of contemporary life and that knowledge of them is key to both education and employment" (Jenson et al., 2011, p. 3). Although many of these skills may not be considered new to the 21st century, most have still not been intentionally integrated into core curricula. However, they are increasingly becoming more important due to the evolving dynamics of the Information Age (Beckett et al., 2017; Kivunja, 2015).

While technological developments have become rapidly intertwined with societal functions since the early 2000s, the Information Age actually originated in the 1970s, along with the neoliberal movement (Sattler, 2012). This movement redefined education from a public good, to a vehicle used by the government to compete in the emerging global economy. In Ontario, this resulted in the provincial government removing power and control in education from local municipalities, and centralizing it through government policies and regulations. These decisions prioritized competition between school boards, marketing within schools, and placed

accountability on leadership and teachers for students' academic achievement. The implementation strategies have largely varied through the rotation of political parties over the last 50 years, but one thing remains clear: students have no choice but to keep up. As the capacity of digital technology advances, and the majority of students have information devices that enable access to resources from around the world, it is critical to facilitate practical learning for students' career development (Beckett et al., 2017; OPSBA, 2013).

My research question: 'what are Ontario post-secondary student perceptions of their career development experiences?' invites participants to share an in depth interpretation of their related experiences through an interview format.

Rationale for the Study

Following the release of reports from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, and the Ottawa Catholic District School Board regarding: 21st century learning, learning in a Digital Age, and a call for the Ontario government to provide vision, leadership and support on career education, the Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) released a document on 21st century competencies in 2016 (Christou, 2016; HWDSB, 2014; MOE, 2016; OPSBA, 2013). Titled: Towards Defining 21st Century Competencies for Ontario: 21st Century Competencies, Foundation Document for Discussion, its objective was to offer a foundation for discussion topics among the MOE and external education, policy, and research experts in order to cultivate relevant instruction for students to develop necessary 21st century competencies through future provincial policy (MOE, 2016). Both the National Research Council's (NRC) (2012) classification scheme of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains, and four of Fullan's six C's related to society and well-being (as cited in MOE, 2016) are outlined in this document as important factors of student learning (MOE, 2016). While the document does not change any policy or curriculum expectations, it discusses and reinforces the importance of, benefits from, and global and digital citizenship associated with teaching 21st century competencies. These calls for leadership from Ontario school boards, in combination with the lack of literature on the impact of career development on student experiences, and the need for relevant professional development and pedagogical support serve as incentive to investigate the experiences of students who have undergone the Ontario career education curriculum (Beckett et al., 2017; Borwein, 2014; Connelly et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2016; HWDSB, 2014; Lamb et al., 2017; OPSBA, 2013). Through further research on students' career

development experiences, a more accurate portrayal of the effects of career education in Ontario would be revealed. Qualitative research such as interviews and focus groups offer great opportunities for students to voice their opinions, and share real life examples and results of their career development experiences. Researchers would gain an increased understanding of diverse student perspectives, which would contribute to identifying both similarities and differences in the student experience. This would not only help to gather information on outcomes of past curricula, but also to establish clear goals for future direction. Effective curriculum development requires student feedback to productively move forward and improve current educational standards.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine student perceptions of career development in Ontario through a qualitative case study research approach. Seven participants between the ages of 21-28 were recruited and interviewed as to their perceptions on career development experiences, benefits, concerns and recommendations, as well as ease of access to resources, and educators' influence on their educational journey. Participants in this study provide in depth perspective and offer hindsight based on key components of their career development experiences, and impact on post-secondary pursuits and beyond. As a result, these student perceptions and shared experiences provide insights, offer recommendations to improve career education curriculum, and can be used to compare and contrast with newly implemented policy, such as the recently revised course in the Ontario Curriculum: Career Studies, Grade 10 (MOE, 2019). To grasp the current state of career education in Ontario, relevant policy and literature are subsequently addressed.

Ontario Policy

The Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) provides a holistic definition of the term "career", including all forms of work, learning, community engagement, and relational facets (2013). Similarly, the MOE states that career-development is "the development of the knowledge and skills needed to set short-term and long-term goals in planning for the future" (2013, p. 4). For the purpose of this research, these definitions of career and career-development as provided by the MOE will be used. While clarity surrounding key descriptors of career education continues has increased, students still face major challenges as they transition from secondary to further post-secondary education, and work (Connelly et al., 2013).

It is crucial for education curricula to equip students with the tools, and opportunities to become engaged and resourceful learners (Hughes et al., 2016; Kivunja, 2015). This includes re-evaluating current teaching philosophies, instructional standards, and assessment methods through curriculum design, professional development, and recommended pedagogical strategies in order to effectively implement practical approaches (Beckett et al., 2017; Connelly et al., 2013; HWDSB, 2014; Lamb et al., 2017; OPSBA, 2013). Furthermore, as called for by HWDSB, OPSBA, and OCDSB, schools require provincial leadership to successfully navigate these revisions. To garner an accurate portrayal of the effects of career education in Ontario, past students' experiences must be considered. These perspectives can then provide local and provincial policymakers with valuable insight on how to further help students develop the skills necessary to succeed. As the neoliberal movement continues to dictate provincial education development, it is important to consider how reinstating local policy-making abilities could impact students and their community. Reflection and understanding of past students' experiences is crucial in providing a base for policymakers to build from, as student feedback is an imperative resource. As such, this research will investigate Ontario post-secondary students' perceptions of their career development experiences. Next, Ontario research and documents on career education will supply the relevant context for this study.

Career Education in Ontario

After the MOE released Towards Defining 21st Century Competencies for Ontario in 2016, Beckett et al., (2017) discussed its call for "education systems to emphasize and develop [21st century] competencies in explicit and intentional ways through deliberate changes in curriculum design and pedagogical practice" (p. 3). The document goes on to address the importance of the "changes in the work force from an industrial model of production to a rapidly transforming, technology-driven and interconnected globalized knowledge economy" (MOE, 2016, p. 6). The MOE (2016) further states that, "transformative pedagogical approaches will necessitate changes to assessment practices" (p. 39), and that "competencies that are properly identified, conceptualized, and incorporated into the curriculum expectations…[will] ensure that all Ontario students have equitable opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed…" (p. 47). While this foundation document promoted proactive behaviour across school boards, and equipped them with guiding principles, intended outcomes, and corresponding models, the government had yet to release a revised curriculum, with clear and concise skill

classification, student goals, and pedagogical strategies (HWDSB, 2018; MOE, 2016). After considerable anticipation, and a change in political leadership, the MOE released a revised course curriculum of the Grade 10 Career Studies class to be implemented beginning in September of 2019. However, as this updated curriculum had not been released at the time of this study's data collection (July 2019), the document will be considered and used to compare findings in the discussion section of this paper.

Throughout recent years, several reports on career education in Ontario have come out of research agencies, universities, and the Ministry of Education (Beckett et al., 2017; Borwein, 2014; Deller et al., 2018; Drake & Reid, 2018; Giammarco et al., 2020; Lenarcic-Biss & Pichette, 2018; MOE, 2016; 2019; Weingarten et al., 2019). These documents shed light on common findings across school boards, identified priorities, student feedback and development, education metrics, challenges, future recommendations, and the current state of career education in Ontario. For example, Drake and Reid (2018) describe necessary components of teaching practical skills in the 21st century. They note the benefits of establishing an inquiry-based environment, creating integrative maker spaces, utilizing technological resources, developing character education, and ensuring effective assessment methods are used. Similarly, as previously mentioned, the nature of the 21st century workplace is becoming increasingly demanding, and requires strong technical, communicative, and collaborative skills (Giammarco et al., 2020). Justice et al., (2009) conducted a study on the impact of an inquiry-learning course for first year students at an Ontario university. They discuss the popular assumption that skills are easily transferable amongst different areas of learning and life. This is particularly pertinent to career education, as instructors and supervisors often expect students to have previously developed communication, teamwork, and learning strategies with a clear understanding on how to apply them in new environments. However, a transfer of skills more accurately occurs when: (1) learning is focused on similar principles, (2) explicit recognition of skill resemblance is present, and (3) learning happens in a collaborative process, emphasizing thorough explanations, with feedback opportunities. This stresses the importance of students developing lifelong learning and reflective strategies, in an inquiry-based, feedback-oriented learning environment to foster core skills through intentional pedagogical objectives, which applies to all facets of education.

A popular career education model referenced in several related papers is Fullan's (as cited in Connelly et al., 2013) six C's for student and society well-being, which includes: (1) character

education, (2) citizenship, (3) communication, (4) critical thinking and problem solving, (5) collaboration, and (6) creativity and imagination (MOE, 2016). Notably, these skills overlap between what could be considered necessary for career development, and what could be advantageous for life in general. Fullan (as cited in Connelly et al., 2013) theorized that students equipped with the development of these skills would leave school prepared for not only a career, but also modern life as a whole. However, as many employers expect more from entry-level positions, the need for specialized learning and knowledge increases.

Work integrated learning and cooperative education can provide important opportunities to practice application, gain valuable insights, and receive feedback from supervisors (Pretti & Fannon, 2018). This also allows students to accurately evaluate and attach meaning to their current level of knowledge or skills, while gaining an understanding of nuances in the workplace through community practice. Although these pedagogical approaches are important for student development, student feedback is an invaluable resource for improving education curriculum.

After surveying over 6,000 students online, and facilitating three focus groups, Lenarcic-Biss and Pichette (2018) gathered information on post-secondary students' perceptions of the state of their skills. Students reported feeling as though transferable skills such as: critical thinking, work ethic, and time management had been developed. However, they mentioned a gap in professional skills including: business etiquette, technological skills, and data analysis skills along with financial literacy, leadership, and teamwork capabilities. Similarly, two student-turned-researchers provided self-reflective perspectives on their secondary to post-secondary experiences in Ontario (Watkins & McKeown, 2018). They touched on the need for students to be more cognizant of their skill development, and transferable cognitive skills. Although students may be exposed to and practice new skills, they often lack the tools to effectively express relevant strengths and abilities to employers. Watkins and McKeown (2018) recommend that instructors explicitly state the use and development of skills throughout course assessments, in an effort for students to find increased value and understanding through their academic experiences. In order to equip instructors with effective teaching methods, the government must provide accommodating professional development to teachers, and adjust curriculum expectations accordingly, using evidence-based data to increase student support.

Through the documents and articles discussed, it is evident that researchers are more concerned with career education in Ontario than ever before. In the last five years, there has been

a substantial increase in related publications, suggesting that researchers and the provincial government alike have deemed it to be more of a priority than had been previously indicated. Recent papers address societal and economic changes, pedagogical approaches, learning strategies, important developmental skills, and student feedback. Across the literature, there is a clear consensus that curriculum, pedagogical practices, and learning opportunities must progress in order to accommodate the growing needs of students. Most critically, this includes effectively assisting students in their transition to post-secondary pursuits. To ensure these evolving student needs are met, incorporating student feedback into future developments is imperative. As such, conducting this research is one step closer to gaining a better understanding of the student experience of career education in Ontario.

Methodology

Research Question

Based on the current state of career education in Ontario, and lack of literature detailing student feedback on this topic, a case study research approach provides the option for a thorough analysis and understanding of student experiences. While a revised version of the Grade 10 Careers Studies course was released in 2019, there is currently no option for teachers to take on career education as a teachable. This leaves teachers without proper training, professional development, and pedagogical support. The goal of this study is to provide an accurate portrayal of the effects of career education in Ontario, and to highlight areas that require increased support based on these students' feedback. Participants are asked open-ended questions based on their personal expectations, influences, opportunities and opinions related to their career development. The research question guiding this case study is: what are Ontario post-secondary students' perceptions of their career development experiences?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers are primarily interested in how persons make sense of their lives (Merriam, 1988). Through this methodology, the process of case study research is used to garner an in depth understanding of a person and their experience (Mertler, 2018). As such, researchers are the primary instruments for data collection as all information is mediated through them (Merriam, 1988; 2012). Case study research often involves fieldwork, case descriptions, and themes to be pulled out of individual cases, and across case studies (Creswell et al., 2007; Stake, 1995). Moreover, interviews are often used to carry out case study research, demonstrating that

the rapport developed between researchers and their participants is a critical piece of the process (Seidman, 2006). This qualitative research will be used to offer insight into participants' experiences, which will in turn allow me to analyze student perceptions of Ontario career-development, and their implications for future pedagogy and curriculum.

Epistemology

For this Stakian qualitative case study approach, constructivism is used as the approach to inform and frame the research. The principal concept in constructivism asserts that reality is constructed through individuals' social interactions and evolving interpretations (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). Stake (1995) actively reiterates that multiple perspectives must be considered while constructing knowledge, as various viewpoints should be represented. He believes that qualitative researchers consider knowledge as constructed rather than found. As such, he views qualitative case study researchers as interpreters, and as collectors of interpretations, who consequently report their constructed knowledge through their research. Stake's (1995) four characteristics of his case study approach include: (1) holistic, (2) emphatic, (3) empirical, and (4) interpretive aspects. The holistic characteristic is used to frame the relationship between each case and its context, by providing supplementary information, and in depth perspective on each participant. The emphatic characteristic focuses on living vicariously through participants' experience, which is achieved by utilizing vignettes and quotes throughout the data analysis. The empirical and interpretive characteristics are integrated by means of field notes and relevant interpretations provided within the discussion. Employing these four characteristics produce tacit knowledge, which is gathered from memorable experiences and contributes to common understanding among readers. It also allows for naturalistic generalizations, which is a result of interpreting detailed experiences; as well as humanistic context, offered through the empirical style and relatedness approach that this framework provides.

Case Study Approach

Seven participants between the ages of 21-28 were recruited through an ethics-approved social media post (see Appendix A) to participate in a semi-structured interview (Appendix B) on a first come, first served volunteer basis. Participants were required to have completed their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. All participants completed their OSSD between 2011-2013, and had pursued at least a Bachelor's degree at the time of data collection. Participants were informed through the Letter of Information (Appendix C) that they were able to withdraw from

the study at any time without repercussions, that anonymity would be ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and that personal identifiers would not be disclosed.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a qualitative semi-structured interview (Appendix B), and conducted by the researcher at a location, or through a medium determined by the participant. Interview questions focused on career development experiences, influences (such as teachers, mentors, extra-curricular activities), challenges in/access to resources, and positive or negative perceived outcomes. This included considering the meaning of career development, if their experiences prepared them for post-secondary pursuits, and whether or not they matched their expectations accordingly. These prompts allowed participants to recall and reflect upon experiences, provide personal context and perspective, and offer recommendations for future career education curriculum. Interviews were held in several locations including: a university campus, local ice cream shop, virtually, and over the phone. In addition to each recorded interview, observational field notes were taken. Once interview recordings were transcribed, participants were asked to complete member checks to ensure validity. While a couple participants were not interested, all participants had the option of receiving their interview transcript via email to review and suggest changes that better suit them. Participants were given roughly a week to review their transcripts and send back accordingly. As shown in Table 1, contextual information of each participant is provided to allow for a greater development of participant profiles.

Table 1

Contextual Information of Participants

Participant	**Contextual Information**
Gabriella	-Grew up in a northern town in Ontario before pursuing her BSc, and PhD in science, and would ideally like to secure a job within a related industry.
Christine	-Raised in southern Ontario, pursued educational pathways within the realms of psychology and kinesiology, and is interested in becoming an instructor in higher education after completing her PhD.
Sydney	-Grew up in southern Ontario, and is currently working as a technical business analyst for a software company in San Francisco, after pursuing a computer science degree.
Lynden	-Procured a job in quality assurance, and production within the video game industry, after being raised in the GTA, and completing his BA, and MA.
Edison	-Studied architectural design, and now works in construction and architecture in southern Ontario.

Chase	-Working within the retail and service industries of the GTA, while completing his BA.
Emma	-Working as a policy analyst in the public sector of southern Ontario after completing her BA, MA, and MPA.

As Stake's (1995) case study approach entails utilizing holistic, emphatic, empirical, and interpretive characteristics, Table 1 provides readers with relevant background information on each participant. These data equip readers with the information necessary to build participant profiles by allowing them to observe connections between participants' lives and their detailed responses. With this knowledge, readers can infer a more accurate interpretation of participants' experiences, and note how their perspectives may have been shaped. These contextual data contribute to a holistic perspective delivered throughout the data analysis and findings by enabling readers to gain a thorough, and well-rounded understanding of each participant.

Data Analysis

After interviews were transcribed, and member checks were completed, a manual thematic inductive analysis was conducted through the data and observational field notes (Mertler, 2018). Subsequently, all questions were analyzed through Stake's (1995) four characteristics in case study research, using: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic considerations across seven instrumental case studies of a collective case study. More specifically, this included interpreting each response by considering the case and its context (holistically), and vicariously through their described experience (emphatically). This allowed for individual profiles and themes to emerge from the data. After Stake's (1995) approach was used to frame the data, a constant comparative method analysis among the cases enabled commonalities and themes to be revealed (Boeije, 2002). These themes and common threads within participant responses were then coded, and sorted into areas for discussion. The three main themes included: the role of educators (teachers, mentors/coaches, guidance counselors), the influence of extra-curricular activities, and reflections on their career development experiences (meanings, skill development, and recommendations). This qualitative case study approach provided me with the opportunity to become engrossed in the data, establishing clear participant profiles, and unique perspectives of each question. As discussed below, participants most prevalently considered the role of educators, the impact of extra-curricular activities, and their overall career development experiences and recommendations throughout the interviews.

Findings

To provide a brief preview of participants' key experiences and main recommendations, Table 2 displays a summary of relevant case study findings below.

Table 2

Profile Information of Participants

Participants	Key Experiences	Recommendations
Gabriella	-Accepted into first year research lab, and project; mentored by first year professor; became a fourth year TA for same course	-Students need more information on options, changing degrees/pathways; -Help students to identify strengths
Christine	-Accepted into research lab in third year, mentored by graduate student; -Gained networking opportunities	-Students need to: learn effective studying strategies; -Understand how transferable skills work; -Learn how to self-reflect
Sydney	-Developed close relationships with guidance counselors, teachers; -Joined hackathon and robotics teams at postsecondary institution	-For students to gain more one-on-one time with guidance counselors; -Importance of social networking, and effective strategies need to be taught
Lynden	-Practical skills gained through volleyball coaches, and leadership class activities	-Make career studies course a year long, schools need to lead by example to show value and importance of course
Edison	-Architecture/tech program offered in high school, influenced by teachers to enroll	-Important for students to understand that being on either the applied or academic track does not determine their level of intelligence, theory based learning is not for everyone
Chase	-Experiences through volleyball team and related extra-curricular activities, leadership opportunities	-That applied and academic courses should not imply level of intelligence, but rather offer different approaches of learning the same material -Students need more freedom to explore personal interests
Emma	-Class debates and discussions, mock trials	-Allow students freedom to develop skills that fit personal interests and goals; -Offer more experiential/co-op positions

This initial data preview add to the contextual information provided in Table 1, and supports the holistic perspective conveyed throughout the findings to assist readers in developing a thorough understanding of each case study participant.

Through an in depth analysis of the responses of the seven participants, three main themes emerged. Data on the role of educators in career development highlighted three noteworthy influences: teachers, mentors and coaches, and guidance counselors. Participant responses on extra-curricular activities asserted the importance of their career related experiences, course-based opportunities, and skill development. Finally, through the consideration of personal understanding, relevant activities and preparation, skill development, and recommendations, participants discussed key components of their career-development experiences. To begin, the role of educators in students' career development experiences is addressed.

The Role of Educators

Educators served as one of the biggest influences for these seven participants. As outlined in the key experiences column of Table 2, almost all of them explicitly discussed multiple experiences with either one, or multiple teachers, mentors, coaches, or guidance counselors. As will be subsequently discussed, some participants developed relationships with educators who highly influenced their post-secondary or career pathway, whereas other participants gained practical knowledge from their coaches and mentors. Guidance counselors however, were not generally spoken too highly of due to a lack of understanding their role. More individual experiences with teachers, coaches and mentors, and guidance counselors are examined next.

Teachers. All participants spoke to relationships with teachers, generally implying positive influences. They discussed teachers promoting confidence in abilities, values, and feedback, the impact of teacher instruction and insight on course content, the importance of developing rapport outside of the classroom, and how teacher passion, and pedagogical proficiency can be inspiring for students.

Sydney shared that through forming relationships with teachers, she learned how to identify personal strengths, develop self-efficacy, use discipline, and consider new perspectives. She also felt that these relationships, "helped [her] immensely, and have shaped the person [she is], and will continue to shape the professional that [she is] now and in the future."

Edison spoke to the impact of his teachers' support and advice that led him to join his high school's architecture program, which eventually won him a corresponding award upon graduation. He felt that this specialized program enabled his creative and artistic side to shine, as well as learning relevant construction-based knowledge, which currently helps him in his line of work.

Lynden and Chase discussed their appreciation for teachers who took the time to develop student relations outside of the classroom. Chase stated, "I think it's the few teachers that you develop relationships with outside of the classroom…because that's when they see you as more of a person and less of just a student."

Gabriella expressed a comparable relationship with one of her first year science professors. He had selected her as one of fifteen students to do a research based project that was to be designed, implemented, and presented to the faculty department. This not only influenced her decision to go to graduate school and pursue a career in research, but she also became a teaching assistant in her fourth year, and spoke to wanting to inspire younger students, just as she had been. Gabriella additionally said, "I think seeing the teachers' genuine passion for what they were teaching makes a big difference. If they're not enjoying the teaching, the students aren't going to enjoy learning it."

While these participants discussed the influence of teachers on their career development experiences, Lynden and Christine discussed the impact of their mentors.

Coaches and Mentors. Most participants mentioned mentors and coaches as crucial to their career development experiences. Whether these mentors and coaches came from involvement in sports, supervisors in extra-curricular activities or research labs, participants all spoke to the support they felt from these individuals.

Lynden talked about the role his volleyball coaches played, not only through skills in sport, but mainly due to the transferable life skills he gained. He said that while their main focus was volleyball, he also developed perseverance, and effective communication and leadership skills through his coaches' lessons. These were opportunities that he considered "a career development experience through osmosis."

Christine echoed Lynden's sentiment, and added that as a result of instructors who were visibly confident in her abilities as both an athlete and a student, she was able to translate that confidence into stronger self-efficacy for school and other areas of her life.

Edison similarly shared his appreciation for his time spent playing basketball. He felt his coaches' lessons extended beyond the sport and that he was able to apply those skills in other environments.

Christine felt a comparable impact from her research mentors. Like Gabriella, Christine developed an important relationship with a first year professor, in addition to a graduate student

who acted as her mentor throughout her undergraduate degree. Christine shared that Lisa, the graduate student, helped her realize that she brought value to the table and was knowledgeable enough to contribute meaningful insight. She gained these experiences after one of her first year professors accepted her into his research lab, and was then able to learn valuable research and networking skills. As a result from her mentorship with Lisa, Christine decided to pursue her master's degree, which then led her to connect with her current PhD supervisor. Furthermore, Christine spoke to how she believed her experience with flexible high school teachers consequently led her to pursue mentorship and guidance throughout her undergraduate degree. These personal relationships developed with teachers, coaches and mentors are not only impactful in their own regard, but can additionally lead to positive outcomes in the future.

Guidance Counselors. In general, participants felt as though guidance counselors helped with balancing academic timetables, and university applications. Over half of them acknowledged guidance services as available, but stated they did not utilize beyond mandatory engagement. Christine and Lynden agreed that it was not clear what guidance services were available, or how to use them. Christine mentioned that, "you didn't know what to ask them, and I think half the battle is knowing what to ask." In a similar respect, Lynden said, "you don't know what you don't know, so you don't know what to ask." He also raised an important point that as students may not always be the most effective communicators, there are no classes for uninformed parents to learn and assist in their children's educational journey, leaving many of these students to take on tasks related to pursuing higher education alone.

Case in point, Christine discussed her experience as a first generation student, in saying that as her parents grew up in a different education system, and had dissimilar, incomparable degrees, she was unable to consult them on advice for post-secondary pursuits. As a result, she was responsible for navigating a lot of these questions, resources, and decisions on her own. While Sydney, on the other hand, had the opposite experience with her guidance counselors. She shared how much she appreciated their close relationships, and recommendations made for her based on personal knowledge of her strengths and weaknesses. She highlighted:

> "Looking back, those two times that I took off school, were some of the best decisions I've ever made, and I wouldn't have been able to make them without those people and their support, and their knowledge of my emotional capabilities."

Sydney addressed the necessity of going into those meetings prepared, open and willing to discuss personal needs, wants, options and goals in order to get the most out of those

relationships and resources. However, as Lynden and Christine highlighted, there can be a lack of knowledge surrounding the types of services available to students. Whereas the role of teachers, mentors, and coaches appears to be exceedingly apparent, the use of and access to guidance counselors garners mixed reactions, and certainly requires more attention. Overall, participants described key experiences impacted by the role of educators in their career development, and the influence of extra-curricular activities is addressed subsequently.

Extra-Curricular Activities

While types of extra-curricular activity involved varied among the seven participants, all spoke to their experiences with high regard. As seen throughout this research, students often get involved with extra-curricular activities that provide an opportunity to delve into a personal interest, develop a specific skillset, and/or branch out into new possibilities. When students find something they love, it gives them an opportunity to become passionate about a cause, develop new social networks, and enhance their skills. Each participant in this study articulated similar positive outcomes whether through sports, academic-related, or skill development activities.

Experiences. Participants' experiences in extra-curricular activities vary from involvement in student council, research labs, and a variety of sports, to community engagements, hack and robotics teams, and mock trials. While Sydney discussed her change in academic degrees, she also described the impact of joining Hack McGill, which not only pushed her out of her comfort zone, but also showed her that she was capable of more than she ever thought possible.

Sydney had a transformative experience through her involvements, while Edison admitted that in hindsight, he would have preferred to participate in more advocacy-related activities in addition to his basketball, rugby, and football commitments. Emma shared a similar sentiment, by stating that she wished there had been more social action initiatives to take part in. Not only were participants involved with extra-curricular activities outside of the classroom, but also, some were notably involved with activities that grew from opportunities within the classroom.

Course-Related Opportunities. Many practical life skills come from effective application of course content. For example, Edison spoke to his technical skills developed throughout his architecture program in high school. Comparably, Gabriella discussed the influence of her first year research course, and her growth through the opportunity to participate in executing a research project from its conception. Lynden and Chase also discussed skills

gained from event-planning projects in their grade 12 leadership classes. On the other hand, an experience that began as course credit for Christine eventually turned into acquiring a new volunteer position in a professor's research lab. Her experience is notably comparable to Gabriella's story, in how these course-related opportunities turned into the beginning of their career paths.

Emma felt as though her involvement in mock trial competitions, coupled with debate opportunities within her courses, allowed her to gain perspective, skills and insight into real life issues by engaging in critical analysis with her peers. These types of experiences were extremely valuable to Emma's career development, as she now works as a policy analyst in the public sector. As evident through these involvements, extra-curricular activities permit a healthy degree of skills development within students.

Skill Development (in extra-curricular activities). Upon reflection on these experiences, all participants noted essential skill development. Christine mentioned learning teamwork and time management skills, as well as the need for a balance of commitments, and gaining valuable life exposure. Gabriella similarly reported learning teamwork skills, especially with those who are difficult to get along with, and acquiring leadership experience. Edison also reminisced on the advantages of learning how to persevere, developing a strong work ethic, and understanding how to reach full potential through his involvement in sports. While Lynden reiterated how his volleyball pursuits equipped him with skills, opportunities, and values that extended beyond the volleyball court. As Chase discussed his leadership positions, he drew one parallel between his organizing volleyball tournaments throughout both high school and university. In reference to his experience with hosting tournaments, he shared:

> "I think the key is being able to feel as though you don't need to be babysat…at times, I felt like my friends and I were running the show…other coaches and parents are asking me the questions. Outside of that high school setting, you're going to have to deal with people who are older than you and be able to communicate, and interact with them. Those are things that you don't do in the classroom, there's just no opportunity for it, and that's what's important, applying it in a situation where nobody's holding your hand."

Based on Chase's appreciation for autonomous opportunities provided through sport, it is crucial to consider the positive implications participation in extra-curricular activities can have. Finally, participants' interpretations of, experiences with, and recommendations for career-development are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Career Development

As the majority of interview questions revolved around participants' recall, understanding, expectations, and perceived outcomes of their career development experiences, a significant portion of data is described in this section of the findings. Participants were rarely able to recall more than one or two in-class activities that left a lasting impact. Instead, they discussed opportunities provided through high school, and post-secondary education that they viewed as either skill development, or career preparation. Participants expanded on what they perceived to be worthwhile experiences, and provided suggestions for how to improve, or address the gaps in their experiences, and how those gaps affected them in hindsight. As this group of questions was designed to be more general, they elicited a more diverse collection of responses from participants.

Reflections. All participants were asked to discuss what career development meant to them. They offered concepts such as: receiving career guidance at an early age, learning important life skills to be used throughout life, and accessing the resources necessary to reach goals and further career options. It is interesting to note that several participants provided personal definitions that foreshadowed themes of their life, and subsequent interview responses. For example, Gabriella discussed receiving guidance at an earlier age to gauge decisions later on more effectively. Similarly, throughout her interview she remembered the typical 'medical school' dream of science students, and a lack of knowledge surrounding alternative options. She disclosed that she most likely would have changed degrees had she had a better understanding of what types of jobs science degrees would allow for. Another example is Emma highlighting all activities, skills, classroom, formal, extra-curricular, or relational occasions as career development opportunities to grow, gain perspective, or listen to others. No other participant identified such a variety of scenarios that could breed opportunities for career development, however, as Emma considered classroom discussions, and mock trials to be her most influential experiences, it clearly reflects her in depth understanding of uncommon alternatives. It also relates to her current work as a policy analyst, and the constant need for consideration of others' perspectives. In most participants' perceptions of career development, key experiences, current pursuits, and related recommendations, strong connections and themes can be drawn throughout their responses.

Participants also discussed the types of activities and skills that they attributed to career

development. In high school, these examples included: activities in careers class, learning information regarding post-secondary programs, career path resources and other courses that involved productive strategies. In university, participants identified: program-specific panel events, working, joining extra-curricular activities, and informative classes. Moreover, participants recalled noteworthy experiences that enabled effective skill development.

Skill Development. While participants touched on specific skill development throughout their experiences, general skills acquired included: research skills, networking abilities, gaining insightful mentorship, improving work ethics, honing decision-making, project management, and event organization skills. Emma appreciated her critical thinking and analysis skills that came from in-class discussions. She believed these were:

> "…Really fundamental in being able to learn and grow, not just as a student, but also as a person who is thinking and reacting to the world around them. [Through] learning and hearing from my peers, I was able to recognize their various perspectives on things that would not have occurred to me on my own."

Though some participants shared a variety of skill development through these career related experiences, others still noted a lack of opportunities and comprehension. Chase and Emma discussed the lack of skill development in school. For example, Chase addressed how teachers did not provide the necessary communication tools for students to succeed in public speaking exercises. They also both touched on the need to offer more resources, and allow increased freedom for students to explore personal interests and goals. More clearly stated, they would have appreciated learning material that reached beyond 'checking off the boxes' of mandatory curriculum. Subsequently, as participants have expressed a range of diverse career development experiences, they additionally offered a variety of recommendations that they felt would have better prepared them for post-secondary pursuits.

Participants' Recommendations. While participants were asked if they had any recommendations, or further comments to add as the last two questions in the interview, recommendations were generally offered throughout. Most commonly they occurred in relation to skills or opportunities they wished they had developed earlier on, or through reinforcing the positive influences of their respective experiences. As participants provided a variety of learning experiences, influential factors, and impactful extra-curricular activities, recommendations added up rather quickly.

Participants provided recommendations based on: the desire for personalized learning,

curriculum changes, the lack of transitional and career-related information, and the need for transferable skill development. For example, while Emma would have preferred opportunities for self-directed learning, Chase shared his opinion on developing personalized pedagogy. He expressed that he felt getting into the typical routine of 'lesson-assignment-quiz-test' can be detrimental to students by creating a lulled pattern throughout the semester. Instead, he suggested there be an increased variety of learning options, and personalized assessment choices. Emma and Chase also highlighted important considerations for the lack of autonomy students experience in high school, and how that can translate into challenges for post-secondary pursuits. Meanwhile, other participants addressed the effect of current curriculum.

Gabriella and Lynden urged the need for the grade 10 careers studies course to be extended into a full year credit, and pushed to a senior grade. Lynden made several noteworthy comments by stating that grade 10 students often viewed career studies as a free period on the computer, as opposed to using it to actively explore and consider future pathways. He said that:

> "It's one of those things that gets pushed to the wayside for a lot of students, but I think it's how it's delivered. If schools started pouring more effort and energy into educating people about this…it becomes less of a free period and more of, 'this is important for me to learn, and it's as important as it is for me to go to my advanced functions class.'"

Lynden addressed the importance of schools and educators leading by example to show students how to follow suit, which is a critical piece to consider. Other important changes to career education curriculum revolve around the lack of transitional information provided to students for a smoother transition to post-secondary pursuits.

As Lynden spoke to the difficulties of managing expectations in class, Gabriella also agreed that it would have been nice to employ more accurate expectations regarding, "what to expect out of high school, going into university, and what options would be [available] outside of university, and after the degree for job prospects." She and Christine were both frustrated with the lack of guidance on available jobs with corresponding degrees.

In contrast, Emma touched on the problematic misconceptions of pursuing an arts degree, describing experiences where she felt that she had to justify her choices, and spoke to the incorrect perception that STEM degrees are inherently more valuable than arts degrees, which misinforms people on the significance of the range of job opportunities available.

Likewise, Gabriella and Sydney proposed that students would benefit from increased individual time with educators. Sydney went on to say that:

> "…As people learn, and grow differently, and are inspired and motivated by different things I feel like, as much as you can, have a personalized one-on-one time where someone's getting to know you, what your strengths are, what your weaknesses are, and create more of that relationship and bond. I think that that would be really helpful, because then you also feel like this is catered to me."

Sydney's shared experiences suggest that she has benefitted from insightful relationships and personalized learning. Participants additionally addressed important transferable skills such as: building self-confidence, social networking abilities, professional development, and productive academic strategies. Sydney articulated the importance of developing self-confidence, and strong networking abilities. She agreed that, "in undergrad, the challenge is: how am I going to stand out to a professor in a class with 400 people?" However, she believed that once students can open up, grasp what they are looking for, and take initiative, people are often more than willing to provide support.

Finally, Christine, Chase, and Lynden all articulated the need for learning useful studying strategies, and understanding how effective retention works. They also discussed the need for a more realistic comprehension of how transferable skills apply. Moreover, Lynden specifically addressed the disparities in moving from secondary to post-secondary education by saying:

> "A lot of people who are in those post-secondary spaces rocked [their] high school education experience, and then get into their first year general classes and get destroyed because they don't know how to do what they're supposed to do. They think, 'if I just put in the same amount of effort that I put in in my high school class I'll be fine because I'm smart, I'm capable.' The thing that's difficult though is not the concepts you have to learn, but the process you have to go through to pick out information, determine what's relevant and what's not, and figure out how you're going to be tested…if you didn't figure it out early, you probably didn't figure it out by the end either."

These participants considered relevant discrepancies between projected university expectations and realistic first year experiences to reiterate the importance of transitional support.

Participants amply provided their opinions, and recommendations on perceived gaps in the curriculum, and on development in transitional, career-related, and transferable skill sets to help inform future career education curriculum.

In summary, participants continuously addressed the need to be better informed, and understand their freedom to change academic tracks, and career pathways accordingly. Participants felt that this would not only reduce pressure, and stigma around switching routes, and negative misconceptions surrounding degree types, but also reduce overall anxiety toward post-

secondary pursuits. There was a considerable variety of career development opportunities expressed through the experiences of participants. Notably, many of these experiences fell outside of the career education curriculum. However, participants shared key reflections on the role of educators, extra-curricular activities, and overall career development experiences, which will be addressed throughout the discussion.

Discussion

The data highlighted numerous noteworthy elements of participants' career development experiences. As the HWDSB (2014) identified, students desire stronger relationships with their teachers. Lynden and Chase both reiterated the impact of relationships developed with teachers outside of the classroom, and their desire to be seen as more of a person, and less as a student. Sydney and Gabriella similarly discussed the need for increased one-on-one time with teachers to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth. Sydney also spoke to the skills she gained through the relationships she formed with teachers, such as: developing self-efficacy, using discipline, and considering alternative perspectives. Whereas Edison credited the insight and advice of a teacher as the reason he pursued architecture. These experiences speak to the overall impact instructors can have by helping learners to identify personal skills and passions, and structuring school expectations accordingly (OPSBA, 2013).

As Hattie (2012) indicated, effective teachers employ targeted learning goals and provide success criteria for students to enhance learning processes. These success criteria address students' commitment, confidence, expectations, conceptual understanding, and challenges provided for the students. Pretti and Fannon (2018) likewise specified the need for deliberate teaching strategies. They called for explicit communication between instructors and students regarding skill development within assessments. In contrast, two participants stated they had no skill transfer between high school and university experiences. This simply cannot be accurate. However, it does suggest participants' misunderstanding of skill development. Students need to be taught how to identify skill development through deliberate pedagogy, and personalized consideration for assessment techniques. It is critical for students to acquire the appropriate skills and language to recognize relevant proficiencies and to communicate them accordingly with potential employers (Pretti & Fannon, 2018).

With these considerations, it could also empower students to engage in more self-directed learning, and stimulate reflective tendencies (OPSBA, 2013). If the MOE can implement

effective professional development for teachers to ensure these learning strategies are provided, students will be more fully equipped to succeed. Moreover, these strategies are not only applicable in high school classrooms, but within higher education institutions' classrooms as well. Currently however, educators are undertrained and under-resourced in career education (Connelly et al., 2013). Career education learning in faculties of education at pre-service training institutions requires increased attention and specificity. Career studies sections are often allotted to teachers with little or no training, and a lack of expertise just to fill up schedules. This is unacceptable. Students require effective support and pedagogy from qualified teachers who are properly equipped and motivated.

Meanwhile, students have minimal understanding of the services provided by guidance counselors. As Lynden stated, "you don't know what you don't know, so you don't know what to ask." However, while Lynden implied a lack of knowledge surrounding guidance services, he also believed that other students would have benefitted more from these resources. This begs the question of if there is a misunderstanding in what types of resources are available, or in how to access these resources, or both? Are the resources provided suited to the needs of students? Domene et al., (2006) similarly found students had a lack of information on guidance resources. Students were unclear on if counselors' purpose were to provide support for educational planning, career options, and school needs, or otherwise. They also suggested that supplying additional modes of service delivery for career education is beneficial. These modes would also include educational opportunities for parents. This would be exceptionally helpful in circumstances of first generation students, who may not otherwise have the support at home that other students benefit from. Connelly et al., (2013) agreed that it is imperative to strengthen and increase the number of career education opportunities available to parents. These resources could act as a strong influence on students, with the encouraged push to stay informed.

Lynden, Edison, and Chase also shared their positive experiences with coaches. Specifically, Lynden discussed the transferable life skills he developed from his volleyball coaches. Christine likewise felt that she received invaluable knowledge through her mentor in the research lab. As Gibson (2004) reinforced, through Christine's coding of her experiences related to the lab, confidence gained in voicing her opinions, and new opportunities for research and social networking, her mentor played a significant role in championing Christine's development.

Similarly, Forneris et al., (2015) indicated participation in extra-curricular activities

provided students with developmental assets, perspective on healthy environments, and exposure to challenging activities. Zaff et al., (2003) added that suitable activities often complement intrinsic motivation, and offer individual purpose. For example, Chase discussed his development through his role in hosting sporting tournaments at school. These experiences provided him with leadership opportunities, autonomy, and increased understanding of real life situations. Likewise, Sydney identified how joining the hackathon and robotics team pushed her out of her comfort zone, and provided opportunities for new and transformative experiences. Notably, all qualities mentioned are evident through the extra-curricular experiences of all participants. Sometimes, participants even expressed higher appreciation for their involvement in extra-curricular activities, than for the influence of educators' in their development. Overall, it is clear that the positive outcomes associated with participation in extra-curricular activities are significant, and student involvement would rightfully serve as a priority for all schools.

As demonstrated, students face significant challenges while planning for transitions in the education system (Connelly et al., 2013). The lack of consistent approaches in Canada, and even within Ontario, contributes to the disparities that students experience between high school and post-secondary pursuits. In particular, Lynden addressed the discrepancies between the studying tactics necessary to employ in high school versus university. Sydney and Christine touched on the need to access relevant resources, and Emma and Gabriella discussed requiring more information on changing academic and career pathways. It is critical to provide students with structural information on post-secondary options, and in effect, reduce the stigma of changing pathways. This includes addressing the misconceptions of the inherent value associated with STEM subjects, as opposed to arts and humanities courses. The options and opportunities for jobs of all disciplines across various industries should be made clear to students.

Traditionally, the education system has been curated according to the pre-requisites demanded by the Industrialized Age (MOE, 2016). However, Western society has now transitioned into the Information Age, and requires alternative approaches to properly equip students. There is a need for 21st century skills to be integrated into the education curricula, prioritizing skills that serve to further students' education and employment opportunities (Connelly et al., 2013). For example, work-integrated learning experiences such as experiential education, or service learning help to strengthen school and business community partnerships. Emma regretted not utilizing those resources, and hoped for increased opportunities for future

students to engage with experiential learning to allow for more career exploration earlier on. Eyler (2009) discussed the benefits of taking students into the community to help fill in the gap between classrooms and real life understanding. These experiences also provide students with the opportunity to receive feedback and insight from supervisors, enabling a reflective nature and critical approach to learning.

Similarly, Watkins and McKeown (2018) addressed the need for students to be aware of transferable skills in order to effectively identify and communicate abilities for increased self-awareness, and job opportunities. Multiple participants expressed the lack of foresight in relating skill development and critical analysis between their high school and university experiences. Justice et al., (2009) reported on these difficulties by explaining how developing transferable skills work, and suggest it requires similar contextual factors, goal orientation, and environmental support. The process of transferring skills needs to be consciously nurtured through an appropriate pedagogical approach and course design. Often, however, many assume it takes place automatically. Likewise, Lynden effectively communicated that students' attitudes toward career education are a direct reflection of the delivery methods employed by schools and teachers. These are important points that deserve proper consideration and clear direction from leadership on how to provide tangible support to students. Overall, it is evident that students require a significant increase of support for smoother transitions to post-secondary pursuits. Students need to develop the skills and tools necessary to access and navigate available resources regardless of changing environments.

While past career education curriculum was underdeveloped by failing to provide impactful learning strategies, relevant activity opportunities, and effective pedagogy, the modifications released in the 2019 career studies curriculum are a substantial improvement. The MOE (2019) reinforced the need for mandatory learning regarding transitioning to post-secondary pursuits, and emphasized the importance of support from parents and educators. The curriculum identified three main strands to focus on: (1) developing skills and strategies to succeed, (2) exploring and preparing for the world of work, and (3) planning and financial management for post-secondary goals. It provided goals from grades K-12 regarding career studies, and promotes classroom and school-wide opportunities for learning. The MOE (2019) discussed useful skills, and addressed the difficulty, though nevertheless importance, of transferable skills. Most noticeably, it offered concrete examples and expectations of the lessons

to be completed within each strand, lists teacher prompts, and instructional tips for activities and skill development. While these are critical amendments to the career studies curriculum, real progress will depend on the professional development available to pre-service and current teachers to ensure the effective implementation of these new standards.

Limitations

Although the similarity of participants' age, and pursuit of university after high school allows for data on a specific population, it may also be considered as a limitation based on the lack of representation in pathways available to students. Likewise, there is a limitation based on when the participants graduated, as it dates their experiences according to the curriculum standards at the time. However, responses and experiences reported through the literature on career education in Ontario were often consistent with the data presented in this study. The small size of participants in this study makes it difficult to generalize experiences. While using the researcher's social media may also be considered a biased recruitment tool. As well, participants may not have been able to provide a holistic recount of their experiences as limited by memory.

Conclusion

Participants' experiences provided rich data on the influence of educators, extra-curricular activities, and career development perceptions of students to inform a deeper understanding of the potential career education has to fuel student development. Through Stake's (1995) case study research approach, student perceptions were viewed through a holistic framing, emphasizing contextual factors that supplemented the data. Participants offered practical recommendations that can contribute effectively to building a stronger understanding of the effects of career education in Ontario. Notable recommendations included the need for more freedom in learning, personalized learning options, and receiving more one-on-one time with educators. Participants also spoke to the current lack of transitional information provided regarding pursuing post-secondary options, as well as changing pathways in the future. Almost all participants touched on the importance of developing transferable life skills throughout their educational career, and offered suggestions on an appropriate timeline and implementation strategies. While these recommendations are useful for constructive feedback, learning of participants' key experiences also provided important insight into the most influential factors of students' career development. Overall, it is clear that increased student support in Ontario is necessary for smoother transitions to post-secondary pursuits. This research can be used to inform future career education

curriculum, and contribute to the growing literature on career education. This research undoubtedly offers an in depth understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and impactful elements of these students' career development experiences, features that are currently scarce in relevant literature. Through this study, participants provided unique perspectives and valuable feedback regarding the outcomes of career education in Ontario. These perspectives are critical to the productive progression of career education curriculum in Ontario, and can also be considered within an international context. As a result, more thoroughly developed career education can ideally equip future students with the skills and tools required to succeed in their chosen field, and help to reduce social inequities through increased ease of access to resources.

Chapter 3

Discussion

My time spent in this Master of Arts in Education program has been an enduring, and eye-opening experience. While the future can breed unpredictable realities, my greatest discovery throughout this process was realizing that I want to pursue teaching as a career. It was an exciting moment, forever engrained in my memory. I was reading up on relevant literature for a class assignment, and came upon the realization that while intentional, informative and productive curriculum is important, it is the teachers who implement the curriculum that really have the impact on students. From that moment on, I knew I wanted to become a teacher. That being said, I have thoroughly enjoyed this research experience. Conducting interviews and collecting data has easily been a highlight of my time in this program. It not only provided me with several opportunities to learn about others' experiences, consider their perspectives, and discuss the current state of education but also, listening to their stories and viewpoints reminded me of the tremendous value qualitative research offers. Through these interviews, I was constantly reminded of the importance of student feedback, and the value in recognizing varying perspectives. Having the opportunity to learn about, and share the experiences of my participants has been a privilege, and has continuously motivated me to represent them as best I can.

Employing Stake's (1995) qualitative case study approach, and framing the research through holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic considerations enabled me not only become engrossed in the data, but also live vicariously through participants' described experiences. As I started the process, I realized that I had grossly underestimated the amount of time it would take to perform a thorough data analysis. Initially, I planned to identify and code themes within each interview, then across interviews by question, and then across interviews by persons. Subsequently, I intended to frame each response through every four of the holistic, emphatic, empirical, and interpretive characteristics. After completing these steps, I realized that: Stake's (1995) four characteristics work best as interwoven lens. It is to understand what each aspect offers independently of the others, while to simultaneously note their complementary nature. Next, I realized the analysis that I had produced was not enough. It felt unfinished. Naturally, I continued to write, and rework the data in various ways. I began to outline themes that were emerging through each case, I wrote profiles on each participant based on all interview responses, I colour-coded similarities and differences within and across cases, and three main

areas of discussion finally became apparent. Once I had determined the central themes, I started to sort through all participants' experiences to decide which data I would include where. I developed multiple outlines, each time becoming more and more detailed, with specific quotes, identifying important commonalities among participants, and deciding which topics were most relevant to my research, and consequently, would deserve the most spotlight. It was a steady, exciting, and stimulating experience.

Through this study, it has not only given me insightful empirical data to reflect upon, but it will also serve as an important piece in building the foundation in my eventual role as a teacher. These discussions and readings have made me realize that the best timeline for implementing valuable life skills, a variety of learning opportunities and styles, and developing productive rapport with students is as soon as possible. I intend to teach the intermediate grades (six-eight) to ensure that I can incorporate these practical participant recommendations (and more) through informative, effective, and realistic approaches in a healthy and consistent environment. While there may be a popular consensus among students that career education should be offered later on in high school, for a longer duration of time, I feel that offering similar, suitable education earlier on in year-round long classrooms may be more advantageous to students. This experience has taught me multitudes on the research process, and delivered what I believe to be invaluable data on the outcomes of career education in Ontario.

Participants offered a vast amount of information on their career development experiences throughout high school, and post-secondary pursuits, whether that involved the influence of educators, including: teachers, professors, coaches, mentors and guidance counselors, the participation in extra-curricular activities, or any related experiences that elicited applicable skill development. While all participants were asked the same 15 interview questions, follow up discussion questions, and the content of responses greatly varied among cases. Participants' definitions of career development often foreshadowed personal experiences and narrative trajectories. Most cases also included one or two key experiences that appeared to frame the commonalities and themes presented. More specifically, participants offered which career development experiences they best remembered, how persons, events, and resources impacted their trajectory, and how these experiences compared to their understanding and expectations of relevant resources. While there were numerous similarities among cases and their experiences, participants also shared unique examples of and perspectives on career development.

Additionally, while all participants had at least pursued an undergraduate program–degree type, further schooling, current status, and career pursuits all fluctuated. This allowed for participants with a range of different experiences, to retrospectively explore and express their opinions and recommendations on career development in high school and beyond.

Conducting this research provided me with insight into career development experiences of my peers, in addition to offering a deeper glimpse of the state of education in Ontario at large. While career education is only a tiny portion of the schooling offered in Ontario, due to its broader context of student development, participants openly discussed various aspects of the education system regardless of whether or not it was directly related to career development. In addition to the topics outlined in the findings, participants shared their struggles with finding their path, perceived inequalities of the education system that prevent students from reaching their full potential, and human rights issues that are not appropriately represented in the curriculum. Participants granted me the opportunity and privilege to take a peek into their life experiences through a personal lens. As a researcher, these shared experiences allowed me to draw parallels within the narratives depicted throughout their responses. Moreover, these narratives illustrated the similarities and differences presented through each case, regardless of variance in upbringing, culture, and career path. As the Digital Age has drastically changed the ways in which humans interact, and understand each other, the need to effectively prepare students for a relentlessly evolving workforce is more important than ever.

In a global context, there is a need for increased data and corresponding literature on the components, implementation, and effects of career education on students. This includes literature that considers the experiences and feedback of students to inform future career education curriculum. However, as education is provincially mandated, upcoming curricula updates across the country, and in an international context are unpredictable, making it difficult to know what type of impact this research will have. As the MOE in Ontario just released a career education curriculum update in the past school year, based on past revisions, it will most likely be at least five years until the next modification. That was before the residing government made significant cuts to provincial education funds. Now, with the ensuing debt the government will have accumulated due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the distribution of resources in subsequent years is incalculable. Especially considering the recent traction of research and literature on career education, it is difficult to foresee how and where educational resources will focus their efforts

moving forward. Not to mention how career education will change in the face of new virtual realities. Something as simple as the proximal opportunities for students to form long lasting relationships with teachers will be substantially impacted. These effects will surely be detrimental to the current generation of high school and university students.

However, this study provides important data on the realities and challenges of persons currently entering the workforce. These lessons learned, and insight offered by participants can contribute to a baseline for current career development experiences, and deliver feedback to effectively equip future generations with critical skills and tools for success. This changing reality is not only applicable to Ontario, but also across the globe. Students will require these developmental strategies, learning experiences, and access to practical resources more than ever. The research on, and development of career education in Ontario must persist to ensure increased student support is available for smoother transitions to post-secondary pursuits, and beyond. Career development skills, tools, and resources are imperative not only for students to succeed in the workforce, but also to thrive in everyday life.

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Appendix A

Social Media Recruitment Post

Title of the study: Ontario Students' Perceptions of Career Development Experiences: A Case Study Approach

Researchers:

Shaina McDonald	Dr. Stephanie Chitpin
Principal Investigator	Master's Supervisor
Faculty of Education	Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa	University of Ottawa
Tel:	Tel: 613-562-5800 (ext. 4146)
Email:	Email: steph.chitpin@uottawa.ca

Post:

Hi everyone!

This is a recruitment post for a Master's thesis research project that will examine student perceptions of career-development in Ontario. I am looking for anyone between the ages of 21-28, who has completed their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (high school), to participate in an interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. Interview questions will be open-ended and will focus on your career-development experiences during high school.

For more information about this study, including the Letter of Information (which gives you full details about the study), and/or if you wish to volunteer to participate in this study, please feel free to contact me either by direct message, or by email at. Participants will be selected upon a first come/first served basis, as there is limited space available.

This research project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (REB).

Thank you for your consideration!

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Pre-interview questions

When did you complete your Ontario Secondary School Diploma?

Have you pursued any further degrees?

If so, which post-secondary educational institutions did you attend?

Demographic questions

What gender identity do you best identify with?

How old are you?

Interview questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.

2. What does career-development mean to you?

3. What career-development specific experiences do you remember having while being a student?

4. To what extent did your career-development experiences prepare you for post-secondary pursuits?

5. To what extent did your career-development experiences match your expectations of how resources would ideally prepare you?

6. To what extent did teachers influence your career-development experiences?

7. Were there any particular events, extra-curricular activities, or mentors that stood out within your career-development experiences?

8. Were there any perceived positive outcomes from your career-development experiences?

9. Were there any perceived concerns regarding your career-development experiences?

10. Were any of the following: character development, socio-emotional development, civic development, or multicultural perspectives discussed throughout your high-school experience?

11. To what extent did career-guidance resources help you in your career-development?

12. Do you feel you had access to the resources and tools necessary to help you succeed in your future career pursuits?

13. Were there any challenges presented to you in accessing resources and/or supports in pursuing your career-development?

14. Do you have any recommendations to improve career-development programming? Please expand.

15. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share regarding career-development?

Appendix C

Letter of Information/Consent Form

Title of the study: Ontario Students' Perceptions of Career Development Experiences: A Case Study Approach

Researchers:

Shaina McDonald	Dr. Stephanie Chitpin
Principal Investigator	Master's Supervisor
Faculty of Education	Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa	University of Ottawa
Tel:	Tel: 613-562-5800 (ext. 4146)
Email:	Email: steph.chitpin@uottawa.ca

Invitation to participate: I have been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Shaina McDonald. The study has received approval from my organization.

Purpose of the study: This study will examine students' perceptions of their career-development experiences within an Ontario context. The qualitative case study methodology, using Robert Stake's (1995) case study approach will be used to allow for a holistic understanding and analysis of the student experience.

Participation: Through this study, I will complete an approximately 30 minute interview with the researcher. This interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. I will be given the opportunity to review the transcription.

Risks: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study; however, I can refuse to answer any questions or to end my participation in a research activity if I become uncomfortable. I may choose to cease participation in the study as a whole at any time for any reason and in such a case any data that I have provided will be shredded.

Benefits: This study will allow me to contribute feedback towards informing future career-development practices. I will provide insight for educational researchers regarding career-development services, curriculum content, and resources to better equip students for post-secondary pursuits.

Individual and Organizational Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher(s) that all information collected from site observations, individual interviews, workshops and the interpretation panel will be considered private and will only be used for the purpose of this study. I have been provided assurance my anonymity and the organization's anonymity will be protected through the use of a code for my organization and pseudonyms for the names of all individuals and geographic locations in any texts that result from this study. Only the principal and supervisory investigators will have access to the index that links codes to organizations and pseudonyms to names.

Treatment and conservation of data: The data collected (e.g., audio recordings and field notes from interviews) will be kept in a secure manner. Shaina McDonald will personally store all research data in a secure location. All hard copies of documents will be stored in locked filing cabinets, and all digital information will be stored in a password-protected folder on the hard drive of a password-protected computer. Back up files will be stored on an external password-protected hard drive at Shaina McDonald's home. Data will be kept for five years after the completion of the study, after which paper records will be shredded and digital files will be deleted and electronically shredded using security software.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data obtained from me until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Consent: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Shaina McDonald (University of Ottawa), and supervised by Dr. Stephanie Chitpin (University of Ottawa).

I understand the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Review Board has approved this research. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387. Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of this consent form, one of which I may keep. If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers.

Participant Name *Signature* *Date*

_____ / _____ / _____

Researcher Name *Signature* *Date*

_____ / _____ / _____