Workplace Learning in Secondary Schools:
An Examination of Ontario’s Venture into Formal Career Education

by

Fabrizio Antonelli

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Employing Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, this study will examine the origins, creation, and implementation of Ontario’s Career Studies course as it relates to existing economic and workplace practices. Specifically, two broad aspects of the course will be addressed. First, the expectations for the course will be examined to determine the general approach to workplace education as outlined in course curriculum documents and approved-for-use textbooks. Also included in this analysis will be the ways Career Studies teachers interpret and deliver course material. Secondly, this study will uncover the opportunities students have to control and empower themselves in their career development. This includes an exploration of the alternatives to current workplace and economic practices as presented in the course materials, as well as the strategies emphasized for students to adopt in their career planning.

At the moment Career Studies, like other career education and guidance programs in Canada, presents current neo-liberal market and labour trends as permanent and outside the control of human agency. In response to these trends,
students are expected to improve their marketability for employment through individual and competitive career-development practices, in effect distancing themselves from others through formal credential attainment and attitudinal adjustments that best suit employers. Opportunities for students to experience collective empowerment through alternative workplace and economic practices are noticeably absent from the course.

This study wishes to shed light on some of the shortcomings of career education in Ontario and to propose recommendations that truly situate students as architects of their career planning. Employing Hyslop-Margison and Graham’s (2003) *Principles for Democratic Learning* (PDL), this study concludes that opportunities for students to critically examine and question current workplace practices, explore alternatives to the status quo, and, most importantly, understand the social elements behind current workplace and economic conditions, will better position students to control their future work lives.
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Schooling and its relations to wider society has served as fodder for countless studies and debates over the years. As schooling relates to preparation for adult life, arguments surface as to the relevance of directly tying public schools to wider society. Some would argue that education should be broad in its approach and serve students in the exploration of their abilities, skills, and interests. Others see public education as an opportunity to link education to key institutions and practices found in wider society, in particular the workforce. The debate over the purpose of public education in Ontario formed the backbone for the formation and eventual recommendations of the Royal Commission in 1994. Prior to the release of the commission’s report, linkages between work and schooling were limited to vocational education programs, cooperative studies, and sporadic and informal connections to relevant employment practices made by classroom teachers, especially in business and technology courses.

Building upon the recommendations of the Royal Commission, and after years of discussion, formulation, and revision, the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario introduced Career Studies in 2000 as part of its general curriculum reforms. A mandatory half-credit course for Grade 10 students, Career Studies formalizes school-to-work connections, practices, and expected behaviours as part of the secondary-school curriculum. Career Studies acts as an introduction to the world of work and is where students are expected to examine their skills and interests as they pertain to the students’ academic careers and their future careers outside of formal education. Career
Studies not only exposes students to specific career skill sets, but it introduces them to expected workplace values and practices. This study will explore the workplace and economic realities as spelled out in the Career Studies curriculum, with the intent of critically examining student expectations relating to career planning.

The theoretical framework guiding this study will be Gramsci’s hegemony theory. It will be argued that as a hegemonic project, Career Studies puts in place socially constructed “realities” that encourage students to choose certain career paths over others, while working within a framework that makes certain economic and workplace practices appear sacrosanct, inevitable, and permanent. For example, workplace practices such as downsizing, rationalization, and a lack of worker control are presented as a “natural” evolution of current workplace trends. Rather than present alternatives to existing economic and workplace practices that may empower students as future workers, the textbooks and curriculum documents present strategies of adaptation and individual initiative (e.g., entrepreneurship) instead of collective strategies (e.g., unionization) as answers to volatile workplace and economic trends.

It will also be argued in this thesis that Career Studies attempts to limit student agency by creating an economic and workplace “reality” that reifies existing workplace and economic practices. Missing from this presentation are alternative practices for students to critically examine and assess. Rather than present alternative economic and workplace practices that could potentially empower students, Career Studies almost exclusively stresses employability skills and adaptation to existing economic and workplace trends. For example, workplace organization options like cooperative employment and unionization are passed over for more individual career pursuits like
entrepreneurship. Even though the course affords students an opportunity to explore career options in terms of occupational choice, the exploration is often mired in neo-liberal workplace “realities.” This is to say that the career “choice” is simply an exposure to trends in job growth and decline, with an emphasis on encouraging students to prepare for work that will be in high demand. In effect, students are exposed to a work world that favours economic growth over dignity in the workplace, profit over equality, and individualism over collective wellbeing. Just as is happening in other parts of the world (Hyslop-Margison, McKerracher, Comier, & Destroches, 2007a; Lehmann & Taylor, 2003; Misook & Apple, 1998; Taylor, 1998a; Taylor, 1998b; Weiner, 2003) education policy in Ontario accommodates private industry and the marketplace at the expense of student growth and empowerment.

The bases for analysis in this thesis are the economic “realities” and workplace trends as spelled out in the curriculum. Using course guidelines and approved-for-use textbooks, as well as the interview data from Career Studies teachers, the course will be analysed with respect to the presentation of workplace and economic “realities,” as well as student strategies for career development. Essentially, these analyses will form the basis of exploration to determine the degree to which students are empowered in their career planning. Utilizing Hyslop-Margison and Graham’s (2003) *Principles for Democratic Learning* (PDL), this thesis will explore the potential for students to be active agents in their career planning, to critically examine current workplace and economic practices, and the degree to which students are able to explore alternative practices for workplace empowerment.
**Personal Standpoint**

As a former teacher of the course, I saw faults and opportunities in Career Studies. As a secondary-school teacher with a neo-Marxist perspective, it was difficult to teach the course as it became evident early on that students were simply viewed as future commodities for economic growth and global expansion. Inventories and self-exploration surveys dominate the early part of the course, enabling students to come to an understanding of their likes, dislikes, abilities, and weaknesses with the intent to match them to economic and labour-market demands. In the middle and end portions of the course, I was expected to work with students on establishing preferred career paths based on the information gathered in the first part of the course. However, as stated by one teacher in the interviews conducted for this project, the course at times “smack(ed) of economic determinism.” This was a thought that constantly went through my mind when I taught the course because many of my students would feel overwhelmed by occupational information, requirements, and prognostications for future employment. In some instances, their interests, values, and skill sets were adjusted to meet future labour-market demands.

What also made this course difficult to teach was the obvious omission of alternative workplace and economic practices, specifically practices with the potential to empower workers through collective action (e.g. unionization). Through much of the textbook material and curriculum documents, current neo-liberal work trends are treated as inevitable and completely beyond the control of human agency. Instead, individual entrepreneurial action to adapt to workplace and economic change is viewed as a preferred strategy in career planning. This portion of the course brought out the
nonconformist in me, as I often taught to refute the economic and workplace claims made in the textbook. It took time and effort – not to mention my background knowledge in labour and social inequities studies – to deliver a counter curriculum that in my mind it was much needed. It is this understanding of the time and resource pressures faced by teachers who teach outside the curriculum that provided insight into the difficulties involved with introducing alternative curriculum materials. It is this understanding of how the curriculum plays out in the classroom with students that drew me to this project. In my opinion, there is a need for career and workplace education in secondary schools, as it presents an opportunity to teach students the social relations of work – an activity we all spend a considerable amount of time in our lives performing. Unfortunately, the Grade 10 Career Studies course devotes little content to untangling and understanding the complexity of work and its relation to the political and economic world. For this course to be successful, students need to be shown what is possible in their work and career development and not simply be shown what already exists.

**Original Contribution to the Field**

This thesis complements many of the existing school-to-work studies discussed in the literature review in Chapter 3, mainly building upon Emery Hyslop-Margison’s work on career education. Hyslop-Margison’s work is critical of current neo-liberal trends in workplace preparation programs and emphasizes the lack of choice and empowerment students have in their career development. Hyslop-Margison argues that students, often presented with a single option of adaptation to existing workplace practices, are left in a passive position in their career planning and are rarely set up to
empower themselves as future workers. Building upon these themes, through an analysis of the curriculum documents, approved-for-use-in-the-classroom textbooks, and interviews with Career Studies teachers, this study explores career education in Ontario in greater depth than has been done previously. This study demonstrates the intent and expected outcomes of Career Studies, examining its inception, content formulation – both in its expectations and curriculum guides – and the way teachers deliver the course material to students. By adding the element of pedagogical practices in Career Studies classrooms, which to date has been missing from the literature, this thesis adds another explanatory layer to understand what is taught in the classroom and why. With the addition of teachers’ views on key topics of career education, this thesis further uncovers the complexities and contradictions in curriculum delivery and broadens the understanding of the role educators, textbook writers, and classroom teachers play in reproducing the dominant ideology. Effectively, this thesis will go beyond the printed word of the curriculum guides and textbooks and examine the way these educational resources play out in the classroom. The teacher interviews, coupled with the documents and approved-for-use textbooks, provide a greater understanding of the hegemonic practices at play in the Career Studies classroom. For example, this thesis will examine the workplace “realities,” which are internalized by teachers and students and set the parameters for possibilities in career development, as one of many processes and understandings that help reproduce the dominant ideology. It is hoped that this project will present the next crucial step in understanding Career Studies as a hegemonic project and shed light on the degree with which subordinated groups take up
the dominant ideology and help to reproduce existing inequities in the economy and workplace.

Chapter Preview

The layout for this thesis chronologically follows the development of workplace training and education in Ontario, laying the foundation for the “findings” chapters that examine in closer detail the inception, content, and practices of Career Studies. In Chapter 2, I examine workplace and vocational education in Ontario over the past 150 years. The review connects major events in school reformations – such as Egerton Ryerson’s call for public education, the industrialization of Ontario and subsequent Industrial Education Act, to the Royal Commission of the early 1990s – to current ideas on the purposes of public education. Further, I present a brief history of the creation of the Career Studies course in Ontario, the stated reasons for its introduction (how it relates back to the recommendations of the Royal Commission of the 1900s), the chronology of its formation, and its placement within the secondary-school curriculum.

Also, this chapter examines current “conventional” thinking around career education; primarily, the efforts made by government and business organizations to situate career education in the global market. This form of career education, which is common practice today, simply places students in a position as future workers (assets so to speak) for countries and industry to remain “competitive” in a global economy.
Chapter 3 is a review of literature that breaks down into two key parts. The first part will examine some of the more general studies surrounding schooling and socialization. Examples, such as John Dewey’s call for “progressive” education, Paul Willis’ (1977) study of working-class students, Jean Anyon’s (1980) study of school classrooms, and Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) empirical work on schooling and class reproduction, will be taken up and related to current workplace and career education programs, specifically Career Studies in Ontario.

The second section of this chapter brings the focus down to studies dealing specifically with workplace and career education. The work of Emery Hyslop-Margison forms the basis for this section. Currently the leading critic in career education in Canada, Hyslop-Margison has produced several studies critically examining the content and pedagogy behind workplace education. Much of the generally pertinent critical work on the relatively untouched area of career education research comes from less directly relevant theorists such as Apple, Giroux, and Simon.

In Chapter 4, I outline the theoretical framework guiding this study – Gramsci’s hegemony theory. This study specifically examines Career Studies as a hegemonic project (with greater emphasis of the structural origins of career education in Ontario) coming out of a moment of crisis – globalization and the global economic downturn of the 1990s. In essence, hegemony theory frames the analysis of the content and motives behind Career Studies, looking specifically at the extent to which curriculum documents, textbooks, and teachers help reproduce existing workplace and economic practices.
The conceptual framework section of this chapter explains in detail key concepts around workplace and career education; specifically, workplace education is defined to set parameters for the study. Career education differs slightly from vocational education in that career education does not specifically focus on an occupation or vocation for preparation. Instead, career education presents students with general work and employability “skills” that theoretically could apply to any occupation. Also, I define current economic and workplace practices, placing an emphasis on the concepts of control and empowerment. Specifically, I examine how control and empowerment are taken up in conventional career-education literature, as well as critical perspectives on the topic. These definitions help establish how Career Studies tries to empower students as future workers – are students as future workers empowered in the workplace by gaining a competitive advantage over other workers in a free labour market, or are students given the opportunity to critically examine the world of work and gain control and empowerment through a more democratic means of market and organizational control, or is it somewhere in between? Finally, key concepts – such as “adaptability,” “problem solving” and “critical thinking” – included in the Career Studies curriculum documents as “positive” character traits for the workplace are assessed as to evaluate impact on career education.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology and methods utilized in this study. This thesis involves content analyses of curriculum documents, textbooks, and Royal Commission submissions (1994). The content analysis of textbooks focuses on the presentation of world of work and the economy (workplace and economic “realities”), the strategies and skills students need for career development and empowerment in the
workplace, as well as the extent to which alternative economic and workplace practices are present in the textbooks.

The second part of the project includes interviews with Career Studies teachers. Eight teachers were selected for one-hour interviews. The interviews took place in 2006 in Toronto with teachers who have taught the course at some point in their careers. The interviews are used to gain an understanding of how teachers take up the textual and curricular material, what they deem to be important for students to learn, and the willingness of teachers to introduce material outside of the curriculum. Understanding these elements of the teachers’ experiences helps shed light on the role teachers are playing in the reproduction of the dominant ideology. In addition, this chapter will address the methodological limitations of the study; specifically the difficulties securing teacher participants for the project.

Chapter 6 is an analysis of the government documents related to the Grade 10 Career Studies course. The curriculum document for Career Studies was originally published in 1999 and was later revised in 2006. For this project I used the 1999 document to outline the expectations of the course as this was the curriculum guide in use for the textbook creation process and teacher interviews (comparisons will be made to the 2006 document, pointing out differences and similarities on the treatment of key topics to help determine if a shift in thinking has taken place in the Career Studies curriculum). Along with the curriculum guidelines for the course, this chapter will analyze the government discussion and policy documents dealing with the creation of the course. The analysis of government documents is on the “economic trends, workplace organization, work opportunities…,” and “build(ing) the capabilities needed for
managing work and life transitions…” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 13). Specifically, I examine what the course deems to be practical strategies for navigating a career, what life transitions should be expected, and the best strategies for coping with change. The analysis of the documents will be thematic, uncovering how the documents define work and economic “realities,” what skills and attributes help prepare students to take their place in the work world, and the extent with which alternative economic and workplace practices are presented to students.

Chapter 7 opens with an examination of rules governing textbook inclusion on the Trillium List*. A school board/school can only select a book from the Trillium List for use in the classroom as the main textbook. The Ontario government has produced two documents for public viewing that inform publishers and authors of the submission procedures and guidelines for textbook approval for inclusion on the Trillium List. Understanding what is allowed for inclusion in an approved textbook sheds further light on the intentions of the course. From the submission procedures, I perform a thematic content analysis of the four approved textbooks for use in Career Studies. The analysis of the Career Studies texts uses the same themes for analysis from the previous chapters – how workplace and economic “realities” are defined, what are deemed appropriate/important skills and attributes to be learned for career preparation, and finally, the degree to which students are exposed to economic and workplace alternatives. The textbooks used in this analysis are Careers 10 (C10), Careers Today and Tomorrow (CTT), Career Studies 10 (CS10), and Horizons 2000+: Career Studies (H2000).

* The Trillium List is a list of textbooks that have been approved for use in Ontario’s public schools by the Ministry of Education. An item that appears on this list may be used as the main textbook for the course.
Chapter 8 is an analysis of the interviews with eight school teachers exploring how they took up the course and what they think students should take away from the course. For the most part, the teachers interviewed tend to follow the general form of the curriculum documents (either by looking at the expectations in the document or by indirectly following the expectations through the use of the textbook – after all, textbooks must follow the expectations of the course). This chapter makes linkages with the content of the curriculum documents and textbooks to establish the general content and pedagogy of Career Studies. Essentially, the teacher stands as the last piece of the hegemonic puzzle in the delivery of Career Studies. It is the teacher’s acceptance or rejection of the course in part or in whole that breathes life into the potential for hegemony to play out in the Career Studies classroom.

Chapter 9 is the discussion and conclusion, and involves a synthesis of the analyses of the 1994 Royal Commission submissions and recommendations, the curriculum documents, the textbooks, and the teacher interviews. The basic structure of the chapter follows the thematic analyses of the above materials and interviews – definition of economic and workplace “realities,” what are deemed appropriate/important skills and attributes to be learned for career preparation, and finally, the degree with which students are exposed to economic alternatives. Essentially, findings from the analyses are linked to the theoretical framework to determine the extent to which current Career Studies materials and teachers serve to reproduce existing workplace and economic practices.

After establishing the intent and shortcomings of Career Studies, this chapter explores current counter-hegemonic practices in career education. Several resource
guides for use in the classroom take up workplace learning in a critical manner and provide alternatives for students to explore. These guides and some of the pedagogical practices uncovered in the teacher interviews that could be viewed as counter-hegemonic are presented as possible alternatives to existing content and teaching practices. This chapter will also examine some of the counter-hegemonic or democratic learning that is taking place around the world today with the intent of extending these examples of democratic reforms to possible reforms in Ontario’s workplace education program.
Chapter 2 – History of Workplace Education and Current Trends in Career Education

This chapter will explore the history of public education in Ontario; specifically examining how provincial policy makers took up schooling and its relation to paid work. After a chronological examination of key events in the development of public education in Ontario, the focus of the chapter will shift specifically to the events that led to the introduction of career education in Ontario. Rather than untangle all of the social and political dynamics that have shaped policy regarding public education, this chapter will paint broad brush strokes regarding the development of workplace education. At the root of this historical analysis will be an exploration of where students have been positioned in terms of career development and workplace preparation; specifically, the extent with which they have been given opportunities to fully explore, unearth, and understand the social relations of work as preparation for their careers.

Historically, public schools have been placed in the awkward position of having to justify their worth by providing a return on public investment (Apple, 1998). A brief examination of the development of workplace education in Ontario illustrates Apple’s point in that school reform historically has centred on transforming schools to meet and support the needs of the market in order to foster economic growth. When we examine the development of workplace education in Ontario, we see an attempt by provincial governments to put in place a project that works in the preferred interests of industry and the economy, with only secondary thought given to student interest and control as future workers. As a response to the competitive global market, Ontario school reformers at the turn of the 20th century used education as a way to train students to
take their places in the competitive marketplace of industrial Canada. As I explain later in this chapter, nothing much has changed surrounding workplace education, as modern reforms to education still operate as a response to increased competition in the global economy.

**Early Days of Public Education in Ontario**

When we examine the early days of educational reform in Upper Canada, we see a shift from schools operating as locally run institutions to ones that are centrally administered. Prior to Egerton Ryerson taking control of Ontario’s public system of education in 1844, schools were administered by local officials and reflected the needs of the community, respecting the culture of the people and the labour needs specific to the locality (Curtis, 2000). But working-class students tended to stay away from the classroom, which was still viewed as a place for the children of the elite. Instead, workplace education for the working class of Upper Canada was primarily learned on the farm from family members or through the apprentice/master relationship.

In the early 1800s, the ruling elite continued to provide private education for its sons, and in 1807 the colonial parliament introduced the Grammar School Act, which provided public lands for the creation of 10 schools (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992). Although schools still charged fees and remained a private elite institution, for the first time in Ontario, a formal government-sanctioned school system was created to educate the youth of the colony. The Grammar School Act paved the way for John Strachan’s School Act of 1816 that allowed any group of property holders to build a school and receive a grant from the colonial government to pay a teacher’s salary. In exchange for their financial support, colonial officials were given the power to oversee what was
taught in the classroom (Curtis, et al., 1992). Although the colonial government exercised little control over the daily functioning of schools, the School Act of 1816 put in place for the first time a semblance of central control over local schooling practices and curriculum.

In 1844, Egerton Ryerson took control of the provincial education offices and it was his intention to make education both accessible to the general public and centrally controlled (Curtis et al., 1992). As a response to the “unruly” rabble that rebelled in Upper Canada, Ryerson saw an opportunity to control the masses through a centralized curriculum that would impart the “moral guidance” needed to subdue the masses. For the most part, early Ryersonian public education stressed the importance of loyalty to the British crown, God, and the class system, rather than the importance of training a labour force to boost the economic situation in Upper Canada (Baldus & Kassam, 1996). During the middle of the 19th century, Upper Canada had not yet fully industrialized and the need to centrally plan the educational system for industrial expansion was not present. Yet, it is important to note that Ryerson saw general workplace training (attitudes toward work in general) as being an important step towards constructing a morally prudent and industrious worker (Ryerson, 1847).

For the most part, occupations during the mid-1800s required rudimentary training that could be learned quite quickly and easily on the job. Those jobs that required special skills or training would often be taught through an apprenticeship-training program. Consequently, special training within public education was not a pressing need during the mid-1800s. What was needed was a system of education that instilled the idea that hard work would lead to a better economic situation for both the
individual and the colony. The idea of educating students to become better workers placed both conservatives and liberals in the same camp.

Conservatives tended to argue that universal elementary education would produce both good citizens and workers: sober, reliable, religious and orderly people who would respect established authority and private property. Liberals stressed the same points, but also saw education as a means whereby individuals could better themselves. (Curtis et al., 1992, p. 34)

If formal education was to be used for the betterment of the lower classes, it had to be internalized by the working classes as a legitimate means by which to better their station in life. This was not a tough sell as many working-class and rural parents saw education as a way to secure a better future for their children. For example, in rural communities where land was becoming more expensive to purchase, farmers realized that some of their sons would be better served in an occupation outside of farming and viewed public education as a means to acquire the necessary technical skills demanded by employers (Axelrod, 1997). Reformers viewed public education as the means by which the working classes could better themselves politically and demand more rights (Curtis et al., 1992). Many families in Upper Canada internalized that education would provide the best possible path toward self-improvement and went along with Ryerson’s plans for public education.

Labour organizations, for the most part, supported the idea of public education because they saw education as a chance to create a more egalitarian society. However, labour groups were also concerned with the inclusion of technical education
in the curriculum (Zeller, 2000). Artisans opposed some aspects of public education because they felt they would lose control over their craft, as more and more students were churned out to work in the technical trades and factories. Fortunately, for artisans, most parents at this time did not want education to be a technical endeavour and instead viewed education as something that should be different from work (Curtis et al., 1992). Consequently, most of the early attempts to introduce “practical” education into the school curriculum failed.

From 1850 to 1870, school reform was a slow process. Although the School Act of 1850 gave some central control to the Department of Education, Ryerson still had little power to act swiftly in enacting his reforms. Often, it would take years to put a simple reform into practice (Gidney & Millar, 1990). It was not until the School Act of 1871 that Ryerson had gained control over most aspects of public education. In that act, school attendance became compulsory, while a common body administered elementary and secondary schools (Curtis et al., 1992). With this act, Ryerson began to shift public education toward an institution that would provide technical training for the workplace. It was also in this act that the levels of education began to take on a more familiar presence. High schools and collegiate institutes were created as separate learning institutions that would prepare students for enrolment in university. Although there was to be some distinction between the two institutions (collegiates were supposed to be higher academic institutions of learning compared to high schools), any differences that existed were quickly blurred in the first few years of their inception (Stamp, 1994). In this case, despite the push by a central authority to keep the
institutions distinct and separate, the needs and desires of students attending high schools and collegiate institutes determined the type of education they would provide.

Over the following years, enrolment in secondary education swelled. Between the years of 1883 and 1904, high-school enrolments in Ontario doubled, ebbing and flowing depending upon the economic circumstances of the time (Stamp, 1982). During difficult economic times, Ontario's youth would take refuge in the public-school system and continue with their studies. When it was difficult for youth to find employment, attempts were made by educators “to make the elementary and secondary school course a 'preparation' for work” (Curtis et al., 1992, p. 38). The poor economic conditions of the late 19th century forced students to view education as a possible step toward occupational and financial betterment. In essence, education was taking on the credentialist characteristics that are still in play today (see Livingstone, 2004). Referring to the punctuality and attitudinal attributes preferred by employers, Stamp notes: “While the high schools did little in the way of specific vocational training, they did provide a year or two of general education that employers increasingly sought from job applicants” (Stamp, 1982, p. 40).

**The Dawn of a New Century**

By the end of the 19th century, it was becoming apparent to most people that public education would have to take on a more “practical” role. Even labour groups, one of the more vocal opponents to technical education in the past, saw the need for greater technical education in public education to better prepare students for industrial labour. Because of the rise of the factory system, most artisan shops could not keep up with the mass production of cheap goods and were forced to close down. This, of course, led to
the erosion of the master/apprentice training practices that traditionally prepared youth for employment in the skilled trades (Axelrod, 1997). Labour groups, left with few options, hoped that schools would create a uniquely skilled labour force that could still command some control in the workplace and over their product.

With most stakeholders on the same page (or as close as could be expected), politicians and reformers argued that it was time for public education to suit the needs of an industrial age. For example, the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association believed that secondary schools should play a more direct role in the training of workers and supervisors with the ability “to direct the practical side of our national industries” (Axelrod, 1997, p. 110). Once again, some groups, more specifically industrialists and the business class, viewed public education as an institution that could prepare students to assume a role in developing Canada economically.

In 1905, as a response to public concern over Canada’s perceived economic lagging in the global market, the Conservatives’ provincial election campaign ran on the platform that school reform was needed to better train students for life after school (Stamp, 1982). Although reforms were always presented as a way to improve the conditions of the poor or labouring classes, the idea that the nation could gain economically seemed to always loom in the background. Most reformers worked under the assumption that individuals could better their situation through a general improvement of the national economy. In essence, the prosperity of the individual was tied to the prosperity of the country. This was a difficult concept for educators to ignore or contradict for educators and is still in use today (Gandin and Apple, 2002; Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006; Osborne, 2000; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996; Weiner, 2003).
With both labour and manufacturers pressing for vocational education in public schools, the Ontario government decided in 1911 to introduce the Industrial Education Act. The act would allow school boards to create technical institutions and, more importantly, boards would receive increased funding if they provided vocational training (Stamp, 1982). Upon the introduction of the bill, the Toronto Mail and Empire echoed a popular sentiment at the time: “(The Industrial Education Act would) complete the solutions of the main problem of education, namely, to bring the school instruction into correspondence with the affairs of life” (Mail and Empire in Stamp, 1982, p. 82; italics added). Clearly, prevailing public sentiment regarding the purpose of schooling was for schools to function primarily as a workplace preparation tool and not an avenue to acquire general knowledge. How students would be groomed into future careers, as well as what would define a relevant workplace curriculum specific to students of differing backgrounds, would form the foundation for educational debates throughout the 20th century.

By 1913, schools had clearly become institutions to prepare students for occupations in adult life. Rather than serve principally as a socioeconomic equalizer, public education instead helped students refine existing skills and tastes toward specific occupations for their adult lives. In other words, student development was based on social-class background. In 1913, J.W. Robertson, who at the turn of the 20th century was the Dominion commissioner of agriculture, put forth the idea that:

…equality of opportunity to enter a school designed to prepare leaders, is not what is needed. (Instead), equality of opportunity, to mean anything real, must have regard to the varying needs, tastes, abilities and after lives
of the pupils. (Schools must now) serve them all alike in preparing them for occupations they are to follow. (Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education (1910) in Stamp, 1982, p. 84)

Schools were now a site for selection. Those students who were “qualified” to lead would follow one stream, while the rest would look to develop their skills to fill other roles needed in society. As Albert Leake, former provincial director of technical education, wrote, “(The school system consists of) at least two castes, those who are elect and those who are not, i.e., those who can absorb the printed page and pass the prescribed examinations and those who for both material and financial reasons are not able to do so” (Leake in Stamp, 1982, p. 84). Distinction among students was now firmly entrenched in the minds of educators and would dominate educational policy both provincially and nationally over the century (Stamp, 1982).

Public education made several changes through the 20th century, with schools taking on the role of workplace training centres – either directly in the sense of vocational training schools or through more indirect methods in the liberal arts/university stream. The establishment of vocational institutions, or secondary schools with a vocational and technical wing to the school, had its supporters and detractors. Much of the vocational schooling expansion occurred in areas that were without an existing secondary school, with students from the area expected to attend (Smaller, 2003). In places where there was a large immigrant and working-class population, achieving adequate levels of enrolment in vocational education was viewed as a success by schooling officials. With little opportunity for anything else, immigrant parents embraced the chance to develop technical skills in their children. Conversely, when
vocational or mixed academic/vocational schools opened in middle-class areas, parents resisted sending their children to these schools because of the perceived inferior quality of education (Smaller, 2003). In the end, middle-class parents were able to prevent the streaming of their children into these newly built schools and were successful in positioning their class interest over the national interest.

The trend toward more “practical” education and work preparation began to flourish and by 1928, enrolment in vocational schools comprised 25% of the total high-school population (Curtis et al., 1992). In response to an ever-increasing industrial and technological global economy, the Ontario government utilized public education as a means to acquire a more industrious and skilled labour force. This trend continued through the post-war era as more technical schools were built with both provincial and federal money (Curtis et al., 1992). Through the economic expansion of the 1960s and the recession of the 1970s, enrolment in vocational programs ebbed and flowed. If it seemed economically prudent, students enrolled in vocational training; otherwise, the liberal arts afforded students a chance to develop their intellect with the potential for university enrolment and what was presumed a higher-paying, professional career (Curtis et al., 1992).

Royal Commission – For the Love of Learning

In the early 1990s a Royal Commission on Learning was set up to address the perceived shortcomings of Ontario’s public and separate schools with respect to international standards. The Hall-Dennis commission had filed its report over 30 years earlier, and the NDP government at the time felt it was necessary to re-evaluate education in Ontario. The commission was assigned four main tasks:
To provide a “shared vision” for education in the province, to outline a “program” of studies for elementary and secondary schools, to offer guidance on the question of the “accountability” of schools and students in meeting provincial goals, and to examine the question of school governance. (Milburn, 1996, p. 3)

The commission set about accomplishing its task through an extensive survey of public attitudes toward education in Ontario and accepted thousands of submissions from individuals, groups, and institutions. Some individuals and groups were personally invited to provide submissions to the commission and the Royal Commission also traveled across the province in the latter part of 1993 and the early months of 1994 listening to submissions from the public (Milburn, 1996).

Groups interested in workplace education voiced their opinions during the hearings and delivered a variety of suggestions for the commission’s consideration. Business groups expressed a concern over the preparedness of students to enter the workplace. Boards of trade and corporations emphasized the importance of workplace education that reflected the needs of business and the marketplace (Brown, 1993; Gardner, 1993). For example, a submission from Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada outlined the pressing need for workplace education in schools:

The business community relies upon the graduates of our education system as we strive for success in an increasingly tough world. I doubt you would sit by passively if a key supplier consistently delivered to you inferior and inadequate ingredients, ingredients that were essential to the success of your basic process. (Gardner, 1993, p. 2)
Sun Life’s submission to the Royal Commission unabashedly posits the idea that students are merely a future resource for industry and that education should serve the interests of business by supplying a useable product. Much like a farmer describing livestock and its relation to dinner, the large corporation of Sun Life Assurance is able to differentiate and disassociate the end product from the production process. The phrasing used by Sun Life situates students as future workers who are not positioned to control the production process and are seen merely as resources directly tied to the success of Canada’s business community in an increasingly competitive world.

Other interested parties did look at workplace education as a potential avenue for student empowerment in the workplace. Co-operative education and youth employment associations sent in submissions to the commission recommending greater student involvement in workplace settings (ACCE, 1993; OCEA, 1993). These organizations stressed career development through education opportunities in both the classroom and the workplace. It was their recommendation that education should directly benefit students through career exploration and preparation of existing workplaces, but the learning should be explored and dissected in the classroom. Meanwhile, labour groups took a more critical stance on current workplace education and advocated for workplace learning that would expose students to different workplace practices and economic systems (OFL, 1993). Labour groups submitted recommendations to the commission urging schools to rethink the way they educate students. Rather than using schools as preparatory bodies for the workplace, labour groups endorsed a system of education that would empower students to think critically about current workplace practices (OFL, 1993). In place would be a more democratic form of learning where the social relations
of work and the economy would be explored to arrive at a greater understanding of where workers could gain control over their work.

After receiving all of the submissions and producing a four-volume report, the commission devoted only a few pages that directly addressed career education (Bégin-Caplan, 1994). They viewed career education as important, and felt it should be taught in a manner that allowed students to experience workplace education directly (Bégin-Caplan, II, 1994, p. 41). “(Career education) must be an experienced-based program in which young students learn to think about their interests, aptitudes, and responsibilities within a community framework” (Bégin-Caplan, II, 1994, p. 41). The commission suggested that workplace education should involve students working in the community to gain an understanding of how community partners function, both in paid and unpaid work. Career education would also involve an increased involvement of workplace counsellors and members from the community participating in workplace education. As well, students would be given an opportunity to organize their schedules to meet college and university requirements for enrolment (Bégin-Caplan, II, 1994, pp. 120 – 124). Essentially, the recommendations of the commission provided students with choices (although limited), rather than simply having them assessed and slotted into different careers.

**Career Studies: The Early Years**

In 1998, the new Progressive Conservative government introduced a career education package, *Choices Into Action: Guidance and Career Education Policy Grades 1 to 12 (1998), Detailed Discussion Document*. The package outlined “what schools in Ontario are expected to do to help students from Grades 1 to 12 prepare for their adult
and working life” (Ministry, 1998, p. 2). This small discussion document was released to
the public with a survey that asked the general public to submit comments on the
proposed changes to the curriculum and guidelines for career education (see Ministry,
1999a). The reforms were professedly based upon the Royal Commission’s report, with
the intention of making career education more “relevant” to students in Ontario. The
rationale for the first draft was as follows:

The nature and pace of change today means that students must live in a
society which is less constant, and less predictable than ever… The
purpose of a reformed guidance and career education program within the
total school program is to prepare students for these realities. (Ministry,
1998, p. 2)

The Ministry never explained in the discussion paper the “realities” with which
students “must live.” Instead, it simply asserted an assumption that the
economics of a society will inevitably change the workplace setting and that
students must adapt to these changes. Also straying from the Royal
Commission’s report, the Ministry removed the student exploration aspect to
career and workplace education in favour of a more expedited, direct retelling of
what comprised work and its relation to the marketplace. In effect, students were
to be told what to expect from work, what to expect in specific occupations, and
how these occupations would be altered and remade by the economic “realities”
of the global economy.

The rationale for the discussion document created by the Conservative
government also diverged from the Royal Commission’s suggestion to not have
schools operate as workplace preparation centres (Bégin-Caplan, II, 1994, p. 41). The Conservative discussion paper was certainly leaning towards the notion that students need to be “prepared” for existing workplace practices. This notion did not change in the final draft of the curriculum document:

For their educational, social, and career success in the twenty-first century, students will require effective work habits and the ability to make sound decisions, solve problems, plan effectively, work independently, communicate well, research, evaluate themselves realistically, and explore new educational and career opportunities. A carefully planned guidance and career education program, beginning in the elementary grades and continuing through secondary school, will help students acquire these skills. (Ministry, 1999a, p. 5; italics added)

Although the wording was altered for the final document, still present was the intent that career education should act as a socializing agent for students to acclimatize themselves to current workplace practices.

Formal workplace education arrived in Ontario schools in 2000, when the Conservative government of Ontario introduced a half-credit mandatory course for Grade 10 students. The course was intended to introduce students to the world of work and act as a starting point to examine their skills and interests as they pertain both to their current careers as students and their future careers outside of school. Interestingly, Career Studies was paired (and still is today) with the Civics half-credit course. The courses appear as an attempt to build the “model” citizen through student understanding of their rights, roles, and
responsibilities politically, as well as their roles within the workplace and
economy (Antonelli, 2003a). What is most troubling about this pairing, as
uncovered by Hyslop-Margison and McKerracher (2008), is that the opportunity
afforded to students for critical examination of the political system in the Civics
course is not carried over to the Career Studies course regarding the workplace
and the economy. This contradiction sends a clear message to students that
while the political can be influenced by people, the economy and the workplace
are simply “natural” occurrences outside the control of human will.

Regarding the accompanying revised Career Studies curriculum documents, the
Ministry of Education stressed the point that workplace education will act as a way to
acclimate students to current workplace and economic practices:

In guidance and career education, students become more confident,
motivated, and effective learners. They develop learning and employability
skills and strategies that they can use both in their secondary and post
secondary studies and in the workplace. They set goals for
education/training after high school and learn techniques that will help
them manage their learning throughout their lives. In addition, the
curriculum prepares students to live, work, and participate in a complex
and diverse society. (Ministry, 1999b, p. 2)

This passage was revised for the 2006 curriculum document and reads as
follows:
The guidance and career education program aims to help students become more confident, more motivated, and more effective learners…

Students develop learning and employability skills and strategies that they can apply in their secondary and postsecondary studies and in the workplace. They *identify and develop essential skills and work habits that are required for success in the workplace*, as well as skills needed for effective communication, teamwork, and leadership. (Ministry, 2006a, pp. 3-4; italics added)

The general language outlining the purpose of the Career Studies curriculum in 1999 is replaced with a more direct definition in 2006. In the 2006 document, curriculum writers have clearly sent the message that the intent of the course is to prepare and place students in line with the “skills and work habits” that match the demands of the marketplace. It seems that the Guidance and Career Education curriculum documents are echoing the neo-liberal, corporatist agenda that is so prevalent in many school reforms (Gandin & Apple; 2002; Hyslop-Margison, McKerracher, Cormier, & Desroches, S, 2007; Osborne, 2000; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1996; Weiner, 2003). As well, it appears as though Ontario’s Guidance and Career Education documents are echoing what George Radwanski stated more than a decade earlier in his report on Ontario drop-outs, when he described education as “the paramount ingredient for success in the competitive world economy…(and) to our very survival as an economically competitive society” (Radwanski, quoted in Osborne, 2000, p. 10).
Comparative Career Programs

Comparatively, Ontario followed the career-education agendas of other provinces in Canada. In 1991, Manitoba released the following education policy:

The workforce will demand highly skilled and adaptable workers who have the ability to upgrade existing skills and develop new skills, who can help and participate in a climate that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation and economic growth, and who can understand the complex dynamics of a competitive global environment. (Manitoba Education and Training, quoted in Osborne, 2000, p. 10)

Once again, it is doubtful that the Manitoba government is defining entrepreneurship and innovation as the ability of future workers to challenge existing workplace practices, or to shift control in the workplace to the workers themselves. Rather, it is assumed that the Manitoba government has conceded the point that capitalist market forces have control over the workplace and that it is to the best advantage of students as future workers to learn to adapt rather than confront and change.

In Alberta, Taylor (1998b) uncovered a corporate-led educational reform to make the province more competitive in the national and international market place. As well, much of the vocational debates and reforms have centred on filling gaping holes in the technology and trades sector of the provincial economy (Lehman & Taylor, 2003). Accordingly, many of the school reforms both in the curriculum and the physical space of school buildings have followed the economic trends of the province. Just as was happening 100 years ago in Ontario, the current trend toward providing high-tech education to meet the technological demands of the "knowledge economy" has shifted
much of the learning in Alberta from the trades (such as auto mechanics, carpentry, etc.) to courses in computer programming (Taylor, 2006). In the case of Alberta, funding formulas and enrolment issues forced some administrators to transform wings in schools from trades to high tech. As has happened (and is currently happening) in Ontario, Alberta’s educational policies are being designed with industry at the forefront, while student development is reduced to a by-product of intended market gains.

**Summary**

From its origins in Ontario, public education has been heavily influenced by labour-market conditions. Ryerson, having centralized public education saw an opportunity to make a “moral,” “responsible,” and “productive” citizenry. Through the industrial expansion and technological advances of the 20th century, educators have looked to public education as a means to train students to remain competitive in a “global economy.” What policy makers and educators have generally overlooked in the school and work relationship is how students as ends in themselves explore the social relations of labour. As Dewey (1966) would argue, the development of students as future workers must not remain as a technical pursuit. Instead, while gaining the technical skills to perform work students should also acquire the understanding of work relations to better control and understand how their work relates to broader society. Historically, the Ontario government chose to use schooling as a technical endeavor and left out opportunities for student empowerment as future workers. With the creation of a Career Studies course dedicated to general workplace preparation, it will be the purpose of this study to determine if the Ontario government has stayed the course or
has chosen to empower students with a curriculum that critically addresses current workplace and economic practices.
Chapter 3 – Review of Literature

Schooling means many different things to different people. Primarily, schooling, which includes not only the curriculum but the more latent elements of learning as well like punctuality and deference to authority, acts as an opportunity to have students interact and socialize with peers while attaining a base level of knowledge in a variety of subjects. The divergence in the direction and purpose of schooling lies in how people view its relation and relevance to wider society. While some may view schooling as an opportunity for students to obtain a general level of knowledge and understanding of our world, others prefer to view schooling as a key element in preparing youth for their place in wider society – most notably employment. Given the complexities related with schooling and its relation to wider society, not to mention that much of our learning takes place outside of the classroom, it is not the aim of this chapter to reduce schooling to a learning and work relationship. Instead, this chapter will focus mainly on studies dealing with school-to-work transitions, specifically current career-education programs.

This chapter will begin with a review of key studies on school socialization and its relation to workplace preparation. The historic studies range from general observations on the role schools play in preparing students for work, to more specific studies that examine the content of curricula and the pedagogy involved in its delivery. From here, the focus of the literature review will narrow to studies critical of career-education programs. Specifically, the focus will be placed on modern examples of career-education movements in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia here in Canada, as well as movements by educators in other countries, to introduce career education into the
curriculum. Also from the literature, the merits of career-education programs on student development and future employment will be discussed.

**General Theories of School Socialization**

Much of the classic literature on school socialization links well with school-to-work transitions. For example, the work of theorists such as Durkheim (1956), Parsons (1959), Dewey (1966), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), and Willis (1977) just to name a few, studied school socialization with respect to work in some form or another. For theorists such as Durkheim and Parsons, schooling acts as a filtering and allocation process, assisting in the placement of students into future careers. Often citing schools as a “meritocratic” system of workplace allocation, functionalists would argue that both individuals and society benefit from this organizational practice because occupations are filled with the person “best suited” for the position. Of course, the functionalist perspective of meritocracy becomes problematic when issues of class, race, and gender discrimination, just to mention a few, can be determining factors for credential attainment and occupational selection (Porter, 1965). As well, as Livingstone (2004) argues, much of the credential attainment is underutilized in workplaces leading to a job-skills gap. As we shall see, the “harmonious” social reproduction through schooling as perceived by functional theorists is limited in many ways and fails to account for unequal gains across social groups.

Contrary to functionalist theorists like Durkheim and Parsons, critical theorists looked beyond the superficial outcomes of education to explore the social relations of school and work. Critical theorists such as Althusser, Willis, Bourdieu, Bowles, Gintis, Anyon, and Apple, to name a few, believe that the “natural” allocation of students for
future work is indeed rooted in inequities that perpetuate existing relations of power and greatly disadvantages students from lower classes. For example, Willis’ (1977) study of working-class students in England found that the rebellious nature of the “lads” was a product of their social upbringing. This form of agency, although bound up in structural and reproductive elements of class, distinguished the “lads” from others, leading to a rejection of the dominant culture. The agency of the “lads” was limited and in the end helped perpetuate their class standing; however, it is worth noting that Willis demonstrates that a form of agency is taking place in schools and steps away from more conventional structural interpretations of school socialization. As well, Willis clearly demonstrated that class reproduction was bound up in the social relations and practices of schooling and not simply a matter of preference or “natural” inclination as was once perceived.

Similarly, Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) study of class brought forth the idea that the reproduction of social class involves the intermingling of agency and structure. Through an examination of schooling in France, Bourdieu and Passeron were able to identify that preferences and tastes played a role in the future access to higher social standing. Students who were better able to position themselves to acquire higher levels of what the authors termed “cultural capital” (the language, artistic skills, and knowledge valued in society by the dominant class) were better positioned to acquire social standing later in life. School functioned as the “field,” or the physical space where social actors (students) brought their proclivities, preferences, and tastes (roughly translated to be their “habitus”) to intermingle with other social actors (students, teachers, administration, etc.) as well as the dominant school culture. Similar to Willis, Bourdieu
and Passeron tied student agency to the structural reproduction of the dominant culture – acceptance and understanding of the dominant class’ culture and knowledge represented the pathway to success in school and the workplace. Conversely, rejection of the dominant culture, or simply a lack of understanding or access to this knowledge, presented obstacles for school success and would ultimately lead to a lower class standing. Bourdieu and Passeron demonstrated that students from the lower classes lacked the necessary knowledge and cultural capital to successfully navigate through the school system compared with the upper classes, and since school success is so closely tied to occupational and career success, students were likely to reproduce their class position later in life. For Bourdieu and Passeron, the dispositions, tastes and preferences (to an extent, the agency of students) were severely restricted by the structural practices of the French school system.

**Correspondence**

Bowles and Gintis (1976) in *Schooling in Capitalist America* attempt to demonstrate that the social relations of schooling, with regard to class, tie closely with the social and economic practices of the marketplace. In their groundbreaking study and subsequent re-examinations (1988, 2002) Bowles and Gintis, using their correspondence principle, postulate that schools act primarily as preparatory and socializing agents for future career and work placement. Not only are students exposed to the technical skills required for specific occupations (e.g., math skills as preparation for engineering), but are also exposed to more generic employability skills such as punctuality, deference to authority, etc. The alleged correspondence is a product of market demands generated through economic conditions outside the control of
students. On the surface, the *correspondence principal* accurately describes the relationship between schooling and work. Bowles and Gintis (1976) successfully argued in *Schooling in Capitalist America* that students are categorized and placed in school hierarchies by their “talents,” “desires,” and “capacities,” and that these “leanings” are heavily influenced and informed by their social class. In turn, students of working-class backgrounds are likely to pursue working-class jobs, while children of parents from the upper classes are set up for careers in the professions and other “high status” jobs.

Two decades later, Bowles and Gintis (2002) clearly demonstrated that this reproductive aspect of schooling was still taking place. However, Bowles and Gintis failed to go beyond the descriptive elements of their original groundbreaking study to better explain the origins, supports, and practices that perpetuate the correspondence principle. Although it is difficult to dispute that schools act as an agent of social reproduction, the *correspondence principle* remains structural in its approach, leaving little room for agency (Livingstone, 2004). As well, critics have accused Bowles and Gintis of being too simplistic in their explanation of the social reproduction associated with schooling, citing the improbability of an intended and direct relationship between the needs of industry and the purpose of school (Phillips, 1998). In fact, Phillips suggests (with tongue firmly planted in cheek) “that there must have been many secret meetings between leading industrialists and school superintendents at which the former group forced the latter to carry out their will in schools” (1998, p. 164).

Bowles and Gintis themselves admit to these shortcomings in their re-examination of *Schooling in Capitalist America*:
The main shortcomings of *Schooling in Capitalist America* reflect the times in which we wrote. The long 1960s economic boom and the antimaterialist countercultural currents that it fostered perhaps led us to underemphasize the value of schooling in contributing to productive employment. The more important shortcoming, we think, is programmatic. We avoided, for the most part, the question of what schools should be, focusing instead on what schools actually are and do. (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 14)

One could extend that criticism and argue that Bowles and Gintis came up short on their intended goals and simply explained one aspect of what schools are, failing to truly comprehend how schools came to be an element of the social reproduction process. As well, Bowles and Gintis treat teachers, students, and curriculum writers as passive participants in a reproduction process that is clearly to their disadvantage. With a discouraging and unsatisfactory conclusion, *Schooling in Capitalist America* views public education as a structural and restrictive institution and fails to account for the social changes of the past and the possibilities for the future.

Similar to Bowles and Gintis’ study, Jean Anyon (1980), in her study of social-class learning, noted that students of different social classes were taught in different ways. Her study of school settings, ranging from inner city to more affluent suburban schools, arrived at a critical finding surrounding the pedagogical practices of each school. Anyon found that students in inner-city schools were more likely to receive rigid instruction with little room for creative, independent learning. Conversely, students from more affluent schools were presented with a variety of pedagogical practices and given greater liberties to experiment in their learning. In essence, Anyon argued that the
characteristics of schools and their student bodies were determinates of how students learned, reproducing inequality simply through the structures and practices within school walls. Similar to the findings of the aforementioned authors, Anyon determined that the social reproduction of class through schooling was tied to the social relations of work. In essence, the preparation for placement in a future career was not simply determined by the skills, aptitudes, and preferences of students; rather the pedagogical practices within the classroom (based heavily upon class origins) set students up for their future careers. Effectively, students who were from working-class backgrounds were taught in ways that better prepared them to be subservient to employers, while students from more affluent classes were groomed to be leaders and innovators later in their work lives.

**Career Education Literature**

Shifting to a more focused examination of school socialization, career education deals specifically with work preparation, both in the “hard skills” of job searches (e.g. résumé writing, occupational requirements) and the “soft skills” of expected behaviours to be “successful” in the world of work (e.g., punctuality, independence, critical thinking, etc.). In other words, the indirect approach to student socialization is replaced with a more explicit laundry list of workplace expectations, trends, requirements, etc., aimed specifically at students for placement in a future career. The leading critical researcher on current career programs is Emery J. Hyslop-Margison. Hyslop-Margison’s (& Margison, 1998; 2000a; 2000b; & Benjamin, 2001; 2002; & Graham, 2003; & Pinto, 2007) work focuses primarily on current educational practices and their relation to democratic learning. Hyslop-Margison argues that two main faults are at play in career
education. The first is that the design and content of the course is built upon a neo-
liberal agenda heavily influenced by corporate interest (Hyslop-Margison & Margison,
1998; Hyslop-Margison, 2000b). He argues that the content of the course primarily
stems from employability-skills profiles, which are influenced by organizations such as
the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the
Conference Board of Canada (CBOC) (Hyslop-Margison & Margison, 1998; Hyslop-
Margison, 2000b; Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2003). Rather than empower students
to critically examine the world of work and “possess a democratic right and
responsibility to influence working conditions,” current career-education programs direct
students to accept current working conditions and economic practices (Hyslop-Margison
& Graham, 2003, p. 351).

The second major fault of career education pointed out by Hyslop-Margison
deals with the validity of teaching some of the skill sets demanded by employers.
Hyslop-Margison argues that many of the workplace skills are simply not
interchangeable and cannot be taught in such a ubiquitous manner. For example, the
“skill” of computer literacy, although sold as a general employability skill, differs greatly
depending upon the occupation – the basic word-processing skill required for secretarial
work differs considerably from the data-processing skill required of most researchers,
which, in turn, differs considerably from the programming skill required of most
engineers (Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008). Other “skills,” or what could be
better termed mental processes such as communication, problem solving, etc., cannot
be taught outside of content or subject matter either. As Hyslop-Margison argues:
Evaluation of these competencies in the prescribed fashion presents insurmountable difficulties... since mental process concepts are logically inseparable from the context in which they are employed. In the absence of a particular subject matter and context, there is no possible set of procedures to adequately assess the so-called “skills” of communication, problem-solving and decision making. (Hyslop-Margison, 2000b, p. 64)

Exacerbating these difficulties is the fact that much of the Career Studies curriculum is value laden. As Hyslop-Margison points out, it is difficult to teach a “positive attitude” on topics of work and economic change outside of context (2000b). Trying to universalize attitudinal traits and pass them off as “skill attainment” glosses over the material aspects that transform and give meaning to the events in work and the economy that give rise to genuine reactions to workplace and economic change. Essentially, Hyslop-Margison argues that the universal and content-free learning of current career-education practices in Ontario and British Columbia for example, leaves students in a passive position to adapt rather than challenge existing workplace and economic practices.

One skill set in particular is troubling to Hyslop-Margison simply because he believes it is not a skill at all. Specifically, Hyslop-Margison raises concerns about the ubiquitous use of the term “critical thinking skill.” More recently, the term “critical thinking” has been bandied about as the magic elixir to educational problems (Hyslop-Margison, 2000a). Conventional thinking in education today is that students can be taught to think critically just as they would learn to ice skate or drive a car. However, Hyslop-Margison (2000b) argues that critical thinking is not a skill that can be practiced in isolation. In fact, critical thinking can only take place with a full understanding of
alternatives to current practices. Critical thinking is not a skill, but rather an awareness of alternatives in order to solve a problem or guide an action. In the case of Career Studies, students are not given the opportunity to critically examine the world of work because few alternatives are presented to existing neo-liberal practices (Hyslop-Margison, 2000a). Instead, “critical thinking” takes the form of adaptation, where students are given best practices for lessening the blows of social, economic, and workplace injustices.

Hyslop-Margison’s (2007) studies that have focused specifically on the Ontario Career Studies curriculum have raised many of the aforementioned concerns with teaching career education and have arrived at a similar conclusion. Hyslop-Margison and Pinto (2007) examined the potential for students to engage in democratic learning in the literacy documents released by the Ontario Ministry of Education, particularly the items dealing with career education. Critical of the documents, Hyslop-Margison and Pinto come to the conclusion that students are taught “functional literacy” and are treated as passive actors in the learning process. “Functional literacy” essentially is literacy education that is directly relevant for future employment (2007). Contrarily, the authors advocate for “critical literacy” where students are encouraged to critically examine common assumptions in their curriculum. With respect to career education, students would be encouraged to question existing workplace and economic practices so that they may “improve their individual and collective working lives” (Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007, p. 208). Furthermore, Hyslop-Margison and Pinto argue that the literacy component of career education “simply distracts educators and others from the structural shortcomings of neo-liberal
capitalism" (Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007, p. 208). Just as with other educational “buzz words,” literacy education reduces learning to its elemental level and fails to incorporate the social relations of reproduction and inequality. In the case of career education, employment preparation through literacy education places students in a passive position to accept current economic trends and employment patterns as natural, while seeing their own employment opportunities as a determinant of their ability to remain competitive against other workers.

Looking specifically at the Ontario Career Studies curriculum documents, Hyslop-Margison and McKerracher (2008) express concern over the limited opportunities for student agency in a curriculum that presents current economic conditions in an ahistorical manner. In their study, they raise the potential contradiction in pedagogy between the Career Studies course and the accompanying Civics course. In the Civics course students are taught to effect change on government and become part of the political process through actions that range from participation in demonstrations to casting a ballot for a candidate in an election (Antonelli, 2003a). Yet according to Hyslop-Margison and McKerracher, this level of participation and influence over work does not take place in the Career Studies curriculum (2008). This, of course, sets up a confusing and often conflicted learning experience for students taking the paired courses, as it sets up a situation where students learn that political change is possible but economic practices are permanent and out of the reach of human influence. As well, divorcing the political from the economic further entrenches the idea that economic change and control is outside the will of the people. Students in effect are taught “in citizenship education that they are active players in shaping social experiences while in
career education we advise them their role is limited to passive acceptance of, and preparation for, prevailing labour market and working conditions” (Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008, p. 135). The authors stress that this contradiction in pedagogy threatens democratic learning in that students may not be able to distinguish what is natural from that which is socially constructed. In the end, the authors conclude that the Career Studies program fails to critically examine the world of work and lacks the opportunities for students to dialogue and critique current workplace and economic practices; in other words, critically reflect on their learning (Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008).

Alison Taylor’s (1998a; 1998b; Lehmann & Taylor, 2003) work on the introduction of workplace education in Alberta reveals a situation that is similar to Ontario’s foray into career education. Taylor’s work focuses on Alberta’s process to introduce workplace education to the public school system. Within this process, Taylor uncovers the players and the motives for introducing programs that act primarily as workplace training grounds (Taylor, 1998a; 1998b; Lehmann & Taylor, 2003). In an annual report, the Chief Superintendent of the Calgary Board of Education stated:

Public education can no longer operate in isolation. Our ability to graduate students with the skills required to compete in this global economy may be the most pressing challenge we face today. But we cannot do it alone, particularly given the speed with which our knowledge base and technology are changing. We need the support of our parents, the community and businesspeople. (Taylor, 1998b, p. 401)
It is interesting to note that students were omitted from the group of community partners needed to transform workplace education. As well, Taylor found that “business partners representing large oil and gas corporations (were) particularly welcomed by board proponents in Calgary while community organizations, labour groups and small employers (were) seen as less viable” (Taylor, 1998b, p. 418). If any educational reform is to be responsive to the needs of students, it must have the input of a variety of community members, parents, and students to allow for a greater democratization of the curriculum creation process (see McCowan, 2003). Exclusion of major stakeholders from curriculum reform programs (especially those that have the ability to empower marginalized groups – e.g., labour groups, community groups, etc.) leaves the process top heavy, missing key elements that would make the process democratic. As well, the exclusion of certain stakeholders from the curriculum creation process provides an opportunity for ruling groups to secure their control over the economic levers of power. In some ways, as a response to Phillips’ (1998) critique of Bowles and Gintis, Taylor demonstrates that industry members need not meet privately and frequently to dictate control over education policy as long as the desires of industry can be packaged as both necessary and beneficial.

In British Columbia, there is also a movement by the provincial government to teach employability skills and career education to students in secondary schools. Butterwick and Benjamin (2006), critical of British Columbia’s Life Skills Curriculum, cite a replication of a Conference Board of Canada employability-skills profile as the framework for the program. Just as Hyslop-Margison expresses concern over the control market and industry have over the Ontario Career Studies curriculum, Butterwick
and Benjamin argue that the employability skills program is simply “a response to post-industrial globalized capital’s ‘runaway needs’” (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006, p. 78). In essence, the authors argue that the B.C. employability skills curriculum is in place to help produce more “flexible, cheap, and adaptable workers” (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006, p. 78). Under the pretense of personal development, students are given the advice to empower themselves through the exploration of their strengths and choose a career accordingly. Not having issue with personal development in particular, Butterwick and Benjamin are concerned that students are not afforded an opportunity to explore more collective avenues of empowerment (e.g., labour standards, worker protection plans, job creation strategies) that can extend into and support their future career development.

Extending on her previous work, Benjamin’s (2009) study of four schools in British Columbia looked at career education and arrived at results similar to Anyon’s 1980 study. Benjamin found that a class bias was prevalent in teaching career education, depending upon the high school attended, casting some doubt on the concept of “general employability skills.” Students who were from less affluent areas were taught skills that included values and attitudes associated with a “good worker.” In more affluent areas, teachers assumed that students already understood these values and attitudes, and instead made efforts to teach students proper résumé writing skills. Once again, desired skill sets outlined in the curriculum are presented as general employability skills without the social and political context that defines and characterizes their use in the classroom and in future careers. As well, much of the career discourse situates the “deficits” in students rather than the social structure of inequality as the
starting point for student development and eventual success in career planning. Benjamin’s study reveals a strong class bias around the content and delivery of the career-education curriculum. Students once again are placed in a passive position to accept and adapt to current economic and workplace practices; however, students from lower classes appear to be afforded less opportunity to control their future work and career placement because their future careers were predetermined by their school placement. Benjamin also found that for all schools, regardless of social class, there was little or no referencing to history of work, the social creation of work, and broader more cooperative supports for workers.

Looking at studies conducted in other parts of the world that deal with career education, similar practices in career planning are emerging as educators stress the importance of student adaptation to current global economic trends. Cho and Apple (1998) interviewed teachers and students regarding the newly implemented career-education course in South Korea. Contrary to what is happening in most of the world, there appears to be a shortage of manual labourers. It appears that parents are “pushing” their children into the professional occupations. Although done for different reasons, the Korean government implemented a career course in order to fill a need in the labour market. In essence, Korean state planners introduced career education as a way to “keep people from continuing their ‘irrational educational enthusiasm’ and lead more of them to their ‘proper place’ as ‘unskilled’ industrial workers” (Cho & Apple, 1998, p. 270). Rather than “beat about the bush,” the Korean government presented the theory that students as future workers have a “proper place” and must simply suppress any desire to want otherwise. The Korean experience provides a stark and
rather obvious example of Bowles and Gintis’ *correspondence principle*, but it also demonstrates a government that is clearly putting the national interest to remain globally competitive above the individual interests of students.

Teachers in Korea who were expected to take on the extra career course were upset with the government’s approach to career education:

> I have a hell of a time in my career class. I skipped whole difficult concepts. I had to think about how to explain the difficult concepts while I was writing them on the blackboard. Taking account of them makes me sweat. They (government officials) are such bastards. They just command us without considering our circumstance properly. I have lots of troublesome things to do beyond this. They do not know the ordinary teachers’ difficult conditions. How could they understand us? (Cho & Apple, 1998, p. 272)

Despite his obvious disapproval of the career-education curriculum coupled with the restrictive and hurried pace of his school, the teacher still proceeds to teach the course. Although skipping parts of the course (“difficult concepts”) the teacher, clearly upset with the course material, chooses not to go outside of the curriculum.

Similarly, Schweisfurth (2006) found History and Political Studies pre-service teachers in Ontario had reservations about teaching outside of the curriculum unless otherwise given explicit instruction on how to do so. Whether it is an obligation to the profession coupled with a hectic and hurried work environment (Tarc & Antonelli, 2010), a fear of reprimand from administration, or simply a belief that they are not in a position to be agents of change (Schweisfurth, 2006), it is worth noting that teachers often stay
within the curriculum and generally avoid challenging school policies, curriculum
documents and printed texts (Schweisfurth, 2006). A general rigidity and compliance by
teachers to follow curriculum guidelines and texts can present a problem for students
seeking to critically engage with their learning.

Eric Weiner’s study of New Jersey’s venture into career education demonstrates
an eerily similar foray into workplace education to the one experienced in Ontario and
Alberta. Strikingly similar is the rhetoric surrounding the reasons for implementing New
Jersey’s version of workplace education. The 1983 Task Force for Economic Growth
stated in its report, Action For Excellence:

We believe especially that business, in their role as employers, should be
much more involved in the process of setting goals for education in
America. If the business community gets more involved in both the design
and delivery of education, we are going to become more competitive as an
economy. (Spring, quoted in Weiner, 2003, p. 42)

In 2003, the President of the New Jersey State Board of Education agreed with the task
force, stating: “Our task, as the State Board of Education, is to provide opportunities for
all students to receive an education that will prepare them to be competitive in the
international marketplace of the future” (State Board President’s Address, quoted in
Weiner, 2003, p. 42). There is a clear sense that New Jersey – just like Ontario,
Alberta, British Columbia, and South Korea – has delivered a curriculum with the
agenda of placing students in the workplace to meet the demands of industry and the
economy, rather than providing students with an opportunity to critically examine the
world of work. What has taken place in these jurisdictions is a normalization of a
corporate, neo-liberal agenda in the career/workplace curriculum of secondary schools, leaving students with little opportunity to critique and shape their future work lives. Once again, the national interest to remain globally competitive has replaced the interests of students as future workers to control the trajectory and circumstances of their careers.

What is most interesting about the actions of these jurisdictions is that there appears to be a pressing need to further enhance the technical education in secondary schools to compete globally, yet while these career-education programs were being developed, there appeared to be too many workers for too few jobs. If we look at Livingstone’s (2004) study, we see that there is a relative “deskilling” of job requirements in Canada. This is to say that academic credentials of workers have increased while the skill sets demanded in the workplace have not kept up the same pace, leaving many workers overqualified for their current positions. Livingstone argues that much of the blame can be placed on employers who choose to underutilize their employees simply because employers fail to recognize the skills and knowledge employees can bring to the workplace. An advocate of economic democracy, Livingstone (2004) believes a remedy to this problem is to allow employees greater autonomy and control over their work so that they may fully utilize their skills and knowledge. As we have seen in other studies, career-education programs appear to set the stage for students to be reactive and passive employees in their future careers. By not recognizing the relative deskilling of current workplaces and failing to critically examine current workplace practices, schools run the risk of simply shepherding students into dead-end, unstable, rudimentary jobs.
Taylor and Brigham’s (2006) study of Alberta’s attempts to direct high-school students into health-care careers illustrates Livingstone’s jobs-gap theory. Using interview data from various stakeholders in Alberta’s health-care system, Taylor and Brigham uncovered a strong push by the provincial government to fill a supply gap in health care through promotion to secondary students of future job demand in this industry. The problem with this arrangement is that students are simply shown a possible void for future employment stripped of the social meaning of the work. In other words, students are simply being used as capital for future market conditions. Absent is the understanding of work, “a more holistic view of the organization of work in health care” (Taylor & Brigham, 2006, p. 272). Coupled with this problem is the pressure by many professional associations to demand higher levels of formal schooling to achieve recognized, and in some cases, legal status to perform the work. This is where there appears to be the potential for a job-skills gap to emerge. Students, in the case of Alberta’s introduction to health-care work, are willing to jump through hoops to obtain secure employment in their future careers; however, the justification and necessity for these credentials coupled with the likelihood these skills will be underutilized in their future jobs, not to mention that forecasted employment demand could be wrong, leaves many students in a vulnerable and powerless position as future workers. Career-education programs that simply react to current and forecasted job demands are part of a process that strips students of truly having choice over their careers. Failing to educate these students in the social relations of health-care work strips the school-to-work transition of the necessary understanding of where they place in the world of work and how they can effect change on their work environment. Without this understanding,
professional associations and governments have the ability to demand greater
credential attainment from workers without allowing for greater control and subsequent
skill usage in their paid work (Livingstone & Antonelli, 2006).

**Summary**

From the lit review we can see a movement in Canada and other parts of the
world toward career education that reflects our neo-liberal hegemony. Students are left
to play a passive role in their education as existing workplace and economic practices
remain unchallenged. As well, alternatives for collective empowerment in the workplace
through labour movements, workplace reorganization, and economic change are absent
from career-education programs. Instead, career-education programs are used as
workplace preparation programs that shape and transform student skills and attitudes to
reflect the needs of industry.

The rhetoric that accompanies the introduction and implementation of these
programs clouds the true intentions of the course and attempts to define it as necessary
and advantageous for student development in a globally competitive marketplace.
Effectively, the national interest to remain productive and competitive internationally
usurps the need to empower students as future workers. In the end, career-education
programs fall short because they ignore the education-jobs skill mismatch that exists in
many jobs today. Much of the (over)preparation and (under)utilization of today’s labour
market is either ignored or glossed over by career-education policy makers who choose
to write curricula that advocates skill and knowledge attainment as the panacea for
economic and workplace ills. A reflection of the human capital theory that dominates
much public policy in Canada (Livingstone, 2004), students in career-education courses
are simply seen as a potential resource in need of refinement for use in the marketplace.

Finally, the movement toward neo-liberal career education removes the opportunity for democratic learning in the classroom. With educators in Ontario stressing the importance of critical thinking and problem solving across subject areas, it appears that the Career Studies curriculum leaves little room for students to question and explore alternatives to current workplace and economic practices. Without fostering modes of critical inquiry, the possibilities for democratic learning and eventually a truly meaningful democratic workplace and society are placed in jeopardy.
Chapter 4 – Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3 presented recent studies on career education both in Ontario and in other parts of the world. The commonality among those studies was a concern that students were not being empowered with a critical understanding of the social relations of work. This thesis will examine in greater detail the possibilities and shortcomings of the Grade 10 Career Studies course in Ontario. Building upon the aforementioned studies, this thesis will explore the extent to which a neo-liberal agenda is dictating the purpose and content of the course. Also, this study will examine the opportunities presented to students for exploration of alternative workplace and economic practices, either through the content of the course material (textbooks and/or curricular guidelines) or through the pedagogical practices of the teachers. Prior to a more detailed account of the conceptual framework of the project, I will first examine the theoretical framework guiding the project.

The theoretical assumptions underpinning this study derive mainly from the work of Antonio Gramsci. Of course, none of Gramsci’s writings explicitly dealt with public education in Ontario, let alone the relationship between schooling and career development. However, as has been done by other theorists (Apple, 1990; Livingstone, 2004; Mayo, 1999; etc.) this study will apply Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and his understanding of active and conscious learning to the social relations of public schooling and work; more specifically, the workplace preparation and planning in Ontario’s secondary schools. First, a brief survey of key foundational theoretical
frameworks that have informed current studies on learning and work will be presented, with a focus on Dewey and Freire as complements to the work of Gramsci. Then, the focus of this chapter will shift to the writings of Gramsci, with an emphasis on establishing a connection between the relationship of schooling and work and the possibilities for student empowerment through democratic learning.

**Structural Theories of Schooling**

Work and learning theories range from the structural and meritocratic (e.g., Durkheim, 1956; Parsons, 1959) to the more critical, progressive, and liberating theories of Dewey (1966) and Freire (1970). Theorists such as Durkheim and Parsons focus on the macro/structural elements of schooling and its relation to work, failing to acknowledge the potential for agency among teachers and students. For these theorists, students are mere products of a system, socialized to take their place within society. Durkheim stressed the importance of schools for the cohesion of society, developing students to both understand social norms and practices and to develop their proclivities for placement in political and economic society (Durkheim, 1956).

Parsons (1959), building upon the work of Durkheim, posited the purpose of schools as twofold; socialization and allocation (Wotherspoon, 2004). In elementary grades, children are introduced to formal organizations and structural activities through their classroom practices in ways that are congruent with what takes place in the home (for example, in Ontario, as in most other jurisdictions, women primarily oversee early childhood education) (Wotherspoon, 2004). In secondary and post-secondary learning, students develop skills and attitudes that will find them employment in their adult lives.
Throughout their formal learning, students are socialized to accept the norms and behaviours expected of them in their careers and in general social life, making them “stronger” citizens. For example, students learn punctuality and deference to authority by adhering to rules set out by school administrators and teachers. Much of this learning forms the foundation for behaviour within work organizations long after most students have graduated from institutions of formal education.

As for the process of allocation, the functionalist perspective views schools as agents in the sorting process for student placement in future careers. The functionalist perspective argues that the grades, diplomas, and degrees derived from formal education provide the necessary credentials for future employment. This method for sorting students predicates that students are “earning” their future workplace positions through hard work and ability. This “meritocratic” system of workplace allocation fails to comprehend the conflictual nature of society and, in turn, ignores issues of class, race, and gender discrimination, just to mention a few (Porter, 1965). Also, as Livingstone (2004) argues, the credential attainment and much of the human capital theory that fuels the functionalist perspective on school-to-work transitions ignores the underutilization of skills workers bring to organizations. In other words, the “harmonious” socialization of schooling presented by functional theorists fails to account for the disjuncture between social groups and how schools can act to marginalize and disempower students in their transitions to the workplace.

**Critical Theories of Schooling**

Other theorists, such as Dewey and Freire, go beyond the structural macro elements as key determinants of school socialization and move toward a more
micro/agential study of public education. Contrary to the functionalist approach, progressive and critical theorists question the “harmonious” nature of socialization in schools, opting to highlight the contradictions and conflicts associated with public education. John Dewey’s (1966) progressive approach to education saw potential in public education for social reforms. He believed that democratic principles introduced early in public education through both content and pedagogy could lead to a more democratic society. Critical of prescriptive educational practices, Dewey believed that “progressive” education built upon past experiences of students, while situating learning in current social conditions: “The child has his own instincts and tendencies, but we do not know what these mean until we can translate them into their social equivalents. We must be able to carry them back into a social past and see them as the inheritance of previous race activities” (Dewey, 1972, p. 85). Because students are to be active in the learning process -- creating and recreating learning through their experiences -- education, according to Dewey, acts as a directional aid that gently steers students through an understanding of themselves and the world they inhabit. Rather than socialize students to accept current social practices and prepare for the future with current economic trends in mind, Dewey presented education as a possibility for students to reformulate existing social practices in adult life by coming to an understanding of the social and political elements tied to their previous learning and experiences. His interpretation contrasted sharply with previous understandings of education that presented possibilities for schooling as programmatic and quite restrictive for student development. Dewey’s ideas on education placed students in a position where they could have an impact upon their own learning and, more broadly,
the world. As well, progressive education helped to break away from the rational models of education that stressed scientific modes of organizing curriculum and school practice. As we shall see later in this chapter, progressivism failed to problematize education’s close tie with the world of work; however, Dewey’s theories did bring into question the worth of matching education to the world of work, and instead presented students not as human capital, but as agents of social change.

For Freire (1970), schooling presents the possibility for social change and empowerment among marginalized groups. From his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire outlines the possibilities for transformative pedagogy with the potential to liberate oppressed masses from the dehumanizing and exploitative practices of their oppressors. Critical of what he termed “banking,” the tradition of passive learning, Freire saw the potential for critical and liberating pedagogy in the lived experiences of students:

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. (Freire, 1970, pp. 68-69)

Similar to the work of Dewey, as applied to the study of career education, Freire presents the possibility of reflective and active learning as the remedy for passive and alienating learning. Like Dewey, Freire was critical of the traditional preparatory aspect of schooling in the sense that prevailing social practices framed the learning within the
classroom. If career education has the potential for empowerment of students as future workers, it must make linkages to student experiences, as well as allow students to view and explore work in the social context that defines workplace and economic practices. The problematizing of work allows students to critically examine current workplace practices, removing themselves from the traditional submissive and passive role in learning.

**Hegemony and Schooling**

Although all of the aforementioned theories have an element of relevance to the study of career education, Gramsci’s hegemony theory, as well as the subsequent iterations of hegemony theory, provide the most thorough and nuanced explanation of Career Studies origin, content, and implementation. As a guiding theoretical framework, I will employ hegemony theory to situate the creation of Career Studies as a hegemonic project, highlighting the “moment of crisis” and the remedy that was to benefit both individuals and the nation. As well, the content of the course material and curriculum documents will be examined (specifically, the inclusions and omissions of workplace and economic practices) through a hegemonic lens to help determine the intent of the course. Finally, hegemony theory will help understand the decisions made by teachers as to how they deliver the course material and the extent to which they allow for alternative workplace and economic practices to enter the course. It will be argued that the generation, content, and delivery of the course materials are part of a hegemonic project to make existing workplace and economic practices seem inevitable, permanent, and necessary, while presenting strategies of adaptation and individual action as the
only legitimate ways to cope with “realities.” As stated by Cho and Apple in their 1998 study of Korean workplace education:

Like all hegemonic practices, the success of this project depended on three factors. The first factor is material conditions, which are the contingent outcome of a dialectic of existing structures and the accumulation strategy. This helps shape the production and reception of the hegemonic project. The second factor is the historical power bloc's capacity to articulate their interests as the national popular interest. Finally, the hegemonic project will be successful to the extent to which the dominated people participate in the reconstitution of social subjectivity and ideological integration. (p. 271)

Using Cho and Apple’s three key principles as a framework for this project, I will try to establish Career Studies in Ontario schools as a hegemonic project by exploring the origins of the course and how a moment of crisis led to a negotiated and resettled form of workplace education. Following this, I will investigate whether the ruling bloc attempted to pass off its interests as the national interest (eventually satisfying the public interest) through an examination of the curricular documents and classroom textbooks. Finally, I will look at the extent to which teachers and curriculum writers participate in the “reconstitution of social subjectivity and ideological integration” through their pedagogical practices and curriculum development.

Further to the framework outlined above, there are two key elements of hegemony theory I wish to stress in this study of career education: 1) any hegemonic project rests upon both consent and coercion, and 2) hegemony is never fully won or
Gaining consent is crucial for any hegemonic project to flourish. “Hegemony is a relation, not of domination by means of force, but of consent by means of political and ideological leadership. It is the organization of consent” (Simon, 1991, p. 22). As a hegemonic project, the development of Career Studies involved establishing a moment of crisis, while presenting a strategy of progress and modernization as the panacea to deal with it. Shrouded in terminology such as “globalization” and “modernization,” groups within the ruling bloc were able to take advantage of a moment of economic crisis, citing the need for a more “advanced” curriculum to make Canada more competitive internationally.

As a hegemonic project, Career Studies requires the consent of many people for its successful inclusion in the secondary-school curriculum. Consent is achieved by convincing the parties involved that a neo-liberal, corporate organization of work will benefit industry, while at the same time benefiting the national economy and workers/students. Students, parents, and teachers, to name a few, must be convinced that this course of action is not only the best strategy for workplace education, but that it is the only strategy worthy of consideration. As for this study, I have limited my analysis of consent to teachers and curriculum writers (many of whom are teachers). By doing so I will gain an understanding of the extent to which these groups have consented to, and participated in, the reproduction of the dominant ideology.

For a hegemonic group to assert its interests as the national interest, a system of alliances must be gained through political means (Simon, 1991, p. 22). In order to gain
and maintain these alliances, hegemonic groups must constantly negotiate the meanings and boundaries of words and actions. This brings to light that hegemony is never a complete process (Livingstone, 1983). With any hegemonic project, groups must constantly negotiate and resettle relations of power, both within the ruling group and over subordinated groups. In Ontario, the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) acted as a forum for stakeholders to influence the direction of educational reform. As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, the Royal Commission acted as a public forum that allowed for perceived “democratic” involvement in shaping education. As well, an opportunity to utilize and work from a moment of crisis allowed stakeholders to put forth strategies to remedy the problem. In the case of career education, corporations and industry wishing to have control over the curriculum must negotiate among themselves a wish list that is in turn discussed with other stakeholders in education. The interplay and negotiation among stakeholders during the hearings of the commission is but one component of the implementation of Career Studies as a hegemonic project. The creation of curriculum documents, expectations, textbooks by publishers and Ministry personnel, as well as the negotiated learning that takes place between teachers and students, all constitute and reconstitute the hegemonic project. While outside of formal education, the mass media, to name one source of influence, helped promote the dominant ideology through television, radio, and newspapers, not to mention the cultural reproduction influenced by popular music and movies. Of course, on top of all these forms of influence, student peer groups (as we shall see in the teacher interviews) presented an enormous influence over the direction of student career development;
specifically, on issues of acceptable employment and expected outcomes from their formal education.

For a hegemonic project to gain consent, it should not only appear to be working in the national interest, but it must also provide the impression of progress. In the discussion papers on career education, the Conservative government of Mike Harris often cloaked its intentions for the course in the rhetoric of economic progress and success (Ministry, 1998, 1999a). In this case, it was beneficial for the ruling bloc in its attempts to implement a hegemonic project to try and form a consensus from all participants, thus avoiding any potential opposition to the project. As Jonathan Joseph writes:

The reorganization must take the form of a modernisation which is in line with the structural developments that are taking place in the economy and which seeks to foster and cultivate these changes. In this way a ruling bloc can try and head off any potential crisis through a far-reaching reorganisation which creates the impression of progress. (Joseph, 2002, p. 33)

As was uncovered in previous studies, students, parents, and teachers are told that the formal career curricula help students adapt to an unpredictable, fast-paced, and modern workplace. These changes in the workplace and the economy are presented as inevitabilities in the “progression” of work reorganization. The impression given by private corporations during the Royal Commission was that failure to internalize these principles was economic madness bordering on heretical, almost treasonous behaviour.
To be a good citizen of Canada, it would be wise to work in the national interest to remain globally competitive.

Accepting that there is agency among teachers and students to negotiate and develop knowledge regarding workplace education, it should also be noted that, as a hegemonic project, current career education programs act to limit the agency of students and teachers through rigid curriculum documents and approved-for-use-in-the classroom textbooks (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008; Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007). Teachers and students are not presented possible alternatives to existing workplace and economic practices in the formal curriculum, leaving them to negotiate the meaning of work from a narrow lens. As a hegemonic project, Career Studies helps to reproduce social inequalities, in part, because it fails to provide alternatives to the existing workplace and economic systems. Elaborating on Gramsci’s theory and applying it directly to schools and textbooks, Apple writes, “…hegemony acts to ‘saturate’ our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world tout court, the only world” (Apple, 1990, p. 5). In Career Studies, an ideological shift takes place that makes the social creation of work into a natural phenomenon, presenting students with only a limited selection of economic systems and workplace practices.

The limits placed upon students in their learning can often be traced to the structural parameters of schooling practices. “In this way (schools) distort the truth and thus prevent us from fully comprehending a situation – in other words, (schools) tend to frame our thinking within certain horizons or parameters” (Allman, 2001, p. 7). The
ability of students to act as free agents within the classroom resides in the choice students have to challenge existing workplace practices. The structural elements of education – such as textbooks, curriculum documents, hierarchical power structures, etc. – limit the ability of students to act as free agents within the classroom. Although it is difficult to accept that students at times act outside of their free will, it should be noted that the agency of students can be severely limited by policies and practices found within most schools. In other words, some of the socially reproductive elements of schooling practices outlined by Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Anyon (1980) are quite prevalent today in Career Studies classrooms. As we shall see later, the prescriptive and reproductive elements of Career Studies, especially in relation to the social backgrounds of students, heavily influence the career trajectories of students, establishing defined career paths, and at times, deleterious occupational choices.

Both agency and structure are present in hegemony, each helping to produce the other. Deep structural processes help form and shape hegemonic projects carried out by agents, while, at the same time, the delivery of hegemonic projects is an act formulated and conducted by agents (both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic) that help establish deep social structures. Depending upon the hegemonic project, the social structures may remain the same, or can be challenged and changed. Joseph describes how agential hegemonic projects surface out of the more deeply rooted structural hegemony:

Structural hegemony and surface (agential) hegemony are two aspects of a continual process. Structural hegemony concerns the deep, underlying conditions within society and the unity of the social formation. Surface
hegemony concerns the actual hegemonic projects that arise out of this situation, it represents a manifestation of the underlying conditions, albeit, with its own character and dynamics. (Joseph, 2002, p. 131)

Career Studies as a hegemonic project reflects the deeply rooted structural hegemony of capitalist society. The agential process of curriculum development and implementation highlights the surface hegemony Joseph describes in the passage above. The creation of Career Studies, and the content of the curriculum guides and textbooks that accompany the course, points to reactionary policy and project implementation that heeds and yields to existing corporate practices. For example, economic practices such as downsizing and globalization are deeply entrenched in modern workplace settings. As social agents, people have the ability to choose several options to deal with these events. In the case of Career Studies, the Conservative government asked students to adapt to existing practices rather than confront and change undesirable economic and workplace practices. The creation and implementation of Career Studies allowed the ruling bloc an opportunity to defend existing social structures through an agential process of curriculum development. However, it should be noted that the agential processes outlined above are heavily rooted in the deep structural elements associated with workplace practices and economic organization.

Rather than restrict social reproduction in education to the structural elements outlined in the previous paragraph, it is important to also understand the many fronts where knowledge creation and reproduction are negotiated and learned among both dominant and subordinate groups. In other words, we must note the multi-dimensional
aspect of hegemony that makes the domination of subordinate classes a war on many fronts. The constant negotiation and redefinition of practices and themes that constitute career education derive from multiple sites of power:

… we must take note of the multi-dimensional, multi-arena character of hegemony. It cannot be constructed or sustained on one front of struggle alone. It represents a degree of mastery over a whole series of different ‘positions’ at once. (Hall, 1996, p. 424)

Hegemony requires participants to constantly struggle over power relations that define existing social practices (Livingstone, 1983). In the case of career education, there are many players – the state, business, parents, teachers, and students – who negotiate and struggle for power in defining the world of work. The parameters that define and direct students in their career planning are products of the negotiations of accepted meanings and possibilities for work. The strength of these meanings, in particular the attempts made by industry and business to convey a neo-liberal workplace agenda as the starting point for career planning, resides in the power of ruling parties or power blocs to convey their message as both plausible and appealing. Acceptance and rejection of these meanings by subordinate groups (as we shall see later in this thesis) is heavily influenced by an acceptance of what “reality is” and what can be expected, especially in relation to “opportunities” for “empowerment” and “success” in career development. How these terms are defined is contingent upon the negotiated practices and actions of dominated and subordinated classes to get their message across and influence the dominant ideology surrounding workplace and economic education.
As for subordinated groups, agency becomes slightly more problematic. How is a group that for the most part functions unaware of or resigned to the social inequities from which it suffers, resist and ultimately take action against its oppressors? For Gramsci, this movement toward agency first starts at the moment of resistance (Gramsci, 1971). “Resistance” for Gramsci is not something that is active, rather it is passive and unconscious (Mclaren, Fischman, Serra, & Antelo, 2002). It is when the subaltern becomes conscious of their situation that they have the ability to become active and “agency” replaces resistance:

…if yesterday the subaltern element was a thing, today it is no longer a thing but an historical person, a protagonist; if yesterday it was not responsible, because “resisting” a will external to itself, now it feels itself to be responsible because it is no longer resisting but an agent, necessarily active and taking the initiative.

(Gramsci, 1971, p. 337)

How does this potential for counter-hegemonic projects surface? Gramsci refers to the “organic” intellectual as the collection of people who can provide resistance to dominant hegemonic projects. The “organic” intellectual arises naturally from any group formation, such as class or occupation (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5). It is within a group of organic intellectuals that the “function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong” takes place (Gramsci, 1971, p. 2). Subsequently:

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in
question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10)

The traditional intellectuals are those in society who “put themselves forward as autonomous and independent of the ruling class” (Simon, 1991, p. 93) – e.g., judges, lawyers, or priests. Organic intellectuals, however, work in the interest of the social class to which they belong, either as a dominant or subordinate group. Teachers are in an interesting position as being the quintessential “traditional” intellectuals, while at the same time having some members splinter off into roles as “organic” intellectuals. For the most part, teachers act to perpetuate existing workplace practices when they help socialize students in school. However, teachers can also enter into counter-hegemonic projects when they produce alternative curriculum resources or undermine the curriculum when they intentionally teach outside of course expectations, just to name a couple of examples. Counter-hegemonic projects, such as the production of resource manuals critical of existing workplace practices (Antonelli, 2003b; BCTF, 2001; Simon, Dippo, & Schenke, 1991) demonstrate the capacity of teachers to act as organic intellectuals.

Finally, those who contest dominant ideological and hegemonic practices must not be viewed as one unified group (Hall, 1996). Those who resist the oppressive actions of a varied but dominant group form an equally diverse assemblage of individuals who struggle against repressive forms of domination for a variety of unique reasons. Race, class, and gender arrangements, to mention a few, enter into the political, social, and economic struggles that will develop into wider social relations. Within the Career Studies classroom, there is the potential for several groups to exist
that may comprise polar opposites in their resistance or rejection of career-education content. It is for this reason that one must be careful not to assume homogeneity across groups, whether class, gender, or race, and deem one approach or strategy for resistance and critical review appropriate for all persons.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this project will operate around five key concepts: *Economic and Workplace Realities; Workplace and Economic Alternatives; Skill/Attitudinal Attainment; Lifelong Learning; and Democratic Learning*. These concepts will be tied together along with the theoretical framework to help guide this study. As outlined earlier, hegemony surfaces from a moment of crisis with a formation of alliances to articulate the power bloc’s interests as the only or practical alternative. Below are key concepts that will be used to define the moment of crisis, the “accumulation strategy, the historical power bloc’s capacity to articulate their interests as *the* national popular interest,” and finally, “the extent to which the dominated people participate in the reconstitution of social subjectivity and ideological integration” (Cho & Apple, 1998, p. 271).

**Economic and Workplace Realities**

As was outlined in Chapter 3, much of the economic and workplace “realities” that form the foundations for workplace education programs are heavily influenced by neo-liberal, corporate agendas (Hyslop-Margison & Margison, 1998; Hyslop-Margison, 2000b; Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2003). In fact, course content for workplace
preparation programs in Canada is a reflection of the skills and attributes the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Conference Board of Canada (CBOC) desire for students as future workers (Hyslop-Margison & Margison, 1998; Hyslop-Margison, 2000b; Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2003). Often, the learning that takes place within workplace preparation programs is framed within neo-liberal contexts – essentially that free market economics and competitive business practices will guide the welfare of society. As well, it is made clear in these programs that current and future economic and workplace practices were/will be created outside of the social relations of power to the point of being perceived as “natural” (Hyslop-Margison & Naseem, 2007). Essentially, the relations of power that help define economic and workplace practices are ignored and students are left with the impression that changing current practices is undesirable, if not impossible. This study will first establish the extent to which the Career Studies curriculum documents and textbooks link the economic world and the workplace with the social and political world. In other words, to what extent do textbooks and curricular documents make it clear to teachers and students that current economic and workplace practices are social creations that can be changed? Failure to make it clear that the economic world and the workplace are products of social activity makes it difficult for students to think of alternatives to existing practices.

Workplace and Economic Alternatives

Understanding that the economic and workplace practices are socially derived still does not afford students with options for change. The next part of this study will
explore the economic and workplace alternatives presented in textbooks and curricular documents, as well as the extent teachers are willing/able to introduce alternatives into the classroom. With regard to the economic alternatives mentioned throughout this study, I am referring to workplace and economic practices that place workers in positions of power as active agents in the design and control of everyday practices in their work; similar to the economic and workplace democratization outlined by Livingstone (2004). Examples may include, but are not limited to, union and labour involvement politically and within the workplace, social democratic principles that have the citizenry control the economic levers of society, cooperative workplaces that have workers control the organization, and employers recognizing the knowledge and skills of their employees and allowing for greater autonomy and control in their jobs (Livingstone, 2004). As mentioned earlier, a key element of any hegemonic practice is to make current institutional forms seem “natural” and provide little choice for alternative action. Tying in with the first concept of economic and workplace realities, the opportunities for choice in terms of alternatives to existing practices will help establish the extent to which Career Studies, as a hegemonic project, is creating a passive and accepting future workforce.

Skill/Attitudinal Attainment

As part of any hegemonic project, a reproduction and reconstitution strategy must be put in place involving the subordinate or subaltern class internalizing, complying, and carrying out the agenda. In the case of current career-education programs, students must adopt a strategy of compliance and adaptation to existing
economic and workplace practices, rather than a practice of resistance and change (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Margison, 1998; Hyslop-Margison, 2000b; Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2003; Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008). As with the studies discussed in Chapter 3, an adaptation and skill-acquisition strategy (clearly influenced by human capital theory) appears to be the preferred means for students in their career planning. Students learn skill sets that derive directly from the Conference Board of Canada (CBOC) and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) employability profiles. Outside of the heavy corporate and neo-liberal influence on these employability profiles, what appears problematic, as originally stated by Hyslop-Margison (2000b), is that many of the “skills” are, in fact, attitudes. Masking the real intention of employability profiles, workplace preparation programs treat attitude and disposition traits as skills that can be acquired, practiced, and eventually perfected. Many of the traits function as a benefit to industry and keep workers passive and compliant. For example, neatness, punctuality, positive outlook on change, etc., despite being preferred by employers and integral for finding employment, function as attitudinal traits and not skills, as they cannot be practiced or perfected. They are simply attitudinal adjustments that stress the importance of compliance for future employment, and, in a way, help form the foundation for worker passivity.

A second problem with current strategies of skill attainment as a method of student empowerment involves skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. For the most part, these skills are not transferable and cannot be taught outside of context (Hyslop-Margison, 2000b). In fact, critical thinking, often bandied about in business
culture as a panacea to the sluggish economy (Hyslop-Margison, 2000b), can only be practiced with an understanding of a particular situation. More importantly, critical thinking can only take place if alternatives are present for students to compare and choose best practices. In effect, workplace-preparation programs in Ontario attempt to teach critical thinking as an isolated, transferable skill independent of context. This practice has the potential to blur the social relations of work and further pacify students in their career development. For example, teaching about job loss and subsequent “best practices” for finding employment falls short as a critical thinking exercise simply because students are expected to problem solve within current economic practices and are not given key pieces of information surrounding the social practice that led to the initial job loss. Critical thinking, if it is to empower students as future workers, can only take place if students gain an understanding of the social relations of work and the economy and are exposed to a variety of alternative practices from which to choose. For this study, I will determine the degree with which Career Studies takes an adaptation or empowerment strategy to prepare students for the world of work.

**Lifelong Learning**

Intertwined with “skill” attainment as a strategy for workplace preparation, career-education programs stress the importance of lifelong learning. Once again, the use of this concept in the employability skills context is problematic. As was outlined in the previous chapter, many of the career-preparation programs emphasize that lifelong learning is an expected practice/disposition of workers. The concept in itself is not problematic, as almost all workers, either through formal or informal learning, practice
ongoing learning throughout their careers (see Livingstone, 2010). The problem with current conceptualizations of lifelong learning in career-education programs is that much of the learning is limited to technical/specific skill acquisition demanded in the marketplace, with much of it centred on keeping up to date with technological advances in the workplace. Although it is important to learn technical skills that allow for easier navigation through the world of work, limiting lifelong learning to this basic level glosses over two key elements of learning that can empower students as future workers. First, as future workers who will engage in lifelong learning, students need to go beyond learning the technical aspects of work and understand the social relations that guide and transform the workplace. For example, students as future workers need to go beyond the technical aspects of the changing workplace (e.g., automation, computerization) and try to gain an understanding of the economic forces that drive this change (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006).

The second problem with the concept of lifelong learning as is currently used in career-education programs is that it ignores the fact that much of the ongoing learning done in the workplace is ignored and underutilized by employers (Livingstone, 2004). Similar to the previous point, advising students of a lifelong learning strategy to remain competitive in the job market fails to address the current problem of skill underutilization and simply prepares students to be “flexible, cheap, and adaptable workers” (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006, p. 78). Effective lifelong learning strategies need to understand this job-skills gap and set up students as future workers to press employers for greater autonomy and workplace control. Once again, failure to provide a fuller picture of current workplace and economic practices will result in a passive workforce, and will
subject students as future workers to the whims of market forces and employer demands.

**Democratic Learning**

Finally, this study will examine the opportunities for counter-hegemonic projects to surface. In the case of Career Studies, I will be looking for avenues and pathways presented by the textbooks, curricular documents, or teachers in the classroom for democratic learning. The definition of democratic learning for this study will borrow from Hyslop-Margison and Graham’s (2003) *principles for democratic learning* (PDL). These principles are as follows:

1) …respect student rationality, that is, the capacity of students to critique curriculum content.

2) …provide students with alternative viewpoints and perspectives on issues…

3) …do not depict social reality as fixed or permanent, but explicitly recognize the legitimate right of students to transform economic, labour-market, and working conditions through informed political participation. (Hyslop-Margison & Graham, 2003, p. 342)

Democratic learning in career studies must allow students to critique current economic and workplace practices, assess alternatives to current practices, and finally instil within the mindset of students the idea that changes to existing practices are possible. The extent to which these principles of democratic learning are present or missing within the Career Studies curricular guidelines, textbooks, and pedagogical practices found in the
classroom will help determine the extent to which Career Studies acts as an opportunity for student empowerment or as a hegemonic project in career preparation.

**Summary**

…the fundamental concern which resonates throughout the entire body of Gramsci’s writings… can best be thought of as the problem of *how to create history*: to privilege “possibility” and to lift humanity out of the malaise into which it had become submerged. (Hill, 2007, p. 51)

Gramsci, like Dewey and Freire, saw opportunity in education for the liberation and empowerment of marginalized people. Gramsci also understood the complexities in subaltern empowerment; specifically, issues with class consciousness and the ability of the marginalized to see the possible. As has happened in other career-education programs in Canada and internationally (see Chapter 3), skill acquisition and adaptation have been presented as the preferred pathways to career and workplace success. This strategy has limited student growth in terms of future workplace empowerment and has simply shepherded students as a future resource for business and corporate use. The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study involves establishing connections between the ruling bloc’s interests and the content and pedagogical practices found in the Career Studies course. As well, this study will examine the potential for student empowerment in the Career Studies course as a program for workplace preparation. By exploring the origins of the course and its development from the recommendations made by the Royal Commission in 1994, the analysis of Ministry of Education documents in Chapter 6 will shed light on the implementation of this hegemonic project.
Chapters 7 and 8 will look at the reconstitution and reproduction of this hegemonic project through a content analysis of approved textbooks and an analysis of the pedagogical practices of Career Studies teachers. The final chapter of this thesis, in part, will examine the counter hegemony to current career and guidance programs, both in Ontario and internationally, highlighting the potential for reconstitution and resettlement in terms of workplace education. After all, hegemony isn't a static representation of what is – it also provides a window into what is possible.
Chapter 5 – Methodology

A study delving into the meaning of work and workplace preparation – specifically, the terms and parameters set on students for navigating the world of work and developing their careers – needed a methodological approach that would allow for a deep understanding of the processes and practices that give meaning to often relative and ambiguous terms. For example, the terms discussed in the conceptual framework – such as “workplace realities,” “economic alternatives,” “skill attainment,” etc. – are fluid in their meaning and interpretation, influencing career development for students in different ways. How they are taken up and used in the Career Studies classroom is dependent upon the direction of the course set up by the curriculum guides, the meaning of terms as defined in the textbooks, and the pedagogy of teachers in delivering this curriculum, not to mention the extent to which students accept or reject all of these efforts and practices. Since the principal investigation of this study is to arrive at the meanings of work and the expected direction of career development, it was critical to implement a qualitative study for this thesis. The qualitative approach of content analyses of government documents, curriculum guides, and approved-for-use textbooks establishes definitions for key terms in this study. As well, the teacher interviews allow for further refinement and understanding of these definitions, particularly in relation to their use in the classroom. The construction of knowledge and meaning and the establishment of working definitions for understanding the hegemonic relations behind the creation and delivery of Career Studies could only have been done through in-depth analyses of textual material and probing, semi-structured interviews
with teachers. Just as was done in previous studies (Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007), curriculum guidelines were analyzed to gain an understanding of the intent and direction of the career-education programs, while studies such as Cho and Apple’s (1998) used the words of teachers to reveal processes and practices within the classroom relating to student career development.

**Royal Commission – Submissions and Report**

The specifics of this study involve content analyses of the Royal Commission’s *For the Love of Learning* (1994), curriculum documents and guides for the course, and approved-for-use textbooks. For the Commission’s report, only the introduction to the study, as well as the section specifically dealing with career education and the subsequent recommendations for reforms and implementation were analysed for this study. This was decided after an examination of the full report yielded little direct relevance to guidance and career education outside of the aforementioned sections. The introduction to the report spanned nine pages and provided a framework for the purpose of the report, influencing and mediating factors in the creation of the report, as well as the committee’s general perceptions on school improvement and future steps for student success. The commission’s report was included in the analysis for this thesis because the report signaled a clear identification and delineation from previous educational practices in Ontario and recommended future directions for educational reform. In essence, the report ushered in a reformation period for public education that included issues of workplace learning, career planning, guidance, and school-to-work transition policies. Although brief in its mention of guidance and career education (the report dedicated only three pages to the topic), the report sets the foundation for the
educational reforms of the Progressive Conservative government of the 1990s by outlining areas in need of change, including a call for guidance and career education in secondary schools. Another pressing need was for reforms for education policies to better reflect and prepare students for economic changes due in most part to globalization and technological movements.

**Government Documents**

Taking up the mandate of the Royal Commission, the Ministry of Education under the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris introduced Career Studies to the formal curriculum as part of the guidance and career-education reforms of the late 1990s. In 1998, the Ministry tabled a discussion document on future directions for guidance and career education. After hearing from various stakeholders, the Ministry finalized the discussion document with the policy document on guidance and career education (1999a). Effectively, the policy guide put into practice the main framework for guidance and career education established in the discussion document. These documents are included in the analysis because they map out the directions for guidance and career education in Ontario. Specifically, the two documents link what was presented in the Royal Commission’s report with the curriculum guides for the Career Studies course. The discussion and policy documents were analysed thematically using similar criteria for the career guidelines, textbooks, and teacher interviews. In effect, the discussion and policy guides were analyzed along themes of student empowerment in career development, looking specifically at strategies for career development and workplace preparation. As well, the policy and discussion guides were analyzed in their treatment of current workplace practices and how they
defined the world of work and the connections made to the economic and political world. Finally, the degree to which the discussion and policy documents leave open or specifically cite alternative workplace and economic practices was assessed in the analysis. Alternatives to existing workplace practices were key elements of analyses for the government documents, curricular guides, textbooks, and teacher interviews, as the analyses established the degree with which students were presented choice in their career planning. After all, a lack of choice is an integral component of cultural and ideological reproduction, and most certainly a key element in sustaining a hegemonic project.

The Ministry of Education officially created the Grade 10 Career Studies course with the production and implementation of *Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10: Guidance and Career Education* (1999b; 2006). The guideline, originally produced in 1999 and revised in 2006, forms the basis for the course and outlines the content to be covered in Career Studies through overall and specific expectations. For all secondary-school courses in Ontario, curriculum guides lay out course content through strands (broad areas of study), as well as overall and specific expectations, with each topic and subtopic touching upon pertinent content and skill sets to be covered in the course. The expectations create a framework for course content and delivery, as both classroom teachers and textbook writers must address the expectations set out in the guide. Classroom teachers must evaluate students on all of the overall expectations, while the specific expectations can be either evaluated or assessed (Ministry, 2006a). Writers must address 85% of the guideline’s expectations if their textbook is to be approved for use as the main resource for the course (Ministry, 2006b). In both cases, the content
and delivery are clearly defined by the guidelines and give an excellent window into what is taught in the Career Studies classroom. Therefore, their inclusion in the analysis will help determine how the course defines current workplace and economic realities, possible alternative practices, and the extent to which students are empowered in their career planning.

**The Textbooks**

The textbooks included for analysis in this project are from the Trillium List, the approved-for-use-in-the-classroom list of textbooks for Ontario’s public schools. The four approved textbooks included in this study are: *Careers 10* (Campbell, 2000), *Careers Today and Tomorrow* (Plue, Karakokkinos, & Palmer, 2000), *Career Studies 10* (Wallace, 2000), and *Horizons 2000+: Career Studies* (Misener & Butler, 2000).† These textbooks were approved in 2000 and were allowed to remain on the Trillium List for the standard five-year term plus two additional years, as no substitute text was in place during the 2005 – 2007 school years. A replacement text, *Work Smart: Strategies for Career Success* (Balaishis, 2009), was finally introduced in 2009 to reflect the revised 2006 curriculum guidelines; however, due to the timing of this replacement text’s inclusion on the Trillium List in relation to the timelines for this project, only a cursory analysis of this text will be included in the discussion and conclusion chapter of this thesis. The brief analysis of the new text will examine general themes and strategies for students in their career development to determine the degree of shift or of repetition in content from the previous sets of texts. It is worth noting here that only one textbook to

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† From this point forward, the textbooks will be referred to by their acronym: *Careers 10* (C10), *Careers Today and Tomorrow* (CTT), *Career Studies 10* (CS10), and *Horizons 2000+: Career Studies* (H2000). It was decided for issues of readability and ease in following the analysis of the textbooks, that the author’s names would be replaced in the citations and in references within the text with the textbook acronym.
date has been written and approved for use in the Career Studies classroom, providing no choice for school administrators and teachers regarding their main textbook. Contrary to previous years, where four textbooks were available for use in the classroom, teachers, if they wish to use a textbook for the course, must use *Work Smart: Strategies for Career Success*. This lack of choice for classroom materials is in itself telling of some of the hegemonic practices surrounding career education in Ontario.

As for the four textbooks that were approved for use in the first seven years of the course’s existence, the content analysis of textbooks will focus on three key themes: *Workplace and the Economy*; *Student Preparation*; and *Alternatives to Current Practices*. The theme of *Workplace and the Economy* will examine the textbooks’ treatment of workplace practices; specifically, how the textbooks set up the economic and workplace parameters for students in their career development. Some examples of “realities” mentioned quite frequently in the textbooks, as well as in the guides and policy documents are *globalization*, *technological change*, and *downsizing*, just to mention a few. How the textbooks treat these topics – specifically their origins, relations to workplace practices, and the degree of permanence – will be telling in terms of the social creation of structural parameters so desperately needed in any hegemonic project.

It should be noted here that the order of these themes simply comes from a readability standpoint. Positioning the structural elements that form the parameters for career planning at the beginning of the analysis simply better informs the reader of referential points of workplace and economic practices, specifically from the standpoint
of textbook writers and teachers. The actual analysis of the textbooks followed more closely with the curriculum guidelines and the order of topics within the texts, as student assessment and self-awareness (student preparation category) was the first topic of analysis, followed by economic and workplace realities and alternatives to existing practices. As with an examination of any hegemonic project, it is important to understand the agential practices of subordinate and dominant groups in the production of social reality, rather than simply stay at the structural level of analysis and assume actors simply conform to what exists. For the analyses performed in this thesis, I want to emphasize that the guides, textbooks, and teacher interviews started with examinations of career-planning practices of students and followed with a look at the social parameters that place limits on career planning. Once again, I must stress that the arrangement in reverse order of themes from the analyses is simply due to readability and ease of presentation.

As for the theme of Student Preparation, I will examine what the textbooks deem to be appropriate strategies and traits for matching students to potential careers. More specifically, this part of the analysis will look at how students are positioned as future workers and the opportunities for control over their career planning and eventually their work. Some of the tools for career development delivered in the textbook and addressed in this analysis will be the self-awareness and assessment tools designed to inform students of their aptitudes, inclinations, and proclivities. Effectively, the inventory and self-assessment tools provide a starting point of career exploration for students and set personal limits on possible career opportunities. The assessment tools not only inform students of their likes and dislikes, but also (in a not so subtle way) inform
students of their opportunities and limitations. Students are informed of the ways they learn best, what academic skills they possess, and what “practical” skills they may adopt that could aid in their career development. Much of the self-exploration and inventories are done with current labour-market trends and occupational requirements in mind. Students are not necessarily expected to arrive at personal profiles for the sake of understanding themselves; rather, their understandings are meant to match their interests to future work.

Coupled with self-assessment and inventory tools, the Student Preparation section of the analysis will examine the attitudes and “desired” workplace attributes outlined by the four textbooks. This section of the analysis explores what the textbooks deem to be essential “soft skills,” or what could be termed the non-technical skills needed for successful employment. These “skills,” more often attributes rather than skills, could include punctuality, neatness, organization, etc., to name a few, and are often taken from the employability skills profiles of HRSDC and CBOC. In effect, the “employability skills” set the foundation for expected behaviours in the workplace and the expectations and attitudes needed in career planning. The “soft skills” of work established and emphasized by the course, in effect set the degree and form of empowerment students may employ in their career development.

Reduced to the more base levels of workplace empowerment, the section on attitudes couples with the previous section on self-awareness and assessment to set up strategies for student empowerment in career development. In effect, the potential for two broad strategies for student empowerment could emerge from these workplace preparation practices. The first strategy could be considered a form of adaptation to
existing workplace and economic practices, stressing self-improvement in students
toward gaining competitive advantages in the labour market. The other strategy would
be one that is critical of existing workplace and economic practices with the intention of
promoting change through human agency. In essence, one strategy favours individual
empowerment through adaptation and self-promotion, while the other extreme features
a more collective approach to worker empowerment, changing the institutions and
practices that limit worker control and autonomy. This is not to say that these two
options are the only options; rather, strategies of adaptation and confrontation represent
two broad approaches that encompass many practices and tactics in career and
workplace preparation. The categories for analysis of student empowerment simply
order the actions and expectations for student career development into two broad
themes for understanding the intent and purpose of the course with relation to student
preparation.

The final theme of the textbook analyses, Alternative Practices, will involve an
analysis of what the textbooks deem to be possible alternatives for students to explore
in their career development. The alternatives to current practices used in the analysis
can range from the specific (e.g. job sharing, contract work, and part-time work) to the
more general (e.g. co-operatives and economic democracy) and derive from
suggestions made in curriculum documents and textbooks, as well as from the literature
review (see Butterwick & Benjamin, 2006; Hyslop-Margson, 2000b; Hyslop-Margison &
Pinto, 2007; Hyslop-Margison & McKerracher, 2008). Because the themes derive from
disparate sources, the possibilities for alternatives also appear disparate in their
potential for student empowerment. The alternatives derived from the curriculum
documents represent some of the changes in workplace practices that often result from economic shifts and rationalizations related to economic downturns. For example, job sharing and part-time work could be considered products of a shrinking or depressed economy and not necessarily a product of choices made by workers. It could be argued that these alternatives represent a lack of empowerment and choice for workers, and are merely alternative practices for employers seeking to maximize a return on their product through savings on labour costs. It is this conflation of disparate practices that makes it difficult to assume one definition for legitimate workplace and economic alternatives. For the sake of brevity, the analysis in this section will explore alternatives that would be considered different from traditional full-time, nine-to-five, weekday employment, as well as current economic practices found in Canada’s neo-liberal market state. For all alternatives, the major criteria for categorization will rest with the opportunities for worker empowerment through control and autonomy in the workplace.

**Teacher Interviews**

The second part of the project includes interviews with Career Studies teachers exploring their thoughts on the course material, the pedagogy they employ in the classroom, as well as their general thoughts on workplace education. Eight teachers were selected from the Toronto area for one-hour interviews. The interviews were set up through the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, which contacted eligible participants for the project. Teachers qualified for inclusion in the project provided they taught Career Studies at any point in their careers. Participants who initially agreed to be part of the project and expressed an interest in being interviewed
were sent a contact letter outlining the design and goals of the project. The interviews took place in the Toronto area in locations off-site from their Career Studies classrooms.

The teachers recruited for the project varied in their experience with the course and in the total years of classroom experience. Some of the participants taught the course every year from its inception, while two of the interviewees had taught the course only once. The type of schools where the teachers worked also varied in the socioeconomic status and racial composition of the student body. Any differences with respect to teaching experience, student background, school location, etc., will not be generalized to the teaching population. Rather, any differences found in pedagogy, such as student background, will be mentioned as a potential leaning and worthy of further investigation. More importantly, the interviews will be used to gain a base understanding of how teachers interpret the course material, what teachers believe students need to learn from the course, and the degree to which teachers will introduce material outside of the curriculum. Understanding the ways teachers deliver the course and the expectations they place on students will shed light on the role teachers are playing in the reproduction of dominant ideologies in career planning and workplace education.

As for the interviews, issues seemed to surface regarding definitions of critical thinking and alternative practices. Prior to providing an explanation of terminology and presenting examples to arrive at commonly accepted definitions of key terminology, teachers were asked to answer interview questions without prompts to see how they would define key terms. With all the interviews, clarification was inevitably required for the questions on critical thinking and alternative practices. These questions dealt with
topics that were not easy to define, producing varied but relevant responses from teachers. As we shall see later, initial responses to these questions were just as telling as the responses after clarification and helped to shed light on the preconceived notions of work that teachers brought into the classroom.

The interview schedule was semi-structured, involving questions pertaining to the experiences of teachers with the course, questions about students and how they take up the course material, pedagogy, the value and worth of the course, what teachers feel is needed in career planning, teachers’ views on critical thinking, and finally, what teachers believe to be workplace and economic realities and possibilities for alternatives to current practices. Along these general themes, teachers were free to interpret and answer questions to help guide the direction of follow-up and probing questions. However, to keep the interviews manageable, teachers were at times directed back to the general questions outlined above. As mentioned earlier, interviews were roughly one hour in length, with saturation achieved after the sixth interview. The seventh and eighth interviews confirmed saturation, as similar answers were given on key questions dealing with course content, pedagogical practices, views on current workplace and economic practices and the opportunities for alternatives.

Limitations of Study

There are a few limitations to this study in terms of methodology that should be mentioned here. First, the teachers from this study were recruited solely from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This recruitment strategy, although convenient in terms of teacher access, poses a potential shortfall in that the study could be considered Toronto-centric, ignoring the experiences of teachers in other parts of the province,
specifically the rural areas of the province where teachers would likely emphasize different themes and content from the course. Similarly, many of the northern communities that service aboriginal populations are also missing from this study. Although not ideal, sacrifices had to be made for time and finance in order to keep the project manageable. As stated earlier, the intent of the teacher interviews was not to explore for difference, but to use them as a window into the Career Studies class, exploring general leanings and tendencies of teachers in their pedagogical practices. Having the interviews take place in Toronto with teachers from the GTA still allows for these pedagogical practices to be uncovered; however, caution should be practiced in interpreting the interview data so as not to generalize the findings to the entire province.

The second limitation of the study is that only teachers who enjoy or enjoyed teaching the course found their way into the study. In itself, the enthusiasm participants have or had for teaching the course produced an interview sample that eliminated any pedagogical issues of apathy or dissatisfaction among teachers related to timetabling assignments. This sample represents a committed and creative group of teachers providing an example of strong pedagogy in the Career Studies classroom. However, as was discovered in several interviews, it appears quite common that inexperienced and junior staff teachers receive Career Studies as part of their teaching timetable. It also became apparent through the interviews that some of the teachers receive the course only once and prefer to never teach it again. This type of teacher did not present him/herself for inclusion in the project. In fact, when some teachers were asked to participate in the project they declined because they did not consider themselves to be Career Studies teachers, even though they taught the class in the past or were
teaching the course at the time of the interviews. Although it is a reality that some
teachers are less than enthusiastic about teaching this class (a study in and of itself)
this project wanted to uncover what Career Studies teachers thought of the course and
the pedagogy they brought to the classroom. The transient nature of teachers relating
to this course made it important to include participants who saw value in the course,
who would make efforts to go beyond the curriculum, and importantly, identify the
course to be legitimate. For this reason, it was decided to only include participants who
taught the class and saw themselves as a career or guidance teacher.

The final key limitation of the study is the absence of student voices relating to
the course material. Once again, a decision had to be made for the sake of time and
finance and it was decided to look at the pedagogy behind the course rather than the
ways that students take up the course. It is understood that part of hegemony involves
the ways subordinated groups take up dominant ideologies, often assisting in the
reproduction of existing practices. However, to gain a better sense of the delivery
behind Career Studies as a hegemonic project, it was decided that teachers’ voices
would better represent the intent and expectations involved with the course. As well, as
will be demonstrated in Chapter 8, the voices of teachers provide a window into the
thoughts of students and can deliver in an indirect way how the students take up course
material by highlighting what works and what doesn’t in their classrooms.

**Summary**

This project was designed to capture the intent and expectations of Career
Studies as a hegemonic project. Specifically, I wished to explore the ways in which
work and the economy were presented to students to determine the degree that the
dominant ideology was put forth as the expected path for students to take in their career planning. The content analyses of the Royal Commission's recommendations, the Ministry of Education's discussion and policy documents, curriculum guidelines, and the approved-for-use textbooks, uncover the content and intent of the course and provide a picture of Career Studies as a hegemonic project. Coupled with these content analyses, the teacher interviews help bring to light the pedagogical practices in delivering the Career Studies curriculum. In effect, understanding the content and pedagogy helps illuminate the aspects of knowledge creation and reproduction vital for any hegemonic project to take place. As we shall see in the upcoming chapters, these analyses and interviews helped further the understanding of the conditions and practices that guide students in their career planning.
Chapter 6 – Government Documents

In this chapter I examine the development of the Career Studies course through a content analysis of government documents dealing with guidance and career education. Curricular reforms that brought in general employment and career planning to public schools took place in the late 1990s, culminating in the formal creation of the Career Studies course. The documents for analysis in this chapter will start with the Royal Commission’s report, followed by the Ministry of Education’s discussion and policy documents that outlined the need and value of an expanded guidance and career curriculum. Finally, this chapter will explore the Guidance and Career curriculum guidelines (both the original and the revised editions) as they pertain to the Grade 10 Career Studies course.

The analysis of these documents will be thematic and explore the ways in which the government reports, policy and discussion documents, and curriculum guides envision the Career Studies course. Working from the general (the Royal Commission’s report) to the more specific (the Ministry of Education’s policy and discussion documents) to the very specific (the Grade 10 Career Studies curriculum guideline) this chapter will explore the intended purpose of the course, key definitions surrounding workplace and economic realities, student empowerment, and the possibilities for change to understand the situational and relational aspects surrounding the implementation and expectations of Career Studies. Understanding the intent of the course through an analysis of the government documents dealing with guidance and career education will provide a better understanding of Career Studies as a hegemonic
project in the formulation and reformulation of existing economic and workplace knowledge.

**For the Love of Learning**

In the introduction to the 1994 report, the commission outlined the framework that guided many of the recommendations. It read as follows:

Like all organizations, our Commission operated within a particular time, and our deliberations were inevitably influenced by the context of unsettling truths around us.

- Our society is characterized by turbulence, creating widespread uncertainty and anxiety. Canadians fear a future of diminished opportunity, and expect public institutions to deal with this acute concern.
- Our economic system is changing, while technology is advancing at a geometrically accelerating pace.
- The fallout from those related phenomena includes the prospect of a large core of permanently unemployed and underemployed men and women, of younger people in particular, and of considerable confusion about the future of work.
- In the current political climate, and for the foreseeable future, projects requiring vast new public funding will be seen as impractical. The operative cliché is that it is possible to work smarter, doing even more with even less.

(Begin & Caplin, 1994, I, p. 1)
The points above served to heavily influence and guide the commission’s actions and recommendations. The commission performed its study and drafted its report during the global recession of the early 1990s. Much of the trepidation and insecurities of the time seeped into the document. Much of the language, as it appears above and also throughout the report, indicates a capitulation to the economic trends of the day. The wording reflects neo-liberal workplace rationalization practices – for example, “do more with less” – and the perception that much of the collective action for changing economic and workplace practices is futile, almost utopian. For example, the technological advances that occurred in the early 1990s are viewed rightfully as a catalyst for workplace change; however, much like the computer from the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, human action and activity is presented as having little, if any, influence or control over the technology. Most importantly, the previous passage indicates that the changes are coming, are perceived to be disadvantageous to most people, and have little chance of being corrected, stopped, or controlled by human action. This mindset adopted by the Commission sets up guidance and career reform as a reactionary approach to understanding work and the economy and has the potential to place students in a passive role in their career development.

When we examine specifically the passages related to guidance and career education, we can see the economic problems of the time having a strong influence on the intended purpose of the course. From input from corporate partners, the commission considered emphasizing the employment preparation component of public education:
An opinion, commonly heard by the Commission, is that schools often neglect the part of their mandate beyond the traditional academic subjects, that other people consider important. This other function of schools involves making students aware of the kinds of work that are available, and the personal attributes and educational preparation suited to a variety of occupations and careers. (Begin & Caplan, 1994, II, p. 41)

Clearly responsive to the corporate and business interests to make education more relevant and suited to labour-market demands, the Commission took the approach that preparing marketable students as future workers was the best strategy to remedy current conditions of high employment and slow market growth. “This desire was generally phrased, not as a request for specific occupational channelling or training, but as a perceived need to help students see the link between formal education and the world of work, and help them plan their courses in keeping with their interests and strengths, and the opportunities available” (Begin & Caplan, 1994, II, p. 41). Once again, it appears that the commission situates students as a future resource for labour markets and recommends students explore their aptitudes and inclinations in order to find a suitable match in the economy. It appears that the economy and labour markets are guiding the practice of student self-awareness, and students are left to plan their careers with one eye on the demands of business and industry.

It should be noted that the Commission did want career education to have some element of experienced-based learning, with linkages made to the community. At the heart of this decision was the opportunity students would have to understand the social relations of work, in both its creation and ongoing production. Rather than simply
provide a list of in-demand skills for the workplace, or use guidance and career education as an avenue to deliver broad abstractions on the relational aspects of school and work, the Commission wanted the guidance and career curriculum to place students in positions that would expose them to the everyday functioning of various workplaces. It was hoped that through a direct exposure to current workplaces, students could gain a better sense of current workplace practices, with the intent to question these practices in the classroom. However, as we shall see, the policy and discussion documents chose to take guidance and career education only halfway down the path and emphasized general workplace learning and skill acquisition without the avenue for student exploration and critical examination of the workplace.

**Guidance and Career Education Discussion Document**

Much of the language in *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Policy Grades 1 to 12* (1998) *Detailed Discussion Document* (1998) picks up from the *For the Love of Learning* report and stresses up front that the economy is unpredictable, changing, to be feared, and out of the control of people. Outlining why the change is necessary, the discussion document spells out the purpose for the course: “The purpose of a reformed guidance and career education program within the total school program is to prepare students for these realities” (Ministry, 1998, p. 3; italics added). Nowhere are these “realities” specifically defined. However, the language used in the discussion document and the subsequent Guidance and Career policy document clearly indicates that the economic and workplace “realities” that frame the intent of the course are situated in the neo-liberal competitive market conditions of the late 20th century.
Economic and workplace practices such as globalization, layoffs, technological rationalization of work, etc., are mentioned often in Ministry documents as current and future impacts upon the design and delivery of workplace practices.

The chosen strategy to deal with the changing world of work, as outlined in the discussion document, is student adaptation to current and future economic and workplace trends. “As the pace of change in the labour market accelerates, it is increasingly important for schools to help students develop basic and transferable skills and connect their learning in school to conditions in the wider world, including the world of work… prepare students to live in an increasingly diverse society by helping them develop the ability to interact positively and work effectively in a range of settings” (Ministry, 1998, p. 3; italics added). Once again, it is not defined how a student will work “effectively” in a range of settings; however, if the term is placed in the context of the language at the start of the passage, it becomes apparent that working “effectively” involves bringing forth a wide range of skills for use by the employer. As well, the “range of settings” appears to be market driven, as alternative workplace practices derive from recent downturns in the economy. In essence, students are expected to develop basic and transferable skills to endure any shifts in labour demands or market downturns, effectively making themselves more marketable to employers. The virtues of versatility and adaptability are once again trumpeted in the discussion document, placing students in positions of individual responsibility rather than allowing students to explore avenues of collective action toward gaining workplace and economic control.

Within the discussion document, the economy and labour markets frequently frame the expected student decision-making and exploration component of the
guidance and career-education curriculum. Here are several passages from the 
*Purpose of the Program* section of the discussion document outlining how a guidance 
and career-education program would help students in their career planning:

Career Development – make informed and appropriate choices and implement 
successful transitions from school to education, work, and life roles. [Later cited 
as one of the essential skills for “academic, interpersonal, and career 
success”]…a wise choice depends on a good understanding of oneself and a 
thoughtful examination of the options available. (Ministry, 1998, p. 5) 

Again, the passage above sets the stage for students to make their decisions and frame 
their career planning with current economic and workplace practices in mind. This 
misses the point of critical thinking, as students are not given the opportunity to make 
career-planning decisions with a range of possible workplace and economic 
alternatives. Instead, the neo-liberal and economic practices of the time (still in use 
today) act to limit the exploration of students and present prevailing economic and 
workplace practices as fixed, natural, and outside of their control. This lack of 
opportunity for students to critically examine the economy and work appears to 
contradict the mandate for critical thought as outlined later in the document. An 
effective guidance and career education, as described in the discussion document, 
“implies that teachers have the responsibility to nurture and support students’ ability to 
*critically examine* what they are learning for its application to their development as 
educated and productive citizens” (Ministry, 1998, p. 6; italics added). No further details 
are given as to how students are to critically examine what they learn; however, as was 
outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis, critical thought is dependent upon a presentation of
various and divergent possibilities. These possibilities were noticeably absent from the discussion document. As stated earlier, much of the economic and workplace realities and practices that frame the content of the document are rooted in the neo-liberal thinking of the late 1990s. Little choice is presented as to different ways of knowing and performing work. Because of this, the option to include critical thought in the guidance and career curriculum must mistakenly refer to another value, skill, or trait, or it could be that teachers are expected to have students think critically on a topic other than work or the economy. Either way, there appears to be little room for students, as future workers, to empower themselves through a critical examination of work and the economy.

The document explains in greater detail what can be expected from the guidance and career curriculum at specific grade levels. For students in Grade 10, the course is intended to “increase students' information about and willingness to consider alternatives; and to make choices without losing the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances” (Ministry, 1998, p. 7). The document goes on to explain that in Grades 10 to 12, students would be able to:

- …analyse the challenges related to the changing nature of work and the workplace and learn how to prepare for them;
- develop enterprising skills and attitudes such as self-reliance, network-building, informed risk taking and flexibility;
- learn how to access information and support services relevant to work such as labour market trends, entrepreneurship opportunities and health and safety information; (Ministry, 1998, p. 7)
It appears that considering “alternatives” likely refers to exploring work styles such as entrepreneurship, self-employment, job sharing, etc., rather than alternative economic and workplace practices such as economic democracy or cooperatives. In essence, the alternatives are tied to the willingness of students to explore avenues for individual empowerment through practices of adaptation and competition for scarce employment, with a consideration of all possible employment options. The bulleted points highlight and emphasize a strategy of adaptation and quickly put to rest the notion that collective action is the remedy to inequitable economic and workplace practices.

Finally, the document indicates the intended audience served by the recommendations: “To meet the concerns of parents, students and employing organizations, the ministry is committed to ensuring that all students are provided with a career education program” (Ministry, 1998, p. 7). It is not certain whether the interest of parents and students align with the interests of employers; however, it would be difficult to craft a course on workplace education if these were divergent views. As well, much of the language used throughout the document and cited in this chapter indicates a willingness on the part of the Ministry to allow the interests of employers to inform the career planning of students and, in effect, much of the guidance and career curriculum.

**Guidance and Career Policy Guide**

The policy guide, *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools* (1999), made official the recommendations of the previous year’s discussion document. Essentially, the document finalizes the aforementioned discussion document and puts into practice a
general outline for the guidance and career curriculum from Grades 1 to 12. The content of the policy guide and the discussion document is virtually the same, with a few minor adjustments.

In the rationale, for example, there appears to be a shift in the policy guide to make student interest and national interest synonymous. Students are still expected to make decisions based upon the marketplace: “…students will require effective work habits and the ability to make sound decisions, solve problems, plan effectively, work independently, communicate well, research, evaluate themselves realistically, and explore new educational and career opportunities” (Ministry, 1999a, p. 5; italics added); however, linkages are now made with the national interest and “responsible” citizenry. “(Students) must learn to work cooperatively and productively with a wide range of people, to set and pursue education and career goals, to evaluate their achievement of these goals, and to assume their roles as responsible citizens” (Ministry, 1999a, p. 5).

In the Goals section of the document, the policy guide goes on to read:

The goals of the guidance and career education program are that students:

- understand the concepts related to lifelong learning, interpersonal relationships (including responsible citizenship), and career planning;
- develop learning skills, social skills, a sense of social responsibility, and the ability to formulate and pursue educational and career goals;” (Ministry, 1999a, p. 6; italics added)

The shift toward presenting workplace education as a call to responsible citizenship appears to further entrench Career Studies as a hegemonic project. The matching of corporate or business interests with collective or national interests and passing off
career development as a civic duty threatens to blur the power relations and imbalances that constitute and reconstitute prevailing workplace and economic practices. As well, a term such as responsible citizenship evokes a message that countering and questioning this approach to career planning would be irresponsible and would border on sedition. This pressure to remain responsible to the community and nation at large jeopardizes the option for students to critically examine current workplace practices and explore alternatives. However, some of the language in the policy guide is paradoxical in that the vague sentimental statements for student career planning on the surface appear to contradict many of the previous statements. For example, in the subsection that examines the plans for interpersonal development, the guide reads: “They will also learn about thoughtful and non-violent problem resolution, social responsibility, working cooperatively with others, and caring about others” (Ministry, 1999a, p. 7). On the surface, it is apparent that the passage ostensibly refers to students getting along with each other and being able to work together in a variety of situations. But on a deeper level, this could be a critique of some of the more exploitative economic and workplace practices currently employed in our economy, especially practices such as corporate relocation and downsizing that lack the social responsibility and caring toward communities and workers.

Finally, in the section on “Career Development for Grades 9 to 12,” the document outlines expectations for student achievement in career planning. Much of the section focuses on development strategies of adaptation to current economic and workplace practices and a broadening of employability skills to make students more attractive in competitive labour markets. Students are expected to:
describe how changes taking place in the economy, the environment, and society affect the job market;

- describe the variety of volunteer, employment, educational, and career opportunities, including self-employment;

- demonstrate their understanding of employability skills (e.g., job search, interview, job readiness, employment sustainability, and entrepreneurial skills)

(Ministry, 1999a, p. 7; italics added).

The language is similar to the discussion document, only now there is greater stress on self-employment and entrepreneurial skills to cope with labour-market change. If there was doubt as to whether the guidance and career curriculum was stressing individual action over collective action, it appears to be clarified from this point on. As we shall see later on in this thesis, self-employment and entrepreneurship are presented throughout the resource guides and the textbooks as an effective and emerging work alternative for dealing with the harshness of economic and workplace change.

Much of the language in the discussion and policy documents is vague and provides little concrete direction for teaching the Career Studies course. In fact, direct reference to the Career Studies course appears in only one passage of the entire 31-page policy document. In effect, the discussion and policy documents provide a general sense of the purpose and content of the entire guidance and career planning for both the elementary and secondary curriculum, rather than the specifics of course offerings. The specifics for the Grade 10 Career Studies course appear in the curriculum guidelines. The next section will report on the findings of the thematic analysis of the Guidance and Career Education curriculum guidelines.
**Guidance and Career Education Curriculum Guideline (1999)**

The *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Guidance and Career Education, 1999* is the curriculum guideline that informed the public, teachers, students, and textbook writers of the specific content and expectations for the Grade 10 Career Studies course. It was replaced in 2006 with a revised curriculum guide; however, for the bulk of this study, most importantly the analyses of textbooks and teacher interviews, the 1999 curriculum guide was the government document informing course content and pedagogical practices for Career Studies. It is for this reason that an analysis of the 1999 guidelines will be used to inform the intended direction and purpose of the course with respect to hegemony and career education, while the 2006 document will only serve to illustrate any directional change for the course's future. Both curriculum guidelines will be analysed for their content, specifically around issues of workplace and economic definitions, student empowerment, and alternatives to current workplace and economic practices.

Both the 1999 and the 2006 guidelines are organized by *strands* (broad learning areas), which are then subdivided into *overall* and *specific expectations* (general and specific topics). The strands are the same for the 1999 and 2006 Grade 10 Career Studies course, and are as follows: *Personal Knowledge and Management Skills; Exploration of Opportunities; and Preparation for Transitions and Change*. Within each strand are expectations that students must demonstrate to the teacher for evaluation:

Two sets of expectations are listed for each *strand*, or broad curriculum area, of each course. The *overall expectations* describe in general terms the knowledge and skills that students are expected to demonstrate by the end of each course.
The *specific expectations* describe the expected knowledge and skills in greater
detail. (Ministry, 1999b, p. 5)

It should be noted here that the guide offers examples to illustrate appropriate content
for each expectation; however, the 1999 guide does afford teachers leeway to introduce
their own examples and teach to the expectations they feel are appropriate for their
classroom. As we shall see later, the leeway teachers had with the 1999 course is
somewhat constrained with assessment and evaluation changes in the 2006 document.
Still, it should be recognized that the overall expectations must be demonstrated and
evaluated by students, leaving teachers in a position to address and evaluate all overall
expectations prior to introducing anything outside of the curriculum.

The 1999 Guidance and Career Education Curriculum Guidelines open with a
brief introduction outlining the “place of guidance and career education in the
curriculum.” Picking up from the discussion and policy documents, the curriculum guide
explains that, “Guidance and career education plays a central role in the secondary
school by preparing students for a complex and changing world” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 2).
Once again, the key themes of preparation and a changing world surface as inspiration
for the course content. It is not certain how the guide defines work and workplace
practices, but it should be noted that the guide does define change. Most of the change
related to work involves occurrences and practices that place workers in precarious
positions of employment. For example, downsizing, business relocation, and
technological rationalization are topics at the forefront when introducing the subject of
workplace change. In each of these examples, the economic or workplace activity is
seen as natural and outside the control of human activity. In other words, the economic
and workplace actions listed above are presented by the guidelines as unstoppable forces to which workers must adapt.

This two-step style of presentation, outlining what exists and the strategies for coping and adaptation, forms the basis for the guide. Preparation seems to be defined in the introduction as a chance for students to acquaint themselves with the “modern economy,” set goals, and see the opportunities available in their career development. Students are expected to “acquire an understanding of the changing nature of work and workplaces, and gain insights into the challenges and opportunities offered by the modern economy” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 2). This is a common theme throughout the curriculum guide; students are expected to seize opportunities to better themselves, even if the workplace or economic change is deleterious to worker autonomy, development, and security. The guide recognizes that workers are often placed in precarious positions of employment, yet offers only strategies to improve labour marketability to remedy the problem. For example, the guide spells out the importance of learning employability skills as a way for students to increase their marketability to employers and uses the course as a springboard to acquiring these skills. In the introduction to the guide, the general purpose of the course reads:

This course teaches students how to develop and achieve personal goals in education and work and contribute to their communities. Student learning will include assessing their own knowledge, skills, and characteristics and investigating economic trends, workplace organization, work opportunities, and ways to search for work. (Ministry, 1999b, p. 13)
The introduction to Career Studies presents career development as a reactionary practice where economic determinism appears to underlay student development. Students are expected to develop their abilities and explore their interests, all the while keeping one eye on economic trends. In other words, students need to find out where their interests and abilities conform with current and future job markets.

The passage above also mentions that students need to contribute to their communities. Again, it is unlikely that the line refers to a collective wellbeing in the utopian/social democratic sense, as much of the skill acquisition is linked with CBOC employability skills that individuate students as future workers (Ministry, 1999b, p. 26). More likely, the curriculum guidelines refer to students as “contributing citizens” as a means of fuelling the national economy, thus melding capital’s interest with the national interest. Often presented interchangeably, the national interest for economic prosperity is viewed as synonymous to the general wellbeing of the populace, overlooking potential issues and problems that economic expansion can bring to the environment, communities, and workers. A key building block in any hegemonic project, the interests of the ruling bloc need to be tied to the national identity and be viewed as progressive actions for the betterment of the citizenry. The guideline goes on to state:

In both elementary and secondary programs, students acquire knowledge and skills that help them to become responsible and contributing members of communities, families, workplaces, and peer groups; to turn learning into a lifelong enterprise; and to create and prepare for futures that include *meaningful, productive roles* in work, personal life, and the community. (Ministry, 1999b, p. 3; italics added)
The above passage outlines the general philosophy behind career education and spells out the worth of student learning. Apart from the vague mention of learning for “personal life,” most of the learning students experience appears to serve others. The question remains, to what extent does the guideline expect student learning to serve communities in the sense of collective wellbeing (similar to a social democracy)? Or is there an emphasis on student learning that serves corporate and business interests as national interest, similar to Ronald Reagan’s trickle-down theory of economic prosperity. To answer these questions, the following section utilizes an analysis of the expectations for the course to come to an understanding of the specific content covered in Career Studies.

**Career Studies – Expectations**

As mentioned earlier, the three strands, *Personal Knowledge and Management Skills, Exploration of Opportunities, and Preparation for Transitions and Change*, all have overall and specific expectations for teachers to address in the classroom. In the first strand, *Personal Knowledge and Management Skills*, “students develop their ability to assess and describe their strengths and interests, and to use their knowledge of themselves to determine work and life goals” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 6). Again, the language from the preceding quote places students in a position to match their interests to workplace and labour-market demands. In the first overall expectation from this strand, students are expected to “demonstrate an understanding of and apply strategies needed for success in school” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 14). Discovering strategies for success in school and relating them to the workplace has the potential to place students
in a submissive and passive learning scenario. In effect, there is the potential that students could simply learn what skills and attributes are valued in schools and the workplace, but not understand why these characteristics are prized. Extending upon this theme, another specific expectation outlines potential for application of what is learned in the previous expectation and asks students to, “identify the skills they have developed through school subjects (e.g., literacy, numeracy, communication) and through community experiences and explain how these skills are transferable to work and other life roles” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 14). Further to this, students can explore how specific skills and attributes that lead to success in school can also be used in the workplace:

By the end of this course, students will:

- describe and explain the importance of personal management skills (e.g., organization skills, stress management), habits (e.g., maintaining a personal planner), and characteristics (e.g., adaptability) for success in school and other life roles
- demonstrate effective use of personal management skills (e.g., well-organized notebooks, punctuality). (Ministry, 1999b, p. 14; italics added)

In this final expectation, it is becoming apparent that adaptability traits and characteristics are valued in this course. Student success in their careers appears to be tied to their ability to conform to the demands of authority figures (first with teachers in the school system, then with employers in the work world).

In the second strand, Exploration of Opportunities, students will “learn about trends in the economy, workplaces, and local and global communities” (Ministry, 1999b,
As with other government reports and documents, the economy is seen as distinct, natural, and outside of the control of people, while at the same time viewed as a significant influence on the workplace. In this second strand, students are introduced to the ways the economy impacts work in its design and practice. In effect, the strand “identif(ies) and describe(s) economic and societal trends (e.g., globalization, developments in information technology, emerging work style alternatives, changing demographics)” (Ministry, 1999b, p.16) and makes it clear that these examples of economic and societal trends should be at the heart of career planning. The expectation continues to read: “(students will) demonstrate knowledge of selected occupations, including education/training requirements, duties, employment prospects, and the knowledge and skills valued by employers” (Ministry, 1999b, p.16; italics added). If any doubt is present as to the key influence on this course and career planning for students, it is quickly clarified by the final words in the above passage.

In the third overall expectation in this strand, there is mention of exploring workplace issues: “demonstrate knowledge of selected fields of work, occupations, and workplace issues” (Ministry, 1999b, p.16); however, the workplace issues do not deal with the workplace practices mentioned in the previous paragraph, but simply with issues of safety in the workplace. In effect, this exploration of workplace issues does not challenge existing workplace practices and works instead in the best interest of both employers and employees – owners keep one of their resources in play, while workers stay alive to work another day. Other than a brief mention of workplace safety, there appears to be no mention of collective rights for workers or ethical duties of employers to not exploit workers, not to mention the absence of higher order critical analyses of
current skill underutilization by employers. The exploration of workplace issues for this
course simply follows current legal standards expected of employers and misses the
history of labour movements and worker struggles that helped put in place basic labour
rights.

In the third strand, *Preparation for Transitions and Change*, students are
expected:

In their work… to *anticipate and respond to change*. They develop *knowledge*,
*skills*, and *strategies* that can smooth the transitions between different stages
and roles in life. They *prepare* themselves for postsecondary learning and for the
*challenge* of finding and creating work opportunities. They also develop their
ability to make *effective* decisions, set goals, plan, act on plans, and evaluate
and modify plans in *response* to changes. (Ministry, 1999b, p. 6; italics added)

By the third strand, it becomes obvious that adaptation is the key strategy for student
empowerment in career development, as recommended by the course guideline.

Students are expected to prepare and promote themselves for labour markets by
responding to and meeting the demands of employers. The specific expectation under
the title of *Managing Change* states that there are preferred strategies for dealing with
transition and change and asks students to, “identify changes taking place in their
personal lives, their communities, and the economy and identify strategies to make
transitions occur more smoothly” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 18). Extending upon this idea, the
specific expectation states: “By the end of this course students will identify *effective* and
*ineffective* ways of dealing with transitions and change” (Ministry, 1999b, p. 18; italics
added). The guide does not specify what these strategies could be, it is left for
interpretation; however, as we shall see in the next chapter, textbook authors’ interpretations make it clear that effective strategies align with corporate and business interests, while the ineffective strategies involve questioning, and at times, opposing and struggling against change.

*Revised Curriculum Guide (2006)*

With the revised curriculum guide, the setup for the course remains relatively unchanged. The same three strands exist, with very similar overall and specific expectations. As well, the general themes of the course remain the same, as similar career and workplace preparation strategies are valued (adaptation being the preferred strategy), entrepreneurship and self-employment are once again stressed, and the world of work is still viewed as volatile, unpredictable, and external to the control of people. What has changed with the course is the greater rigidity in allowed content, a greater emphasis on “critical thought” (something found in most other course guidelines), as well as more concrete wording and specific examples for the expectations of the course.

The assessment and evaluation plan for the course became more clearly defined in that students would now be evaluated for all of the overall expectations. This practice, in theory, would tie students’ final grades to the comprehension and acceptance of the overall expectations. “All curriculum expectations must be accounted for in instruction, but evaluation focuses on students’ achievement of the overall expectations” (Ministry, 2006a, p. 13). In effect, the leeway the classroom teachers may have had with the older curriculum guide was eroded as expectations were placed on
teachers to cover, assess, and evaluate all of the course content. Some movement was still allowed for teachers within the course guidelines, as it was still left to their discretion as to which specific expectations would receive more time and treatment in the course.

One of the learning strategies receiving greater attention in the revised curriculum guide was critical thinking. The guideline states in the section on Teaching Approaches: “Guidance and career education courses lend themselves to a wide range of approaches in that they require students to research, think critically, work cooperatively, discuss relevant issues, and learn through practice in a variety of settings” (Ministry, 2006a, p. 19; italics added). Adding to this, the document states: “The critical thinking and analytic skills acquired in guidance and career education will allow students to recognize barriers, biases, and stereotypes that may be exhibited in social interactions and in the workplace, and to develop the skills needed to deal with these situations effectively” (Ministry, 2006a, p. 23). On the surface, this appears to be a shocking shift in philosophy. However, upon closer examination of the expectations, there appears to be little opportunity for students to explore alternatives to current economic and workplace practices. This raises the question as to what exactly the “critical thinking” moments are for the course? Only unions and professional organizations are mentioned as current economic and workplace practices that have a sense of cooperative and collective action to counter current neo-liberal workplace and economic practices. However, what are normally rather loose and ambiguous expectations are now quite specific when referring to unions and professional organizations:

By the end of this course, students will:
• identify economic and societal trends (e.g., globalization, developments in information technology, the *changing role* of unions and professional organizations, outsourcing or “contracting out”, emerging work-style alternatives, self-employment, entrepreneurship, changing demographics) and explain how they influence available job opportunities and work environments. (Ministry, 2006a, p. 35; italics added)

It is not clear what is meant by the “changing role” of unions and professional organizations, but the expectation definitely sets up teachers to take the approach that unions have been weakened in Canada over the past 60 years, and with language such as “outsourcing or ‘contracting out’” it appears that the guide might also be referring to recent global agreements that have allowed large manufacturing firms to escape union employment by moving to countries with weaker labour laws. Noticeably absent from the curriculum are alternatives to current workplace and economic practices. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, critical thinking is impossible unless alternatives to current practices are introduced, explored, and evaluated so that choice and action are based on an informed decision. An absence of workplace and economic practices in a course on workplace and career preparation brings into doubt the sincerity and commitment to critical thought spelled out earlier in the guide. One can only assume that critical thought in Career Studies is nothing more than a surface assessment of personal skills, attitudes, and preferences and matching these traits to the labour market and economy.

Also within the specific expectations for the course, a key difference in the *managing change* expectation sheds the more ambiguous wording dealing with change
and simply states “(By the end of this course, students will:) identify positive ways of dealing with transitions and change” (Ministry, 2006a, p. 37; italics added). This new wording removes “effective and ineffective” and leaves less room to critically examine the processes and conditions surrounding change. Now students are expected to develop positive ways to deal with change, regardless of its personal impact. For example, job loss – either through outsourcing, downsizing, or corporate relocation – needs to be viewed in a positive way, perhaps as an opportunity to start a new career. Whether intended or not, it appears that the revised version of the guideline concretizes once abstract and grey curriculum matter.

As for the example above, there appears to be little confusion as to the direction teachers should take when dealing with adverse workplace and economic change. After all, not only does the new guide clarify the content of the course, it also places teachers in a position to deliver these expectations to meet the assessment and evaluation mandate of the course. As we shall see in Chapter 8, the changes to the revised curriculum can greatly impact what happens in the classroom.

**Summary**

The government documents outline the intentions of the course, stressing a career and workplace preparation program that does little to empower students as future workers. As a hegemonic project, the government documents and guides present current neo-liberal practices as fixed and natural in their occurrence, with little possibility for human agency influencing current workplace and economic practices. Instead, the documents urge for a curriculum on workplace preparation that promotes
strategies of adaptability and marketability for students to meet the demands of industry and business. The room for student agency in their career development exists primarily in areas of self-employment and entrepreneurship. Tying agency to these forms of employment once again tempers choice and workplace control with market demands. The curriculum presents little room to introduce economic and workplace alternatives and a form of collective agency (e.g., unionism) that could empower students in their future workplaces.

The curriculum documents follow two of the three requirements for any hegemonic project as spelled out by Michael Apple (see Chapter 4). First, as presented above, the ruling or dominant ideology surfaces out of the material conditions found in the economy and workplace. Tying strategies of career and workplace preparation to current economic conditions helps reify and entrench current practices as natural and expected, normalizing rather than problematizing unfair and inequitable labour and market conditions. Second, as a way to secure the ruling bloc’s interest as the popular interest, the dominant ideology must be passed off as the national interest. The Career Studies guides often make reference to serving the national interest through student workplace preparation. Prosperity and success for students are often tied to the international competitiveness of the national economy, while good citizenry is tied to productive participation in the workplace.

The third aspect of Apple’s conditions for a successful hegemonic project lies in the ability of the subordinated classes to participate in the reconstitution of the dominant ideology. The following two chapters will help determine the degree to which textbook
writers (primarily teachers) and Career Studies classroom teachers are active in perpetuating existing economic and workplace practices.
Chapter 7 – The Textbooks

In this chapter I will examine the approved-for-use classroom textbooks in the Grade 10 Career Studies course. A critical resource for students and teachers in their understanding of course content and expectations, as well as providing authors and publishers the opportunity to put into words the mandate of the course guideline, the textbooks provide a window into the specific content of the course. The textbooks provide concrete explanations and examples of rather vague and ambiguous expectations as outlined in the guideline, leaving little confusion regarding direction and expectations for the course. In essence, the textbooks provide a critical piece of the analysis as they represent the only resource utilized with consistency in all Ontario Career Studies classrooms.

This analysis of the Career Studies texts will examine the textbooks under three broad categories: Economic and Workplace Realities; Student Preparation; and Alternatives to Current Practices. These three themes best illustrate the content and potential for agency in student career and workplace preparation – effectively outlining the intent and expectations of Career Studies as a hegemonic project. Each topic will have subtopics of exploration that will examine the opportunities present for students to critically engage with concepts and practices of work and career preparation, as well as the possibilities for student empowerment in their career planning. The textbooks used in this analysis are Careers 10 (C10), Careers Today and Tomorrow (CTT), Career Studies 10 (CS10), and Horizons 2000+: Career Studies (H2000). The Career textbooks listed above were the only textbooks to appear on the Trillium List at the time
of the teacher interviews and content analysis of curricular documents. In 2009, a single text was introduced as the mandatory text for the course. In the conclusion of this thesis I will briefly touch upon some of the changes to the general themes and content present within the new text; otherwise, this study and specifically this chapter, will focus on the textbooks approved for use in the classroom available at the time of the teacher interviews. Prior to entering into the analysis of the textbooks, I will briefly touch upon the textbook approval process.

**Textbook Approval Process**

The list of government approved for-use-in-the-classroom textbooks, known as the Trillium List, replaced *Circular 14, 1995* in 2002. Any book used as the primary learning source in the classroom must appear on the Trillium List. Books on the Trillium List are updated yearly as some books are removed from the list while others are added. The decision for inclusion/exclusion is left to the Minister of Education. The renewal process is as follows:

Textbooks approved by means of the provincial evaluation process will normally be retained in The Trillium List for a period of five school years following the date of their initial listing. Textbooks removed from the list at the end of this period may be used for two school years following the year in which their listing expires. School boards will be responsible for ensuring that expired titles are not used as textbooks in their schools after this two-year period. (Ministry, 2006b, p. 5)

Career Studies originally had four books approved for use in the classroom, and these books were not replaced officially until 2009.
To be approved for use in the classroom, textbooks must:

i) support 85% of the expectations for the course;

ii) have Canadian content, examples, and references wherever possible;

iii) be of sound scholarship;

iv) (pay) attention to safe practices… (in) the portrayal of people in learning, working, and playing situations;

v) (have) content (that) reflects concepts of environmental responsibility (Ministry, 2006b, p. 9);

vi) (have) activities (that) provide opportunities for students to engage in higher-order thinking and problem solving; and

vii) …be free from racial, ethnocultural, religious, regional, gender-related, or age-related bias; bias based on disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomics background, occupation, political affiliation, or membership in a specific group; and bias by omission. (Ministry, 2006b, p. 10, italics added)

Several of the above criteria are troubling considering that the Career Studies guidelines, which form the framework and inform much of the content for the approved textbooks, lack the direction and room for many of the criteria to be met. For example, higher-order thought is difficult to achieve without the opportunity to explore alternatives and critically analyse existing workplace and economic practices. The criteria that the texts should be free from bias, including omission, also is difficult to achieve considering the guidelines clearly have a bias toward current neo-liberal economic and workplace practices and fail to include options for alternative approaches to work and economic organization. These glaring omissions in the guide also bring into question whether a
text could be of “sound scholarship” if it is based primarily on egregious conclusions that current workplace and economic practices lay outside of the control of human activity. As we shall see in the analysis of the approved texts, the first criteria for approval is aptly met, as much of the content is framed by and clearly limited to what is spelled out in the curriculum document.

**The Approved Textbooks**

Although the general order of textbooks places student exploration of skills and interests first, and then introduces versions of current and future workplace and economic realities, I decided for this analysis to switch the order of these topics. As mentioned earlier, the primary reason for this order is simply due to issues of readability. In order to refer to student preparation strategies, it is necessary to first outline what the textbooks deem to be the material conditions that inform these decisions. Essentially, the analysis follows the general philosophy of the course as spelled out in the curriculum guidelines – that students should plan for their future with one eye on their interests and the other on the economy. What becomes problematic with a presentation of findings that place student planning first followed by the material conditions of the workplace and economy is the potential for confusion to arise regarding the meanings of current workplace and economic “realities.” With the economy and current workplace practices having a heavy influence on the decisions expected of students in their career planning, I thought it would be prudent to first fully explore and define the “realities” that inform, shape, and transform the choices of
Career Studies students, and then turn to the expected strategies for students in their career development.

This section will look at workplace and economic realities under three main topics, with each topic having subtopics for exploration. The first topic, *Workplace and the Economy*, will examine how the textbooks treat the topic of work and the economy, specifically current workplace and economic practices, as well as workplace and economic change. These topics, in essence, frame the course and inform students of parameters for their career selection and development. The second topic, *Student Preparation*, is an analysis of the best practices outlined in the textbooks for career development and student empowerment, in light of the conditions and “realities” set forth in the section on work and the economy. Finally, the third section of analysis will focus on the alternative modes of work and economic organization presented in the textbook. Subtopics in this section will examine current workplace alternatives presented in the textbooks, as well as workers’ rights and the options for collective empowerment.

*Workplace and the Economy*

*Current Workplace and Economic Practices*

It appears the textbooks pick up where the curriculum documents left off on the topic of work and the economy. For all of the textbooks, three key elements appear at the root of workplace and economic practice: 1) the economy and workplace are volatile and unpredictable; 2) changes in the economy and workplace are “natural”; and 3) turning back these changes is next to impossible, if not impractical or even undesirable. For example, all of the textbooks hint that the nine-to-five job is something that is facing
extinction. As a replacement for the predictability and security of full-time employment, the textbooks present current workplace “realities” as alternatives that often marginalize and disempower workers. All of the textbooks have a chart that juxtaposes current workplace realities with what the authors view as emerging workplace trends. Below are examples of two of those lists:

Table 1. The New Workplace (C10, p. 177)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Experiences of the Past</th>
<th>Workplace Realities Today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work until retirement (company loyalty)</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship (independence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs outlined by management</td>
<td>Work done in self-pacing teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seniority increases job security</td>
<td>Employability and transferable skills increase job security (no guarantees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12 education</td>
<td>Lifelong learning, upgrading/updating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specializing</td>
<td>Multi-tasking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large companies offer fastest track to success</td>
<td>Small offer fastest growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Nine to five” hours</td>
<td>Flexible hours, including alternative work styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional occupations most appealing</td>
<td>Non-traditional occupations most appealing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Predictions About the New Workplace (CS10, p. 147)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>New Workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job that you keep for life</td>
<td>6 to 8 major changes in a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictable salary with benefits and pension</td>
<td>Temporary and contract work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical structure</td>
<td>Project based structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger organizations with thousands of employees</td>
<td>Smaller organizations with specialty focuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 5 schedule, with predictability and routine</td>
<td>Flexible schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Special skills required

Transferable skills required

Services like answering phones and typing provided by support staff

Each person handles most of own services – voice mail, e-mail, word processing

Education first, then work

Lifelong learning

Work for someone else

Work as an independent contractor, consultant or entrepreneur

Most jobs in manufacturing and mass production

Most jobs in information technology and the service industry

All of the textbooks present workplace change ahistorically, choosing to focus instead on ways to prepare students for these changes. The Careers 10 textbook suggests to students that “because the way we work has changed,” they “must market (them)selves” and “set (their) goals and make (their) decisions” in accordance with the “New Economy” (C10, p. 177). In the textbooks there is no mention of reversing these trends, understanding these trends as social constructions, or explaining the power dynamics that give rise to and sustain these workplace and economic trends, not to mention the disparities in benefits derived from these practices.

In most instances, changes in the economy or workplace that would be considered disadvantageous or detrimental to workers in terms of their market leverage for better wages, working conditions, and control over their work, are presented as a “reality” of the new world of work that must be dealt with in an “employer friendly” way. For example, C10 presents a story that not only makes it seem absurd to expect permanent full-time employment, but presents precarious employment as advantageous to workers. In the story “The Permanent Cat,” a cat that is no longer wanted by his owner is placed out on the street. Effectively, the cat performed his job so well by killing all of the mice in the house that he has made his position within the household
redundant. Not needing the cat’s services any longer, the owner puts him out on the street with only a recommendation “rolled into his collar” (C10, p. 175). The similarities to employment in North America’s manufacturing and technology industries are clearly present in the story, and are assumed to be intentional. However, the lesson of the story is not to warn students to be leery of greedy employers; rather, the story suggests that workers should not expect job security, no matter how well they perform their jobs.

The story continues in an alley with the displaced cat encountering another cat that gives him this piece of advice: “Well, Mr. Tibbs, you’re a fine cat. I can see that. But if you want to survive you’re going to have to take a little walk on the wild side. Let go of all that permanent stuff. Follow me. I’ll show you how to make the transition” (p. 175). Mr. Tibbs, the cat that was dismissed by his owner, is presented by the text to be at fault for his situation because he “unrealistically” expected job security. The story concludes with Mr. Tibbs accepting the new workplace “realities” and offering himself to potential employers as a “contract” worker. The cat successfully finds a new owner and is happy in his new surroundings.

At the very end of the story, the author places a twist on the loss of permanent employment and makes it seem as though it is more advantageous for the worker to be in a contract position. In order to secure employment, Mr. Tibbs promises his potential employer that job security would not be an issue as placement back on the street would be of no consequence, simply because the cat is aware of the temporary nature of the work. “And because I am completely independent, I will have no trouble surviving if you have to put me back out on the street. I will also return to the street if I am unhappy in your home” (p. 176). The story ends with the line: “He loved the old man, and his love
was permanent – though he never forgot he wasn’t a permanent cat” (p. 176). The story highlights a common theme of all the textbooks – instead of assuming or expecting employers to yield to the demands of workers, workers must be flexible and adaptable to the needs of their employer. In effect, the textbooks take the approach of selling job insecurity as a chance for workers to act as free agents in the marketplace. The flexibility and adaptability that is prized and desired by employers is seen as a virtue for workers, especially if they wish to see success in their careers. Of course, all of this obfuscates the reader and presents the precarious and often detrimental aspects of part-time or contract work as opportunities for control and career development. As we shall see, this strategy of presenting reality through rose-coloured glasses is persistent throughout all of the textbooks, paving the way for greater acceptance of current neo-liberal strategies in workplace rationalization and economic reforms.

**Workplace Change**

Much of the workplace change mentioned in the texts relates to economic events such as globalization, technology and the burgeoning “knowledge economy,” as well as liberalized trade agreements between nations. For example, in Careers 10, the authors spell out some of the dominant economic practices influencing work through a whimsical comparison of what they term “megatrends” to dance trends. Below are two examples of the “megatrends” affecting the workplace:

- The Globalization Jig. Borders are disappearing as trade agreements and communications unite people on every continent. Technology helps us access foreign markets like never before.
- The Service Sector Swing. Incredible growth is happening within a category of workers that was once limited to low-paid cashiers, clerks and salespeople.

Today, the service sector includes knowledge and information based occupations, as well as those in health and education. (C10, p. 155)

In these two “megatrends,” C10 looks at globalization and a shift to the service sector in a positive light and stresses that these events could lead to great things for the student. Unfortunately, a delivery of these economic events in this manner glosses over the devastating impact in the workplace brought about by shifts toward liberalized global markets and diminishing demand for labour in the manufacturing sector. This positive spin on globalization also appears in CS10:

But as Canadian business and entrepreneurs met the challenge of the new economy, new employment opportunities opened up. What was becoming clear was that the new workplace was unfamiliar to the average Canadian. New, well-paying jobs demanded workers who had a broad educational background and who were highly skilled, people who could work as team members, be flexible, and take part in creative decision making. (CS10, p. 143)

Note, in this passage, the textbook informs students that globalization provides high-paying jobs to those workers with “broad educational backgrounds.” In this instance, the textbook chooses to focus on the opportunities for the relatively few workers who can use their knowledge and skill base to exploit markets abroad, yet they ignore the many who suffer globally from unfair and troubling labour practices. As well, the textbook sets up the victim to be blamed for an inability to “compete” in the global
market, yet ignores the self-interest of businesses to relocate where labour is cheap and powerless.

Three of the four textbooks (CS10, p. 143; H2000, p. 123; CTT, p. 157) do cite a downside to globalization and the liberalization of economic borders. The downside of greatest concern is the potential job loss for Canadians. However, it should be noted that the warnings in the textbooks are brief, a paragraph or less, and are rebutted with arguments on the “potential” for success in the new economy. For example, Careers 10 quickly rebukes the potential for job loss from globalization by pointing out the potential for job creation. “Globalization may mean the end of work as we know it, but just think of the possibilities that are opening up” (C10, p. 172). CS10 writes: “The new flattened-out, dejobbed world that’s coming is less secure. But there is also more opportunity. More than ever, the emphasis is on building and starting your own career” (p. 147; italics added). It is never made clear what the opportunities for career success may be, and it is not made clear as to why liberalized trade borders would lead to success. Instead, it is just presented as “fact” that opportunities will present themselves and that students should be aware of them when developing their careers.

Another common changing workplace reality is the effect technology has had upon both the type of work available and the way that work is performed. Again, the textbooks mostly look at how technology has positively influenced work by creating a technology sector for employment and how technology has made work more efficient and easier. However, when a downside to technological change is mentioned, it is once again brief and quickly rebutted with an example of career opportunity. Horizons 2000+ the textbook presents some thoughts on technological change in the workplace:
Technology has had an impact on the workplace in other ways as well. Robotics has caused many traditional factory workers to be replaced by machines. Traditional office workers, such as receptionists and secretaries, have also been replaced. Companies have downsized, or reduced the number of employees, as a result. The challenge for young people today is to choose growth careers in the field of technology and to use technology to their advantage. (H2000, p. 122)

Despite presenting several examples of where technology has led to workplace rationalizations, redundancies, and layoffs, the textbook presents technology as an avenue for positive change and career development. The material conditions and power relations that brought about layoffs in these industries are ignored, as the technology itself is presented as an independent practice that arrived almost on its own to alter the way humans are employed in the workplace. In fact, technology is humanized to the point that one text makes the claim that “changing technologies will demand that workers continuously upgrade their skills through ongoing education and training” (CS10, pp. 22-23).

Decontextualizing workplace and economic change from the material conditions that both give rise to and are impacted by change was common among all of the texts on a variety of topics. For example, an economic event such as the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is simply viewed as having an impact on work, with little understanding of the political and social arrangements that brought about the agreement. CTT brings to light that “the Free Trade Agreement, an economic breakthrough, has also had a large impact on the workplace” (CTT, p. 155). Missing from this general statement are the conditions that brought free trade to North America,
an understanding of who benefits and who may be disadvantaged, as well as the political nature of the agreement. Instead, the textbook dubs the agreement as “an economic breakthrough,” with little explanation as to why it is a positive influence on the way work is performed.

**Student Preparation**

**Dealing with Change**

Workplace and economic change are present in all of the textbooks. In fact, the changing world of work is the common thread that ties these texts and the course curriculum document together. The texts deal with the changing nature of work as an obstacle for students to overcome in their career planning. As mentioned earlier, the texts stress the importance of looking for opportunities in change and, more importantly, seem to stress individual action over collective action in dealing with deleterious forms of workplace and economic change. Two of the textbooks go so far as to stress the need for students to develop adaptability skills in everyday life by explicitly stating the desirable actions for the student to take when facing change. C10 and CS10 present an expected set of behaviours that stress adaptability over confrontation, presenting charts to demonstrate both “effective” and “ineffective” ways of dealing with change.

The charts read as follows:

**Table 3. Effective and Ineffective Change** (C10, p. 149)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective ways of dealing with transition and change</th>
<th>Ineffective ways of dealing with transition and change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I find change exciting</td>
<td>I find change frightening/threatening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can be flexible/adaptable</td>
<td>I can be a stick-in-the-mud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can be proactive/look ahead</td>
<td>I can be resistant/stuck in the past</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I can accept/embrace uncertainty | I deal with uncertainty by denying its existence
I can seize the opportunity | I focus on the threat/worst-case scenario
I take responsibility | I refuse/avoid responsibility
I talk to people about the positive and negative sides of change | I don't communicate my feelings of concern/anger/frustration
I stay in tune with progress | I reject/distance myself from progress
I feel positive about change | I feel helpless in the face of change
I take care of myself physically | I experience/ignore physical signs of stress

Table 4. Dealing With Change (CS10, p. 138)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Ways</th>
<th>Ineffective Ways</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look at the positives involved</td>
<td>Focus only on the negatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept what is happening</td>
<td>Be in denial and refuse to accept the reality of what is happening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about your concerns with family and trusted friends</td>
<td>Worry excessively and keep all your feelings inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set new goals</td>
<td>Make no realistic plans for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take care of yourself to deal with the stress of change: eat well, sleep well, exercise</td>
<td>Neglect yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to focus on future opportunities</td>
<td>Keep focussing on the good old days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay informed about the world around you</td>
<td>Ignore information that may help you prepare for change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As discussed in the chapter on government documents, the curriculum document presents adaptability as a key attribute for students to possess when developing a career. The textbooks seem to be making every effort to extend this point explicitly and state that rigidity and resistance are traits that should be muted at all times. CS10 employs this logic and demonstrates this point with an analogy of the near extinction of the panda and the proliferation of the raccoon:
If you remain open to new ideas, it will be easier to handle changes in your life. You’ll find that change can work for you, instead of against you.

Think of the giant panda. It only eats one kind of food (bamboo shoots), and only lives in one environment (the rainy mountainsides of southern China), so it’s very vulnerable to change. It’s not resilient.

Then think of the raccoon. It’s clever, inquisitive, adaptable. It can eat almost anything and get along in most environments. If the world changes, it will adapt. It’s very resilient. (CS10, p. 26)

The comparison between the animals is troubling at best, but the analogous example does point to a preference for “flexibility” and “adaptability” over “rigidity” in career planning. The story illustrates that the “flexibility” and “adaptability” of the raccoon sets it apart from other animals such as the giant panda and allows for the sustainability and proliferation of its species, even in the face of a changing environment. However, the “flexibility” and “adaptability” represents only a portion of why the raccoon exists in great numbers in our cities and why the giant panda edges toward extinction. The textbook glosses over the environmental degradation, interactions with humans, and abilities to reproduce in large numbers, as reasons explaining the differences in sustainability among the two animals. Instead, the textbook points to the raccoon’s ability to “eat almost anything” as a good trait to possess. As well, the textbook points to the relatively healthy and discriminating diet of the giant panda, unlike the raccoon, which will eat human garbage, as the downfall of the species. It almost seems as though a key fault of the giant panda is its inability to live in a symbiotic relationship with humans.

Extending this analogy to career planning, the implication would seem to be that
students in their career planning should learn to be “flexible” and “adaptable” to employers’ demands or else face extinction.

On the same page, CS10 presents students with a chart to complete entitled, “Making Change Work for You” (p. 26). Students are expected to read and react to the change presented in the left column. The table reads as follows:

Table 5. Making Change Work for You (CS10, p. 26)
For each change in this list, think of positive opportunities that could result.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Possible Life or Work Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You graduate from high school</td>
<td>e.g., A chance to get out into the world and try my skills in new ways – a job, apprenticeship, college or university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You decide to leave home and get your own apartment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You get your first full-time job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You find out that your company has been bought out, and your job is gone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your boss gets another job, and you don’t like the person who’s taken her place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last two scenarios present complicated and confusing options for “positive opportunities” in career planning. Both of these scenarios place students in a position where job security and/or satisfaction are gone. The “job loss” and “unhappy work environment” scenarios are presented with the expectation that students will adapt and actually come out with a positive opportunity. Although not explicitly stated, the preferred strategy for the student would involve some form of job change or a different career direction. It is certainly obvious in the “job-loss” scenario that individual action is
preferred to collective action, as the scenario states “your job is gone” rather than “many” or “all” of your colleagues’ jobs are gone. The scenario directs the student toward a position of individual acceptance and action for the career change. On first read, it is difficult to see the opportunities for collective action as students are placed in a reactive position to deal with the unfortunate situation. Similarly, the final scenario directs students toward individual action as the disagreeable workplace relationship is presented as a conflict between two people. In both scenarios, little room is given for students to be critical of workplace practices that leave many workers powerless to accept undesirable work conditions. Considering this chart appears on the same page as the raccoon and giant panda story mentioned earlier, it appears the chart and subsequent exercise is guiding students to adopt the approach of “flexibility” and “adaptability” in their career planning, with a preference for individual action that works in concert with existing hierarchical workplace and economic relations.

C10 also prepares students to be accepting of change, regardless of outcome, through a series of questions that “rate the student’s ability to change” (C10, p. 150). For this exercise, students are presented nine multiple-choice questions with each answer corresponding to a numeric value to arrive at a “final score.” If a student scores high on the questionnaire, it indicates that he or she is “charged for change,” while a low score indicates that the student is “naturally negative.” Rather than reproduce the entire questionnaire, I chose the two questions that provided the most intriguing and conflicting set of possible answers for students to select:
1. You have been baby-sitting the same neighbour’s kids for two years. Your new next-door neighbour offers you an after-school job for $2 more an hour than your current client. You:

a) Accept the job; you could use the money
b) Stay with the job you have now because it’s a sure thing and you feel comfortable with the kids
c) Make sure the job will last longer than the holiday rush before you accept it

2. Your parents are separated but they live in the same neighbourhood. You reside with your mom during school and your dad in the summer. Your dad is being transferred to Vancouver. You:

a) Feel frustrated that your parents don’t get back together
b) Jump at the chance to move to Vancouver also
c) Arrange to spend the summers and some holidays visiting in Vancouver

(C10, p. 150)

In question one, the preferred answer is “a,” while “b” is the answer to avoid. It is interesting to note that loyalty is seen as a negative attribute, while greed, for lack of a better word, is seen as a positive attribute. For question two, “b” is the preferred answer, while “a” is the answer to avoid. In this example, natural emotions related to changes in the family dynamic that children feel at having their parents separated are dismissed. Instead, students are expected to view the relocation and distancing of parents, as well as the personal uprooting of the child from his or her community as an “opportunity” to live in a new place. Students reluctant to move from friends and family, or simply possessing a disliking of the city of Vancouver, are directed to believe that
they are “naturally negative,” certainly unflattering words for students willing to stick to their beliefs, morals, and preferences. Although not explicitly stated, the theme of “effectively dealing with change” certainly places preferences on individual actions that conform to existing workplace and economic practices. Doing so leaves little room to explore collective strategies as viable options to confront and control workplace change as a pathway toward career success. As we shall see in the next section, rather than collective empowerment, the “right attitude,” as outlined in the textbooks, is critical for students to succeed in their career planning.

Desirable Traits

As outlined in the previous section, the textbooks stress adaptability as the ideal and expected strategy for students to keep in mind when planning their careers. Adding to this attribute, the textbooks delve further into career success through a presentation of desirable traits and attitudes students should also keep in mind for career success. One of the texts, CTT, goes so far as to present a list, such as the ones cited earlier to demonstrate that in order to “succeed” in life students need to possess the “right” attitude. Students are advised to change their attitude to one that is more accepting of the “harsh realities” of life. Similarly, all the textbooks stress the importance of having a positive outlook on life in order to build a “successful” career. In CTT, the textbook notes that “highly successful people expect good things to happen to them” (p. 40), and adds a checklist that outlines key steps to achieve a positive attitude:

1. Think positively – Expect success
2. Accept compliments – Say “Thanks”
3. Accept Responsibility – For your successful actions and acknowledge and learn from your failures
4. Identify your skills – The ones that lead to success
5. Reward yourself – Celebrate your success. (p. 40)

This list varies from the earlier lists in that the general language provides greater room for interpretation and subsequent actions. However, the list above has one troubling recommendation. The third point dealing with “responsibility” sets up students to act in isolation and places the onus for “success,” as well as “failure,” squarely on the shoulders of students. This way of presenting “success” and “failure” ignores some of the structural and external factors that have an impact on student success. For example, many employment obstacles related to gender and race are not accounted for in this list. Instead, it could be implied that the “failures” that many marginalized groups experience in their career planning is a function of attitude and a reluctance to take responsibility for failed actions.

C10 also uses a survey to rate students’ attitudes. The survey is comprised of 12 questions asking students to agree, mostly agree, or not agree with the question as it pertains to their own lives. Agreeing with the question results in a score of 3, mostly agreeing with the statement results in a score of 2, while not agreeing with the statement scores 1 point for the student. At the end of the survey the scores are summed to reveal the degree to which the student is “positively charged.” A high score indicates the student is “positively charged,” while a low score means the student is “mostly negative” (p. 105). The questions read as follows:

1. Am I friendly?
2. Do I refrain from complaining a lot?
3. Do I control my temper?
4. Do I feel well most of the time?
5. Do I keep my promises?
6. Do I readily admit my mistakes?
7. Can I be optimistic when others are disheartened?
8. Do I have a sense of duty and responsibility?
9. Do I speak well of my teacher, coach, employer?
10. Do I follow directions willingly and ask questions when necessary?
11. Do I organize my work and keep up with it?
12. Is it easy for me to see the positive qualities in most people? (p. 105)

Students with scores below 20 points are deemed to have a “mostly negative attitude,” and are advised that they are “not taking responsibility for (their) actions” (p. 105). Once again, a “blame the victim” approach to career planning surfaces as students who do not “speak well of their teacher” or do not “follow directions willingly” are faulted for having a negative attitude. A “positive” attitude, according to this textbook, requires students to demonstrate deference to authority, accept individual responsibility for career setbacks, be optimistic at all times, and refrain from complaining. In effect, a “positive” attitude entails students be passive and agreeable, especially to existing hierarchical structures both within their school and, if applicable, their workplace. Extending the general principles related to a “positive” attitude to the career-planning process, it becomes evident that attitudinal surveys, such as the one above, are setting the stage for students to adjust their mindset to meet the demands of employers.
The twinning of deference to the employer with a “positive” attitude is also delivered in CS10. The textbook cites resilience, adaptability, and self-confidence as “key attitudes” for students to possess if they are to have “success in any endeavour” (p. 229). The textbook illustrates this message with stories of people who persevered through adversity to achieve the success they have today. For example, CS10 uses a story from TV personality Pamela Wallin to demonstrate how unpleasant life experiences positively shape personal character. Wallin writes about her work experiences, and uses an incident from her youth when she was employed as a baker’s assistant. It reads as follows:

The head baker was an especially gruff man, fond of yelling at us younger workers. “Hurry up!” he would bellow as I was scrubbing a muffin pan caked with burned-on batter. “We haven’t got all day.” Nothing I did, it seemed, was good enough for him.

Once, when I dropped a dozen loaves I was taking from the oven, he reduced me to tears with his shouting. But I didn’t quit. I took my lumps, and I learned an important lesson in the process: No matter how well you think you do your job, there is room for criticism. (p. 230)

A rather troubling incident of worker abuse, Wallin’s story delivers a message that students should be prepared to take criticism from others, constructive or negative, in a positive way. This extreme case is intended to demonstrate that the “right” attitude can make the difference in career development. Once again, it appears that the “right” attitude involves deference to authority and the resilience to handle abuse and mistreatment in a “positive” way. The author fails to note the unacceptable treatment of
workers at the hands of Wallin’s employer, nor does he use the story as a springboard to explore issues of workers’ rights. Instead, the message from the story is that students need to develop the “right” attitude for success in the workplace and adapt to, rather than change, the unpleasant aspects of work.

All of the textbooks stress the importance of applying the right attitude in school as the first step to acquiring the right attitude for the workplace. In the “school skills” section of the textbooks, the general advice students receive for success in school extends, for the most part, to success in work. The key attitudinal traits for school success, as presented in the texts, are perseverance, optimism, and a positive attitude. The textbooks dispense advice for improving student performance in note taking, tests, exams, and general study (C10, pp. 14 – 16, 18 – 21; H2000, pp. 64, 66, 74 – 76; CTT, pp. 12 – 15). For example, CTT explains the importance of developing “better learning skills” for school success:

Students sometimes think that the reason that their classmates do better in school is because they are smarter. To some extent, natural ability does play a role in success in any field – art, music, sports, and academics. However, there are other factors that may be just as critical. In fact, smart students are not necessarily smarter than their classmates but they have developed better learning skills and strategies that are more effective. And they have a positive attitude about school and learning. (p. 12)

The other textbooks are in accord with the main principles outlined above and stress that students can achieve success in school if they pay attention in class, are neat with their notes, review the material frequently, and are relaxed when taking tests and
exams. Once again, success and failure are presented as products of individual action and are not related in any way to social relations of power. The statements above gloss over the potential obstacles that marginalized groups face in school success. Instead, just as was done with workplace and career development, success in school is presented in the textbooks as the product solely of “hard work” and negates the impact of social influences and structural arrangements, such as gender and race.

As a general rule, the textbooks stress the need for students to be organized in their daily lives if they wish to experience success in school. Each textbook utilizes either a chart or a list explaining positive work habits that lead to success in school. H2000 provides a list of eight tips for achieving classroom success:

1. Go to every class and be there on time.
2. Take a notebook, textbooks, planner, or organizer, and other required materials to class and be sure to copy down important notes and assignments. Record any homework assignments before you leave the classroom.
3. Take careful notes. Details matter. You might not remember later. Underline or highlight important points.
4. Listen carefully. Respond to questions. Sit near the front if you are easily distracted.
5. Ask questions if you need clarification on an issue. Ask for extra help after school if you need it.
6. Participate actively in class. Share your views. Be positive.
7. Find someone (a study buddy) in each class who will agree to share
   information with you and pass on homework assignments if you are absent.
   Get your study buddy’s phone number.

8. Complete your homework each day. (p. 63)

The textbook stresses that students should follow a regimented agenda that meets the
demands of the school in order to achieve scholastic success. No explanation is given
as to why these strategies are important for students, outside of the practical and
relational aspect to better grades. In effect, current scholastic practices, especially
those for rote learning, are left unquestioned, leaving little room for a critical
understanding of why these attributes lead to success in school.

Two other textbooks, C10 (pp. 12 – 13) and CS10 (pp. 80 – 81), move away from
more generic study habits and utilize Sean Covey’s work, The 7 Habits of Highly
Effective People, to exemplify “positive work habits” (CS10, p. 80). A list of 10 “work
habits of effective people” is presented in CS and reads as follows:

1. Don’t procrastinate
2. Keep a positive attitude
3. Don’t think the worst
4. Set clear goals
5. Set priorities
6. Break tasks into manageable chunks
7. Get organized before you start
8. Commit yourself to doing the task
9. Remind yourself
10. Reward yourself (p. 81)

CS10 builds upon the list above and stresses that students should make a habit of task completion in order to make it a “positive habit”:

Try this: Do whatever task you have set for yourself as if you really like doing it. That’s right, pretend; act the part. If you can do that for ten minutes you will probably find that you don’t dislike the activity as much, even if you really didn’t want to do it in the first place. Try it. You will probably surprise yourself. Before long, it will become a habit and you will just do it. No big deal, but a big payoff! (p. 81)

This passage implies that students should, out of habit, complete what is asked of them, even if they find the experience unpleasant. CS10, like the other textbooks, is hoping students develop these “habits” so they become automatic, even if they run counter to the student’s way of thinking. This approach to task completion leaves little room for students to critically assess the worth and value of their work practices. In effect, there is a real possibility of worker alienation and disempowerment if students enter into work relations with a passive and accepting attitude to whatever task is put before them.

The “habit-forming” approach mentioned above is found in all textbooks, especially when referring to personal and time-management strategies (C10, pp. 12 – 13; H2000, p. 74; CTT, p. 44; CS10, pp. 73 – 75). In this case, the “habit” students must develop relates to the ordering of daily tasks, specifically which tasks are “important” and which tasks can wait for later or be avoided. All of the textbooks cite “important” tasks as those related to school, while the least important tasks are social experiences with friends and family. In effect, a hierarchy is established where students
must complete school activities first, and then (if there is time) participate in “relevant” social activities. By “relevant,” it is implied that social activities that would advance a scholastic career (such as school clubs or volunteering) are of greater importance than other social activities such as spending time with friends or watching television. If we extend school to the workplace, as is so often done in the textbooks, this hierarchical approach to task completion appears to be setting students up to prioritize their work lives over their social and family lives.

Attached to the somewhat harsh prioritization of work and personal life, students are bluntly warned in one textbook (CTT) of the “realities” of life and presented a list of rules for graduates taken from Charles Sykes’ book, *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can’t Read, Write, or Add*. The list, similar to the previous advice on prioritization, is intended to inform students of the difficulties in life. It reads as follows:

1. Life is not fair, get used to it.
2. The world won’t care about your self-esteem. The world will accomplish something before you feel good about yourself.
3. You will not make 40 thousand dollars a year right out of high school. You won’t be a vice-president with a car phone until you “earn” both.
4. If you think that your teacher is tough, wait until you get a boss. He doesn’t have tenure.
5. Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger-flipping; they called it opportunity.
6. If you screw up, it’s not your parents’ fault so don’t whine about your mistakes. Learn from them.

7. Before you were born, your parents weren’t as boring as they are now. They got that way paying your bills, cleaning your room, and listening to you tell them how idealistic you are. So before you save the rain forest from the blood-sucking parasites of your parents’ generation, try delousing the closet in your own room.

8. Your school may have done away with winners and losers but life has not. In some schools they have abolished failing grades, they’ll give you as many times as you want to get the right answer. This, of course bears not the slightest resemblance to anything in real life.

9. Life is not divided into semesters. You don’t get summers off, and very few employers are interested in helping you find yourself. Do that on your own time.

10. Television is not real life. In real life, people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.

11. Be nice to nerds. Chances are you’ll end up working for one. (CTT, p. 34)

The list is not intended to be humorous, rather it is delivered with frankness and honesty to assist students with their career planning. The “tough love” approach behind this lesson is intended to inform students of “realistic” career expectations so that they may avoid career-planning traps related to idealistic and impractical thinking. The harsh language used in the list highlights the intended severity of the warning and paints a bleak picture of school-to-work transitions. As well, the list removes human agency
from workplace and economic practices and chooses to not deliver options for student
control and empowerment and to not provide advice for challenging these “realities.”
Instead, as is done throughout all of the textbooks, strategies of adaptation are
presented – even in cases where life and workplace situations are deemed to be cruel
and unfair to students as future workers.

The list is included in a chapter entitled “The Future Is Not What It Used To Be,”
and is part of the general philosophy that students who “fail” in life have only themselves
to blame. Although the textbook delivers a message that life is difficult, harsh at times,
and unfair, it is the fault of students if they choose not to adapt to these realities.
Strangely enough, the same textbook utilizes Robert Fulghum’s “All I Ever Needed to
Know, I Learned in Kindergarten” poster in the following chapter (CTT, p. 38). Instead
of using Fulghum’s work to demonstrate that kindergarten was where we learned simple
yet important lessons in life, such as sharing and caring for others, the text co-opts the
general feelings of the poster to deliver yet another situation where we utilize personal
management skills.

It is worth reiterating here the strong connection textbooks make between
success in school and in the workplace. Starting with general attitudinal traits desired
for career success, the textbooks point to specific skills learned in school to make the
connections to specific skill sets demanded by employers. It should be noted here that
the course is delivered to students who, for the most part, have not been employed and
are being introduced to the expected practices of work. In order to bridge the gap
between experience and knowledge, the textbooks spend considerable time relating
school practices to work practices. In effect, this accomplishes two things. First, as
mentioned earlier, it gives students who may not have ever had a job a window into the workplace. Second, and possibly more importantly, connections are made between school and work, emphasizing the worth in what is done by students at school. The hierarchical relations of schooling, the everyday practices related to the production and presentation of knowledge, as well as the deference to authority are presented as practical and relevant comparisons to work life, and are especially pertinent to planning for entry into the world of work. Many of the textbooks choose to match school skills to what employers desire from their workers, forming the basis for learning certain skills in school. In effect, the workplace is dictating what the textbooks consider to be desirable school skills. For example, H2000 states explicitly the importance of contributions from the Conference Board of Canada (CBOC) to the development and delivery of materials found in the textbook. The introduction of H2000 presents *A Note From the Conference Board of Canada*:


*Kurtis G. Kitagawa, Research Associate and Manager, Employability Skills Forum, The Conference Board of Canada, May 2000.* (p. xii)
The authors are forthright with their admission that the textbook is heavily influenced by the work of the CBOC, particularly the *Employability Skills Profile* and the publication, *Science Literacy for the World of Work*. Later in the textbook, H2000 uses the Conference Board of Canada’s Corporate Council on Education’s Employability Skills 2000+ chart to help establish important skills for employability. It is apparent in this example that the connection between work and school is one that favours corporate and employer-driven skills as essential, and positions schools to react to labour-market trends in their Career Studies courses. As well, blatant connections are made between work and school, with an emphasis on establishing school routines that will empower employers and place workers in subordinate positions.

Similar to the example presented in H2000, all of the other textbooks stress the importance of matching school skills to the skills desired in the workplace. In Chapter 2 of CTT, there is a section entitled “Skills Required by Employers” (pp. 20 – 21) that outlines employers’ demands for employees, meshing together the Conference Board of Canada’s, Motorola Canada’s, and The Business Council of British Columbia’s list of positive worker attributes. The textbook stresses “these are the first skills that you should focus on as they are probably the most important to acquire” (p. 20). Later in the chapter, CTT returns to the *Employability Skills Profile* from the CBOC to highlight the academic, personal management, and teamwork skills desired by employers (p. 37). Once again, it appears that the desires of the business community are directly influencing the curriculum for the course.
Similarly, C10 utilizes the CBOC’s *Employability Skills Profile* to highlight what employers want from their workers. The list includes five broad personal-management strategies:

1. Demonstrate Positive Attitudes and Behaviours
2. Be Responsible
3. Be Adaptable
4. Learn Continuously
5. Work Safely (p. 64)

The textbook points to a “lack of personal management skills (as) the number one reason Canadians lose their jobs” (p. 64). The textbook sends a stern warning to students that failure to abide by the principles laid out above could lead to job loss in the future.

Finally, CS10 utilizes the Conference Board of Canada’s *Employability Skills Profile* to emphasize the skills students need to possess for success in their career planning (pp. 65 – 66). CS10 utilizes a chart divided into three skill sets that can be developed in school. The sections of the chart relate to academic, personal management, and teamwork skills and are all introduced with the line, “Canadian Employers need a person who can…” (p. 66). If there was any doubt as to the intent of the chart, CS10 explains on the following page that “there’s a strong relationship between the skills you need to do well at school and those you need to do well in the workplace” (p. 67).

In H2000, the relationship between school skills and employability skills is presented in the following chart, entitled “Initiative at School and in the Workplace,”
which stresses to students the importance of “doing what should be done without being told to do it” (p. 70).

*Table 6. Initiative at School and in the Workplace* (H2000, p. 70)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AT SCHOOL</th>
<th>IN THE WORKPLACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participates in class.</td>
<td>Shows a willingness to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does work as assigned.</td>
<td>Is busy with assigned tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcomes extra work.</td>
<td>Does extra work as required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets after school for projects.</td>
<td>Works overtime if required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a mentor for a reading buddy.</td>
<td>Helps others with work if required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggests alternatives in group work.</td>
<td>Presents better ways to get a job done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes certification courses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands time management.</td>
<td>Meets time lines and is prompt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the general connections between employer demands and school practices, the table above promotes somewhat problematic workplace arrangements. For example, unquestioned acceptance of the points “works overtime if required” and “does extra work as required” places workers in a potential situation of exploitation. The chart above, if accepted by students, presents possibilities for employers to extract as much work from their employees under the guise of expected workplace behaviours. In this table, the concept of “initiative” clearly implies doing more with less time – once again, a situation that favours employers over employees.

The assumption that carries through all of the textbooks is that skills demanded by employers must be worth learning in school. For example, in CS10 it reads: “…even learning that doesn’t seem important today can help you acquire the skills that employers may want in the future” (p. 68). CTT explicitly states the importance of its
work skills chart by reminding readers: “As you review the chart of these ten top work skills, see how your experiences in and outside of class can provide opportunities for you to be more skilled. Hey, that is what employers want” (p. 30; italics added). Finally, in C10, after students take an employability-skills profile survey to determine their strengths and weaknesses, the textbook asks students to chart which skills they already possess and which skills need improvement (p. 48). For this exercise, there appears to be little room to negotiate what is needed or not needed; instead the assertion is made that all the skills outlined in the employability skills profile must be attained by the student.

Building upon employability charts and questionnaires, specific quotes and passages from the corporate world are used to rationalize the need to learn or develop certain skills in school. C10 employs the advice of human-resource managers to help students develop résumés and cover letters (p. 200). CTT uses a direct quote from a corporate executive when looking at the topic of problem solving in the workplace (p. 41). CS10 uses three quotes from human-resource managers to emphasize what employers want from their workers (p. 70). Finally, H2000 uses the advice of a company president on how to write a proper résumé and covering letter (p. 230). All of the textbooks take the word of the corporate world as sacrosanct and expect students to follow the requests of human-resource managers, CEOs, and company presidents. The rationale is simple: if students wish to succeed in their career development, they should meet the demands of potential employers. This seems like a reasonable request on the surface; however, acceptance of this philosophy makes it difficult for the student to be critical of business and corporate practices. As we shall see in the following section,
few options on employability issues are presented in the textbooks, leaving little room for students to develop alternative practices to the status quo.

**Alternative Action & Student Empowerment**

**Work Alternatives**

The work alternatives presented by the texts are congruent with existing workplace and economic practices and include job sharing, flex-time, contract, part-time, self-employment, and temporary work. When presenting these work alternatives, the textbooks make it sound advantageous for students to adopt these practices in order to advance their future careers. What is problematic is that all of these work alternatives lack both permanence and security. Despite this shortcoming, the textbooks choose to emphasize the “positives” with each work alternative. For example, C10’s section “So Long, Nine to Five” describes the loss of stable, permanent work as a welcome change for some. “Many people want a better balance between work and personal life. Flexible work styles make it possible to pursue a variety of interests and opportunities” (p. 162). Although this may be true, it should also be mentioned that many people working in part-time or contract employment would much rather have permanent, secure employment and that only some workers choose “flexible” work arrangements. The textbook continues by stating:

Work style alternatives are most acceptable to people who thrive on independence and excitement. They can, however, be stressful for those who feel more comfortable working with more structure and few surprises. (p. 163)

In this paragraph, it sounds like those who want secure employment are boring and don’t want to experience the excitement of the new work alternatives. As well, the
passage makes it seem that those who are in situations of part-time, job sharing, temporary, and contract employment made a personal choice to have fun in their lives, rather than being forced to accept an undesirable situation. Similarly, CTT (pp. 160 – 161) and H2000 (pp. 119 – 120) present the topic of work alternatives as a choice made by workers who simply desire to control the way they organize their workday.

As a way to deal with troubled labour markets, the textbooks make a clear preference for students to choose self-employment as a work alternative above all others. Three of the textbooks devote multiple pages on the topic, highlighting the benefits of being an entrepreneur (CS10, pp. 123 – 129; C10, pp. 167 – 169; CTT, pp. 132 – 143). CTT promotes entrepreneurship as a way to “be your own boss” (p. 132) and dedicates a full chapter to the topic. The chapter opens with a series of questions: “Would you like to be the boss? Do you want to be able to say, ‘The buck stops here?’ Do you want to control your own destiny? If these goals appeal to you, then running your own business is an alternative you should consider” (CTT, p. 132). In an attempt to “recruit” students to the world of entrepreneurship, the textbook makes self-employment sound like an unproblematic and exciting pathway to career success. In the 12 pages dedicated to entrepreneurship, only six lines mention possible disadvantages to self-employment. Otherwise, the chapter portrays entrepreneurship as a great opportunity for employment and self-determination in a student’s career.

Similarly, CS10 and C10 present their sections on entrepreneurship in much the same way, choosing to promote the positive elements of self-employment as a work alternative, with little time spent on potential pitfalls:
In this turbulent economy, working for yourself can be more secure than having an employer (who’s going to slip you a pink slip?). And while you won’t have a company pension plan or dental benefits, you will have personal freedom, greater flexibility when it comes to balancing work and family life, and a sense of ownership over your own destiny. Sound like what you are looking for? Read on. (C10, p. 167)

All of the textbooks choose to ignore the fact that most small businesses fail within the first year of operation, or that the “freedom” that one experiences in a business is limited by the demands of customers and creditors. Just as the textbooks gloss over the negative elements associated with precarious employment, the potential pitfalls of self-employment are ignored in favour of highlighting potential “positives” associated with entrepreneurship.

Worker Control

In this final category of analysis, I will focus on the texts’ treatment of labour rights and the potential for workers to control their workplace, specifically the extent to which textbooks refer to unions and collective or cooperative workplaces. Generally, the textbooks ignore unions as a pathway to collective control over the workplace. Only CS10 devotes more than a page to the role unions play in the world of work, explaining the purpose of unions and professional associations. The textbook reports that unions “provide a common voice in negotiating a contract or collective agreement for its members” (CS10, p. 111). The language switches from predominantly value-laden language, which is found in such passages as entrepreneurship and new forms of work,
to a passage that is very restrained and free of optimism. For example, it could have been easy and accurate to mention that unions, in both the past and present, usually have been able to secure better wage rates or provide greater security for their workers. As well, it would seem that a section on unions would present an opening for textbooks to explore the benefits of collective action, much like what was done with the chapters on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Instead, the textbooks choose either to ignore the topic – as is done in CTT, H2000, and C10 – or deliver the subject in an “unbiased” way, as is done in CS10, using no “positives” or “negatives” to describe the role unions could play in shaping the world of work.

All of the textbooks mention workers’ rights, but only in relation to worker safety and the labour code. In light of tragic accidents involving young adults in their workplaces, all of the textbooks examine best practices for establishing a safe work environment. CS10 (pp. 131 – 132) uses the example of Rob Ellis, an 18-year-old boy who died while working in a bakery, to emphasize the importance of being careful in the workplace and of refusing dangerous work. As well, the meanings of the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) symbols are explained to students, outlining what products and/or places to be careful of or to avoid in the workplace. C10 discusses worker safety and the meanings of WHMIS symbols (pp. 220 – 223), and also adds a section on harassment in the workplace (pp. 224 – 225). CTT spends several pages (pp. 144 – 153) on the topic of worker safety, and advises students of the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers in creating a safe work environment. Once again, the WHMIS symbols are explained and students are advised of their right to refuse dangerous work. Only H2000 goes beyond safety issues and
spends several pages (pp. 195 – 201) looking at workers’ rights within the workplace. The textbook informs students of their right to work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment, as well as their right to work in a safe workplace, and informs students of the legal procedures involved in refusing dangerous work.

Although a good start toward worker empowerment, the sections on workplace safety mention that workers have control over their work environment only when there is the potential for direct and potentially fatal consequences. The right of refusal of dangerous work and avenues for litigation in terms of workplace discrimination are valid and empowering examples of workplace control. However, the attempts to “empower” students are limited to these two topics and are never connected to broader workplace issues, such as work reorganization or job loss related to relocation or other situations that place workers in precarious positions of employment. Instead, the textbooks choose to distance issues of dangerous work and precarious employment, asserting that the former is reversible through human agency, while the latter is assumed to be a permanent fixture of the “new economy.” Once again, a chapter on worker rights could open the door to establish linkages to worker empowerment through collective workplace action, such as unions or cooperative workplaces; however, the authors choose not to make these connections and instead ask students to adapt to the demands of the market and employers in their career planning.

Summary

The analysis in this section shows that the approved-for-use Career Studies textbooks help reify and reproduce existing neo-liberal workplace and economic
practices. The “realities” from which students operate in their career planning derive from employer demands and are presented as fixed and outside of the control of human activity. The Career Studies textbooks introduce students to employability skills that come directly from HRSDC and CBOC, as well as from human resource managers and employers. This presentation of career planning and skill attainment places students in a passive position to accept and adapt to current labour-market demands. The alternative practices introduced in all of the textbooks focus on changing work styles, most of which disempower workers in their autonomy and control over their work. Alternatives that encourage collective labour action are absent, leaving little room for critical discourse on workplace and economic issues. Instead, the textbooks reflect the general sentiment of the curriculum documents and help deliver a curriculum that stresses individual efforts (entrepreneurship and self-employment) and adaptation in dealing with harsh economic and workplace “realities.”

As we have seen from the analyses of the textbooks, curriculum, and Ministry documents, the intent and content appears to demonstrate that Career Studies operates as a hegemonic project. The interviews of Career Studies teachers in the following chapter will examine whether or not the course content is delivered in the classroom. Establishing the extent to which teachers accept or reject the curriculum and textual material will help determine whether Career Studies is, in fact, setting students up to reproduce dominant workplace and economic ideologies.
Chapter 8 – Teacher Interviews

This chapter is an examination of the pedagogical practices of Career Studies teachers. Reflecting the key role that teachers play in the delivery of the curriculum, these interviews probed at the course content, classroom practices, and perceptions teachers had of Career Studies. Specifically, these interviews focused on the potential for reifying or combating hegemonic practices in either their acceptance or rejection of the curriculum outlined in the previous chapters. Eight teachers were interviewed about their experiences with the course. Five of the teachers‡ (Julie, Michelle, Edna, Martha, and Amy) were teaching the course at the time of the interview, while three of the teachers (April, Tracy, and Erin) were no longer teaching the course when they were interviewed, but were in some capacity working with the course material either in their guidance departments or with their school board.

This chapter will be divided into three broad sections. The first section will deal with the environment in which these teachers deliver the course material. This includes how they came to teach the course, their previous experiences with the course, the personal experiences they bring to the course, and the external elements of the classroom, such as the socioeconomic and ethnic composition of the school. The second section will deal with the teachers’ perceptions of the course and workplace realities, as well as their thoughts on how students take up the course material. The final section will explore the teachers’ views on student empowerment as future workers, critical thinking, and workplace alternatives. As well, this final section will look at the willingness of teachers to introduce alternatives to current curriculum content.

‡ Pseudonyms were used for this study.
The Career Studies Environment

The Teacher

Most of the teachers in this study went directly into teaching from university. Only two interviewees, Edna and April, took a relatively circuitous route into the profession. Edna was a nurse prior to entering teachers’ college and April was trained as a teacher in another country. Upset by the gender discrimination in her former country, April came to Canada seeking a better life for her daughter. Once in this country she had to recertify to become a public school teacher. As the participant with clearly the most arduous route to teaching in Ontario, April brings her past experiences into the classroom to demonstrate that obstacles can be overcome through hard work and determination. For the rest of the teachers, their part-time and seasonal work prior to teachers’ college helped inform students of the varied work experiences typical of a career.

How these teachers came to teach the course varied. For some, the course was simply given to them to complete a timetable. In one case, the teacher was given the course by accident due to a timetabling error, but she kept the course and was glad she did. One teacher (Martha) sought out the course as she had experience teaching similar content in one of her business courses. April, Erin, Tracy, Edna, and Michelle all taught the course because they either had a Guidance part-one qualification (not a requirement to teach the course) or were part of the Guidance department in some capacity. Although not stated officially in any government documents, respondents speculated that the course was intended to be taught by Guidance personnel as a way
of getting guidance counsellors into the classroom. What these teachers experienced over the years was a shift from Guidance departments being responsible for teaching the course to the course being taught by junior or recently hired staff. Every teacher interviewed for this study speculated that this was not a popular course for teachers:

… at other schools, you get “aw, you got stuck teaching Careers,” that’s not a problem here. (Julie)

I spoke at a conference in October this year about one of the main frustrations that there are teachers who want to teach the Career Studies course and we are seldom given it. It seems to be dumped on teachers who don’t want it or are junior, and this is one of the things I was talking about in October, “please give it to teachers who ask for it.” (Michelle)

In fact, I had asked someone who was a guidance counsellor to teach it. He didn’t want to teach it, he taught English instead. And I had a problem with that. But there was nothing I could do about it. I wasn’t into staffing; I didn’t want to cause issues. A lot of guidance counsellors didn’t want to teach the course.

(Tracy)

The interviewees thought that the lack of interest teachers had in teaching the course was one of Career Studies downfalls:

It’s a great course especially if it is taught by someone who likes it. I was on maternity leave, and I know two teachers taking over a lot of my courses showed movies every Friday. Just by doing that the kids didn’t take the course seriously.

(Michelle)
Erin speculates that the lack of desire for teaching this subject leads to many Career Studies classrooms headed by first- or second-year teachers. April adds that a Career Studies assignment is seen by teachers as temporary, simply a right of passage for being the new teacher in the school:

…they think it's temporary. They teach it one time and I'm not going to teach it again. So they don't put their time and energy into it. If you don't identify yourself as a Career Studies teacher and love it, you are not going to do a good job.

(April)

The fact that many teachers do not identify themselves as Career Studies teachers (despite having taught the class) made it difficult to find interviewees for this study. Many would acknowledge that they taught the course in the past, but did not consider themselves qualified to comment on the course material or their teaching practices. Thus, the teachers in this study could be considered the exception as they loved teaching the class and saw its importance for students. Their desire to teach the class and the work they did with the course material made them exemplary Career Studies teachers and provided a glimpse of the course’s potential. For example, as a response to the revolving door of Career Studies teachers in their school, Erin and Martha co-authored a Career Studies resource guide to provide new teachers with at-hand lessons for the course. The resource guide assisted with practical lesson plans and followed the curriculum guidelines, giving new teachers the necessary content and pacing for the course. Erin and Martha hoped the guide would provide the much-needed stability in pedagogy so that students could get the most from their Career Studies experience.
The School

The environment of the school varied among the teachers interviewed. Two of the teachers (Michelle and Julie) taught the course in the same school, which is located in an affluent part of Toronto and has a high-achieving academic student body. The remaining six teachers taught in mixed schools in terms of student learning levels, cultural background, and socioeconomic status. What remained constant among these teachers was that school culture and student background had an impact upon the content and delivery of the course material. For the two teachers in the relatively affluent and high-academic-achieving school, the course functioned as a preparatory course for university placement toward an eventual career in the professions or managerial business class. This is not to say that the teachers discouraged students from exploring different post-secondary and workplace options; however, there were pressures from parents, peers, and students to focus mostly on university placement and professional/managerial career options. Michelle and Julie described making several attempts to keep options open for students and would consistently stress that every occupation had merit. For Michelle and Julie, just like with all of the teachers interviewed, it was important that students explore work and pick a career path that would interest them and make them happy in their future careers, regardless of status or salary. Despite their efforts, Michelle and Julie did speak of some pressure placed on them by parents to expose and direct their children toward the university stream. When recounting her experiences in her previous school (a private school with similar high-academic-achieving students), Michelle was asked by a parent of a child exploring blue-collar work: “of course you’re also… he’s not going to do that, so what else are you
teaching them?” Michelle also mentions that in her current school, she was told by a colleague not to teach apprenticeship and college training programs simply because students would have little interest in these topics. April, working as a career facilitator for the school board, for similar reasons was told by a teacher in a predominantly academic school to not bother introducing apprenticeship options to students. But it should be mentioned that the group of teachers interviewed for this study pushed back against this form of correspondence and did what they felt was best for students. When asked if she followed the advice of her colleague, Michelle mentioned that she saw the importance of giving her students the full spectrum of career options and chose to introduce apprenticeship training programs. In fact, she invited a woman who worked as a carpenter to speak to her class – clearly an attempt to debunk gender and class prejudices surrounding the trades.

Julie mentioned student-peer issues when it came to exploring blue-collar work in her school. For example, when asked if students in her school were all destined for university she replied, “No, some of them will do some trades, do some apprenticeships, and become a carpenter or something. But those kids don’t speak out much.” When asked if the pressure students faced to enter university and professional occupations came from parents or peers, Julie suspected that peer pressure was the greater influence:

I think it is peer pressure, because one boy said he wanted to be a carpenter and the second one said a truck driver. And when he said truck driver there were laughs, and I could see on his face, “oh I shouldn’t have said anything.” So, I think a lot of them do things quietly and don’t voice that.
Student perception of an occupational hierarchy came up in many of the interviews, regardless of the socioeconomic background of the school. In mixed academic and socioeconomic schools, students still saw the professional occupations as the gold standard and blue-collar work as a less than desirable consolation prize.

Still, the teachers interviewed for this study tried to strike a balance and encourage all possible occupational options, while keeping student choice “realistic” in terms of student ability and potential for employment. For the academic and affluent students, it was clear that these teachers knew their students would be heading to university and taught the course accordingly; however, for the other six teachers in the interview group, there was a prevalence of student expectations exceeding the teacher’s perceived abilities of the student. Teachers in mixed schools spoke about having to temper student enthusiasm by hinting that their career choice may be difficult to attain or that students should also have a “back-up” career in mind. Amy had great difficulty trying to strike that balance with students and sought advice from a speaker at a career conference:

It is hard… I was talking to one of the (conference) speakers and asked what do you say to the student who says “I want to be a doctor, I want to be a doctor,” and you are looking at the kid and you know… “you are a nice kid and from the marks you are getting in my class and what I can see are your abilities and your skills, you are not going to be a doctor.” And that is one of the hardest things to do, to get them to see some of the other things they can do… I don’t want to discourage them, but… doctor is one profession, and you might want to think of
nursing because it is still in the medical field. This is the way (the speaker) said to approach it. (Amy)

For all of the teachers there appeared to be a mix of influences and pressures on the content of the course and on the expectations of the students. However, it should be reiterated that what the teacher saw as best for the student, both in terms of practicality and variety of options, appeared to be the primary influence on the content and delivery of the “career options” portion of the curriculum. However, it should also be mentioned that teacher and student options appeared to be limited and tempered by current economic and labour-market trends. It wasn’t enough that a student wanted a certain career path or occupation, there also had to be economic viability in that choice – a common premise for Career Studies.

As for the potential “correspondence” from this course, Amy presented an interesting point that countered Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) theory. Amy believed that students in her school, because of their position as recent immigrants, would not receive the same level of occupational guidance and awareness from their parents that they receive from the Career Studies course simply because the parents were unfamiliar with work practices in Canada. Adding to this, April saw the potential of peer influence on some of her “less motivated” students. When asked about the mixing of differing academic levels and socioeconomic/cultural backgrounds, April responded: “…I think students need to have other role models around them. It is good to have kids that come up with the beautiful portfolio and they showed it and other kids are going to learn from it …” To say that there are many influences on course content surrounding occupational pathways would be an understatement, to say the least. All of the
teachers interviewed for this study only had what they perceived to be the best practices in mind for students to explore work and possible career paths when selecting materials and pedagogical approaches for the Career Studies course. However, as we shall see later, these teachers appeared to be working within current workplace and economic practices and framed much of their teaching within perceived economic and workplace “realities.”

**Teachers’ Perceptions**

**The Course**

As mentioned earlier, all of the teachers in this study enjoyed teaching the class. They also saw value in the course material and thought the course should remain mandatory. All of these teachers viewed Career Studies as an opportunity to get students thinking about their careers so that they could plan accordingly. When asked how relevant they thought the course was to students, some teachers cited its practicality:

“I think it is extremely relevant. Even at their young age, because it makes them start thinking not just of their job, but really their educational pathway and their career pathway. (Martha)

Very important! Because it has them get informed about the current state of careers in their world. It also gives them some information for educational planning. (Tracy)

Others thought it was a good way to sober students to the idea that they would be making important career choices over the next few years:
Very relevant! These kids come into Grade 9 and Grade 10 and they haven’t the foggiest idea what they want to do. And if you don’t know what you want to do then you can’t take the appropriate courses to get you there. (Edna)

It is very relevant because we are all affected by how we get employment. (Erin)

Extremely! I think it is the course we’ve all been waiting for. It’s the Guidance course you could never get kids to take. You can do so much more... I mean career is life preparation. It is social skills. It's all sorts of really great things. (Michelle)

While others saw it as the course that they wished was available when they were in high school:

I think it is very relevant. It’s a course that requires them to examine things that they are interested in, things that they are good at and come to a conclusion about what they might want to do. When I was a kid (laughs)... I mean when I was a kid what was the extent of guidance I got? (Amy)

It was believed by each respondent that there was a need and purpose for this course. However, not all could agree on whether or not the course should be extended to a full year. Half of the teachers thought that the course could be a full year to expand on existing materials and introduce new topics. The other half of interviewed teachers felt that the course was long enough, and that making it any longer would bore students. It was unanimous among the interviewed teachers that student interest in the course, whether it was full- or half-credit, depended upon the enthusiasm of the teacher. As mentioned earlier, respondents believed that the teacher was critical to the success of the course:
Kids can quickly pick up the teacher’s attitude. Every kid goes in the class and if the teacher is unhappy with the course then the students will not get much out of it. I believe the teacher’s key. (April)

Coupled with the attitude of the teacher, participants felt that the course needed to be organized along the curriculum guidelines, but not so closely as to follow mandated texts. In fact, many respondents felt that following the textbooks made the course dry and risked alienating students with outdated and irrelevant material. Instead, many participants chose to introduce their own material, most of which was gleaned from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) materials or from similar skill-development websites and literature. As mentioned earlier, Martha and Erin created their own resource guide for use in the Career Studies class, but once again, much of it followed the Ministry guidelines for the course. Still, it should be noted that teachers were willing to teach outside of the curriculum, provided it was a benefit to students and was somehow related to the course. At the same time, this enthusiasm was tempered by a duty to the profession, administration, and parents to teach the expectations of the course. In the minds of teachers, students needed to cover the curriculum, as it was seen as a building block for future development and learning.

For the most part, teachers set up the course in three sections. The first section dealt mostly with a self-exploration of student skills and attitudes. This section laid the foundation for the second section of the course – career exploration. In this section students used their personal inventories to find “suitable” future careers. The third section delivered generic employability strategies and helped students navigate the world of work. Often in this section, teachers would introduce résumé writing, interview
skills, and workplace realities. It was in this last section that teachers and students saw the immediate benefits of the course. Leaving the workplace realities aside for now, teachers and students appreciated the practicality of the course, in that it offered skills that were of immediate use and relevancy:

I find a lot of them this year, the kids are saying, “oh I love careers, I wish I had careers again.” So that’s nice. I think that for the kids it is a really good year for the kids to go through the books to see what they need for university. What goes into a good cover letter. A lot of them are turning 15 or 16 and they want to get a job. A boy on the first day this year came up to me and said “thank you for pushing me to do a good job on my résumé. And the person interviewing him asked if he had a résumé, and he pulled out his résumé and he got two interviews and got hired. So he said thank you for making me do it. (Julie)

It was the practicality and immediate impact the course had on students’ lives that gave some teachers a sense of pride in their work with the course. However, as we shall see in the next section, what could be termed the workplace “realities” that inform career preparation, many of the interview questions perplexed the teachers in this study and forced some to rethink the direction of the course.

**Workplace Realities**

It should be noted here that the previous sections represented the portion of the interview that required little explanation or probing from the interviewer. The responses were given quickly by participants with great ease and conviction. However, this section and the following section represent the parts of the interview that confused respondents
the most. This confusion is likely a product of the complexity of defining concepts of work and relating it to course material. The subject of work, its relation to the economy, and its transformative potential solicits responses and opinions that range along the political and economic spectrum. Trying to pinpoint what work means to a Career Studies teacher would be next to impossible, as those who teach the course vary widely in their beliefs. However, it is possible to get a general sense of how the teachers in this study viewed the changing nature of work and what they saw as the workplace and economic “realities” that framed their course.

When teachers were asked to describe current workplace realities, the consistent response involved the volatility that is often associated with today’s labour market. Technology, workplace rationalization, and general competitiveness in the labour market appear to be at the forefront for these teachers:

Their jobs change and there won’t be a guaranteed job for the rest of their life.

There are different titles than there use to be, a lot of contract work. A combination of part-time work as opposed to full-time work. (Tracy)

I think it is possible for them to have more than one career. They could also have many careers… but people who go into the more “white-collar” jobs are going to have to be very adaptable and they may even have to create their own jobs for themselves… There are also different types of jobs, it’s not necessarily 9-5 anymore, you have got your flex time, your work at home, your half and half… (Edna)
It seems like a lot of positions you don’t keep your entire life. So having a well-rounded background is even more important now, because who knows what you will end up doing. (Julie)

Most of the teachers viewed opportunities for workplace control and job satisfaction as products of economic performance. During times of economic struggle, it should be expected that workers will make sacrifices and will face stiff competition for employment. In fact, many of the comments from teachers during the interviews hinted at the economy being external to the control of people. Instead, the teachers viewed booms and busts in the economy as almost natural in their occurrences and took a reactionary approach to dealing with subsequent workplace issues.

Tied in with the general competitive nature of work, respondents believed employers were in a position to ask more of their workers, and that workers needed to be more flexible to meet these demands. This was achieved mostly through continuous skill and knowledge upgrades – what is more commonly referred to as lifelong learning. Teachers accepted the credentialism that pervades our society and passed on to their students the economic value of further education. Not surprisingly, the teachers interviewed for this study saw value in making oneself as marketable to potential employers:

It is unstable now with a lot of jobs that are computer related. You know, companies fold, are downsized, get taken over or are bought over, and they bring in their own people. A little different than it was before… in a lot of jobs you are expected now to be able to speak well, and get your point across, and even
administrative assistants are expected to be very professional. You can’t sort of get away with things you may have got away with. (Julie)

In the quote above, Julie sums up the sentiment of most of the teachers. There is a fear among the respondents that the job market has tightened to the point that students need to be well versed in many skills if they are to remain competitive. As we shall see in the next section, skill attainment and adaptation were overwhelmingly the favourite avenues for student success in their career development.

**Workplace Control**

**Student Empowerment**

Prior to entering the section on student empowerment, I think it is important to stress once again that the teachers interviewed for this project are working from the position of doing what is best for the students. With each interview, I quickly gained the sense that the teachers first and foremost wanted their students to succeed. I don’t doubt this sentiment can be extended to almost every teacher, in every subject, and in every school. However, Career Studies presents a paradox to the sentiment above, in that what is in the best interest of students for today’s economy and workplace may not necessarily be in the long-term best interest of students as future workers. The complex nature of work – with its disproportional distribution of power, wealth, and stability among occupations – makes it quite difficult to present a universal strategy for worker empowerment. The competitive nature of work outlined in the previous section, accepted as a workplace reality by all respondents, leaves teachers with two basic strategies for student empowerment: adaptation; and critique and confrontation. With adaptation, students are taught to acquire the skills and knowledge demanded by the
marketplace to fill a niche or opening in the job market. Conversely, critique and confrontation asks students to critically examine current practices in order to challenge and to change the status quo. This section will explore the empowerment strategies teachers used in the Career Studies classroom and their views on workplace change and possibilities for alternatives.

When asked to describe how they prepared students for the aforementioned workplace realities, the overwhelming strategy of choice for teachers was adaptation. In fact, without any prompting, every teacher chose some form of adaptation as the students’ preferred method for career planning. The forms of adaptation can be broken down into three subcategories: skill and knowledge attainment; realistic expectations; and determination. The first category of adaptation, skill and knowledge attainment, was a favourite of most respondents and was often presented with labour-market demands in mind. The path to acquire the desired skills came from either the list of transferrable and employability skills outlined by HRSDC or through gaining educational credentials such as a post-secondary education to make the student more marketable to employers. When asked what they hoped students would take from the course, the teachers’ replies ranged from the practical: “Adaptability. You know, social skills as well which tie into attitude. Just having neat conversations with them about why do you dress up for an interview, what does that mean” (Michelle); to the general: “Always be prepared. Always have the skills. Always have the knowledge. Continuous learning” (April); to the more universal and prophetic:

I think the values of post-secondary training and education… see I keep pushing that. And I have even stressed more and more the value of even apprenticeship.
So don’t think just one way about your future. If this course can do one thing…

high school isn’t enough, you’ve got to have post-secondary. (Martha)

Respondents were quick to point out that competition for jobs situated employers in a powerful position to select candidates from a large pool of qualified applicants. Therefore, all teachers felt it was best that students acquire as many employability skills and as much formal knowledge as possible to distinguish themselves from others. As Julie pointed out in an example highlighting the general competitiveness of the labour market: “(referring to the University of Waterloo hires for their co-op program)

…employers will make two piles of applicants – kids with marks over 80 and kids with marks over 80 who do other things” (Julie). Julie would stress to her students that it wouldn’t be enough to get the good grades, but that students also had to think of other activities, talents, or skills, that would demonstrate to potential employers a worker who could do that little bit extra for the organization.

The second category of adaptation dealt with student expectations of their own abilities and of the job market. For both of these expectations, it was stressed by teachers that students needed to be “realistic.” In the case of student abilities, being “realistic” meant knowing what you were capable of and understanding how your talents fit into the labour market. As mentioned earlier, Amy found it difficult to deal with students who desired careers that were outside their capabilities. Trying not to be too discouraging, Amy felt that a balance could be struck between a child’s aspirations and abilities by simply offering up other options in the same occupational field (e.g., rather than be a doctor, explore nursing).
As for the realities that dealt with the job market, teachers were careful not to be too discouraging, but still kept in mind that the competitive labour market could present harsh and, at times, unfair and unstable work experiences. Edna, who was well aware of the difficulties Ontario’s youth face when finding employment, saw a potential upside to being employed in less than desirable work:

I think the one thing that students need to (know)… is that they have to realize that what they are learning in high school, what they have learned since kindergarten, is all the skills that they are going to take with them into the “big bad world” out there. I think they have to be aware of the fact (that) they are not going to make a really nice living if they work at McDonalds or Wendy’s… unless you own it. Yes some of our students are going to end up there because they don’t have initiative and that is the only thing they can get, but hopefully, you know… sometimes it takes that slap in the face to wake them up to the realities of life and make them understand that they have to get their act together if they are going to get someplace.

Not trying to be too critical of the students they taught, there was a sense that teachers felt students could benefit from initiative and drive if they wanted to succeed in their careers. In fact, the final category, determination, clearly expresses the sentiment that when all else fails in career planning and development, hard work and fortitude will see students through to a better place:

You’ve got to be prepared to do something other than your dream. Have your dream if you want, but you have got to be prepared to do something else until
you can either meet your dream or make money just to live. If they are not open to change, they are going to have a hard time. (Tracy)

When asked about the current unpredictability of work, Erin responded:

A job for life? Oh it’s gone. I think that is the way of the world now. You are not going to have the big unions, you are not going to have the big pensions. You are going to have to take care of yourself and you are going to have more than one job. What was the statistic?... you are going to have at least seven jobs in your lifetime. And I fully believe that. (Erin)

To be fair to the teachers in this study, it appears they are working from the perspective that the economy and the workplace are void of human influence and control. Their perspective treats economic and workplace practices as natural and external to individual and collective action. Keeping in mind that the teachers felt the economy and workplace weren’t going to change anytime soon, the aforementioned strategies of adaptation make sense if you want what is best for your students. If teachers perceive the economic system and workplace practices as external to human control, encouraging students to bring about change through collective action, for example, would seem as practical as encouraging someone to reason with and convince a tornado to spare his or her home. Still, the next section will explore in further detail the reasons why these teachers chose not to introduce workplace and economic alternatives, as well as why teachers skipped critique and confrontation as a strategy to empower students as future workers.
Critical Thinking

When asked about the level of critical thinking done in their Career Studies courses, many teachers stumbled to find an answer. As most teachers saw the course as a practical introduction to career exploration, critical analysis of workplace trends and practices seemed out of place. However, many teachers understood the value of critical thought and tried to arrive at an example of where it may have been used in their courses. Typically, critical thinking was confused with two unrelated skills/attitudes. The first was self-reflection. Teachers in this study would often use personal inventories as examples of critical thought in the course. The belief was that if students could critique their abilities, shortcomings, values, and tastes and apply these understandings to possible occupations, then students were practicing critical thought. Missing in this example are alternatives for exploration and the understanding of the social relations of power, not to mention the limited opportunity students have to critique existing job-preparation practices. However, it is worth noting that these teachers brought up self-critique as a valid foray into critical thinking, reifying the dominant discourse of this course – the economy and workplace are natural occurrences and out of the control of people, therefore, the best strategy for students as future workers is to find where they fit in and where they can strengthen their marketability as future workers.

The other skills often confused with critical thinking were research and inquiry skills students used in their culminating activity. The culminating activity (or final project) for the Career Studies course often involves students researching an occupation of interest. Teachers cited the research and inquiry skills – knowing the prerequisite education for the occupation, the potential growth of the occupation, the
expected salary, etc. – as an example of critical thought in relation to a possible occupational choice. On the surface this seems valid; however, there is little opportunity for students to question and critically examine the social and economic power relations that influence the potential for growth in that occupation, the credentials required for entry into their chosen occupation, and the expected salary for the occupation. In essence, the research and inquiry of current occupations as an example of critical thought lacks the necessary depth for a true critical understanding of work. As well, little is offered in terms of alternatives to existing practices, as students are researching careers within the current neo-liberal economy.

The disconnect between critical thought and alternatives to current work practices was prevalent throughout the interviews. When teachers were asked to provide examples of economic and workplace alternatives they may have introduced into the course as a way to critically examine current practices, all of the teachers admitted that alternatives were not introduced into the course. The reasons teachers gave for not introducing alternatives fell into one of four categories. The first was simply a logistical problem with the course – a lack of time. Respondents felt that the half-credit course was too short to cover all of the expectations in the course and to spend time critically analyzing work:

There’s no time in half an hour to do that and I have personally not done this because there just isn’t time. There isn’t much time but it would be nice to touch those issues. (April)

I don’t think we touched on it directly… you can’t give it all… there is so much information and you can’t prepare them for everything. (Erin)
it is only a half-credit course. And in a semester school you have nine weeks if you are lucky, so you have to fly through the course. And if you want to meet all those expectations you don’t have a lot of time. (Martha)

Choices had to be made for content and since the course afforded little time to explore a topic in great detail, teachers chose to teach on the surface and simply expose students to current workplace practices.

The second reason dealt with the teacher’s perceived notions of maturity and intellect of a typical Grade 10 student. Many thought introducing workplace and economic alternatives into an Open course would be of little value because the complexity of key terms and ideas would not be understood by students:

For the Career course, because a lot of these kids don’t have the critical thinking skills themselves, how can they critically look at the different worlds of work? They are going to say “that’s what I want to do” but they don’t understand that they just can’t give themselves a raise whenever they want to… so I think alternative workplaces is beyond these 15-year-olds. (Edna)

Some respondents thought that economic and workplace alternatives would have little relevance in students’ lives, leading to little interest in the topic:

I guess the thing that I would question… that if it is such a small sector of society then… you know, the chances that any student would be interested in it would be low. (Amy)

Further to this, Michelle, who taught in the affluent and high-achieving-academic school, speculated that few of her students were headed for employment in a unionized workplace and would get little out of a lesson on unions. Yet, she agreed it would still
be worth teaching, just not worth spending a great deal of her teaching time. Whether it was a perceived lack of interest or ability, some teachers felt that introducing these topics risked slowing the pace of the course and would either bore or confuse students. One teacher also mentioned that a critical examination of work and the economy risked discouraging students who were in the early stages of their career development: “I mean you don’t want to burst their bubble. ‘Isn’t life great?! Aren’t you looking forward to getting a job?!” (Julie).

This is not to say that all of the teachers were averse to introducing alternative workplace and economic practices. In fact, when asked about the worth of exposing students to these topics, most of the teachers saw the potential for interesting discussions and student empowerment. However, two problems surfaced when teachers contemplated adding workplace and economic alternatives to the Career Studies curriculum. The first argument teachers presented against the inclusion of alternatives was that it did not belong in the Career Studies curriculum, but in either a Civics or History classroom. Spending time on alternatives in Career Studies risked overlap and redundancy:

Maybe that’s in Civics. Is it in Civics? Government? Labour? I don’t know what they do in Civics. Child labour? What political will can you do? I don’t know if it is done in Civics, but it makes more sense in Civics. (Martha)

It should be noted here that the Civics curriculum dedicates little content to an exploration of economic alternatives, and nowhere in the curriculum are workplace alternatives mentioned (see Antonelli, 2003a). But it is interesting to note that teachers are quick to divorce the political from the economic and see the former as having the
potential for human influence and change, while the latter is viewed as separate and outside the control of workers.

The final stumbling block teachers raised for including workplace and economic alternatives into the classroom had to do with a lack of information and resources. After being made aware of alternatives in their interview and reasoning that they could make it fit into the curriculum, teachers raised concerns over a lack of resources to carry out lessons on alternatives and that most Career Studies teachers lack the knowledge base to properly deliver the material. The last concern has some validity considering that there is no required qualification to teach the course and that it could be given to any teacher in a school. Yet these were experienced teachers in both their general teaching practice and with the Career Studies course, and still they felt they would have difficulty finding and delivering alternative course material. Further compounding this issue is that many first-year teachers receive the course and have little time to research and search out extra materials for a course they may only teach once in their career. Presenting curriculum resources and setting Ministry guidelines to make room for a unit on economic and workplace alternatives would appear to go a long way for most of the teachers in this study and would assist bringing these topics into the Career Studies course.

Summary

The teachers in this study enjoyed teaching Career Studies and it showed in the dedication and creativity they put into the course. Understanding that the course could be so much more than what is outlined in the curriculum documents and textbooks,
these teachers introduced resources and lesson ideas that went beyond what could be considered a reasonable effort. For the most part, these teachers viewed Career Studies as an opportunity to introduce students to career planning and hopefully guide them toward careers that were fulfilling and productive. At no point in the interview did it ever come across that they were working outside of the perceived interests of students.

What did surface from these interviews was a willingness of teachers to operate and organize their course with current neo-liberal economic and workplace practices in mind. Many of the lessons given as examples of student empowerment and knowledge acquisition were clearly framed by prevailing economic and workplace trends. Teachers chose to deliver adaptation rather than confrontation strategies as best practices for coping with today’s competitive and, at times, harsh economic and labour market. None of the teachers opted to introduce alternatives to current economic and workplace practices and chose instead to view current practices as natural and outside the control of human agency. When asked why alternatives were not presented in the course, the teachers replied that they did not have enough time, that it did not belong in the course, that students would not understand the abstract material, and that teachers were not given the resources or made aware of alternatives. When asked afterward if they would introduce alternatives, many of the teachers said they would provided they had the time and resource support.

Michelle made an interesting observation after reflecting on the way she delivered the course, summing up a key problem with the structure of Career Studies.

I think that, one of the things that bothers me about the textbook and the course are concepts in the document that tells us to prepare... we have to teach
students about trends in the workplace and about jobs that are anticipated to have excellent prospects. For example, the idea we should be telling students that there will be jobs in geriatrics, you know that's an area that's going to have lots of jobs. To me that smacks of economic determinism. (Michelle)

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Career Studies course tends to put the cart before the horse. On the surface, the course tries to have students develop their abilities and skills in concert with their interests and proclivities in order to plan a successful career. However, much of this career planning is done with one eye kept on economic and job-market demands. In other words, students’ skills, abilities, interests, and proclivities must also align with future labour-market demands. So it appears Michelle is right to suggest that the course “smacks of economic determinism.”

Because of the economic determinism of the course, teachers are placed in an awkward position of doing what is in the immediate best interest of students, even if it perpetuates existing inequities and power imbalances in the workplace. Essentially, the principles for democratic learning outlined in Chapter 4 are left by the wayside in this course, and as a hegemonic project Career Studies places students in a passive role to acquire the skills and knowledge demanded by employers. As we shall see in the following chapter, the relationship of course curriculum, textbooks, and teacher practices sets up Career Studies to be a labour training course to benefit employers, and not a course to empower students as future workers.
For any new hegemonic project to take root and succeed, several key elements need to be met. First, a moment of crisis must be established outlining the need for the project. Second, the ruling bloc must make its interests appear as the national or common interest. Finally, the subordinate classes must take up the project and participate in its reconstitution and ideological integration (Cho & Apple, 1998). Career Studies, as a hegemonic project, appears to have the key elements listed above. Through an examination of the government documents on career and workplace education, the approved-for-use-in-the-classroom textbooks, and the treatment of the course material at the hands of Career Studies teachers, I have attempted in this thesis to demonstrate how Career Studies operates as a hegemonic project. In this discussion, I will outline the ways the course content and the teaching practices perpetuate existing workplace and economic practices at the expense of providing alternatives for student empowerment in career planning and future workplace control. Finally, I will present alternative practices and curriculum found in Canada and internationally that position teachers and students to critically examine course content and present possibilities for career development that empowers students as future workers.

The first element for a hegemonic project to take hold is found in the ability of the ruling bloc to identify and highlight a moment of crisis. Regarding the need for an updated and “relevant” curriculum to meet the demands of the global market, the ruling bloc was able to use recent downturns in global economic performance and a general
perceived notion of economic lagging in Canada (specifically dealing with shortcomings in technology and manufacturing) to put forth the idea that changes were needed in public education to deal with the economic crisis. Career Studies surfaced out of years of planning and negotiating among business, government, and educational stakeholders, and similar to Alison Taylor’s (1998) findings regarding reforms to Alberta’s system of public education, the findings from this study showed a heavy influence from business and industry regarding reforms in career education. The opportunities for business and industry to voice their preferences began in the early 1990s with the formation of a Royal Commission on learning and the subsequent requests for public input into the report. The commission met, received submissions, and arrived at conclusions for future directions during a deep, worldwide economic recession (it should be reiterated that the preface to the commission’s report emphasized the changing and volatile economy and its impact on public education). Many of the submissions from stakeholders regarding career education reflected prevailing attitudes and called for public education to be accountable to the economic wellbeing of Canada. As outlined in Chapter 2, submissions to the commission on behalf of businesses and corporations were quick to point out an apparent lag that Canada was experiencing in its global standing. Much of the rhetoric in their recommendations pointed out a need to remain globally competitive and urged the commission to “better” prepare students as an integral resource for business and industry. In their submissions, corporate and business interests were heard and adopted partly due to the publicly perceived need for Canada to improve its global standing economically. The important moment of crisis presented itself, heightened
public interest, and paved the way for the eventual acceptance of educational reforms, even though these reforms clearly favoured corporate and business interests at the expense of workers. The downturn in the national economy, the increased prevalence of global trade and lowered trade barriers, and the corporate rhetoric on economic progress made it appear pertinent that education reform help feed a national economy and make it more competitive on a global scale. Coupled with this crisis was the reemphasis of human capital theories regarding the worth and value of public education, highlighting a need to “better prepare” students to meet labour-market demands.

This recognition for school reform, particularly in career and workplace education, eventually brought about a government discussion document on guidance and career education. The discussion and policy documents were products of a Progressive Conservative government that stressed reforms in education that mirrored the general economic reforms taking place in the province. In essence, the Progressive Conservative government wanted to shift greater control over the economy to the marketplace and was also willing to do the same for career development. In the discussion document, the Ministry of Education outlined a need for students to gain an understanding of the fast-paced and changing work world in order to make better transitions to the workplace. Once again, much of the rhetoric surrounding workplace reforms – as outlined in the discussion and eventual policy documents on guidance and career education – deals with issues of globalization and international competitiveness. In fact, both the discussion and policy documents stress that students have a civic duty to best prepare themselves for their future careers (Ministry, 1998; 1999a). In effect,
social responsibility is intertwined with student development and preparation for the workplace and forms a big part of the discussion and policy documents. It is implied that an understanding on behalf of students as to what is in demand in labour markets is a critical step forward for students to be “productive citizens.”

With a moment of crisis established and career education deemed the panacea to the problem, the ruling class (business, industry, employers, etc.) needed to articulate its interests in student career planning as not only the preferred strategy, but also the only realistic avenue to pursue. Effectively, this was accomplished through two approaches. The first was mentioned in the previous paragraph – tying corporate interests with the national interest. Throughout the government discussion and policy documents, curriculum guides, and the approved textbooks, national and global prosperity is seen as the path toward individual success and growth. Strictly speaking in economic terms, all of the aforementioned resources emphasize a need for students to develop a wide range of skills that meet the demands of shifting labour markets. Heeding the words of Sun Life Assurance Company and similar submissions to the Royal Commission that, “the business community relies upon the graduates of our education system as we strive for success in an increasingly tough world” (Gardner, 1993, p. 2), the Ministry of Education, curriculum writers, and classroom teachers presented career education as a preparatory tool to meet the demands of employers. Accepting that business success meant worker success in an “increasingly tough world,” effectively effacing any conflict between the two camps, the course placed an emphasis on current neo-liberal economic and workplace practices as the preferred mindset for students to adopt. It was assumed both by business and by educators that
a versatile and technologically skilled labour force – for the purposes of improving economic production and competitiveness – would advance the nation as a whole and bring prosperity to everyone.

The second key approach the ruling bloc adopted in articulating its interests as “common sense” was an emphasis on modernization, progress, and technological change. Much of the wording within the government discussion and policy documents, as well as in the curriculum guidelines, emphasized that the world of work was changing – in some cases to the detriment of workers. However, the wording within these documents tied the changing world of work to technological and economic progress and often cited the “opportunities” associated with these changes. Making workplace and economic change appear to be inevitable, irreversible, and, most importantly, progressive and modern, the discussion, policy, and curriculum documents were able to set the foundation for a Career Studies course that would stress adaptation to these neo-liberal reforms as the best avenue for student career growth.

The third element of Career Studies taking hold as a hegemonic project rests upon the willingness of the dominated people to take up the dominant ideology and participate in its reconstitution. In the case of career education, defining and delineating the dominated group is somewhat problematic. Career Studies students appear to be an obvious example of a dominated people; however, within this group there are students who are likely to never enter into occupations that could be considered working class. Similar to Jean Anyon’s findings (1980), students are taught a different curriculum depending upon their class standing and expected career aspirations. As was discovered in the teacher interviews, some students in their public education
experience are clearly being groomed to enter managerial or professional fields of work and/or become entrepreneurial owners – for the most part, these students are less concerned with issues of workplace autonomy and control. Conversely, most other students are likely to pursue occupations that limit their power and control over the work. For the latter group of students, the textbooks emphasize the division of labour and power distribution as natural and outside the control of workers. The repetition and reification of “workplace realities” in the textbooks, for example, sets students up to have a mindset where changing existing workplace and economic conditions appears fruitless, while strategies of adaptation and personal marketability are viewed as the preferred avenue in career development. Despite appearing on the surface as one group, Career Studies students form a diverse assemblage of learners who, depending upon existing parental positions of class, race, and gender, etc., receive curriculum content and pedagogy that help perpetuate existing inequities in the workplace. Whether groomed to take positions of power or told to adapt to positions of subordination, students in effect are part of the reconstitution and perpetuation of the dominant ideology.

The other subordinate group taking up the neo-liberal agenda of the ruling bloc is Career Studies teachers. Again, the variety in pedagogy for Career Studies teachers is a clear reflection of the students they teach. Similar to Anyon’s findings (1980), teachers appear to tailor their pedagogy to meet the demands of students in their future career plans – a clear product of a student’s social standing. On top of the relational pedagogical aspects of Career Studies, the interviews with teachers revealed a complex and layered relationship in teaching for student success and empowerment. For the
Career Studies teachers there appears to be a duty to teach the course with a neo-liberal mindset, regardless of the social standing of their students, in order to best prepare students for a workplace that is harsh, unforgiving, and competitive. Caught in a contradictory position, Career Studies teachers clearly understand how current and future workplace and economic practices disempower workers, yet they want so desperately for their students to succeed in their careers that they followed a curriculum that offers little room for critical approaches to learning about work and the economy. The Career Studies teachers feel a sense of duty to best prepare students to adapt to current and future workplace trends, instilling within students strategies of skill acquisition and attitudinal adjustments with the hope that these approaches will make students marketable to future employers. The purpose behind this approach to teaching is an insistence on behalf of teachers that current economic and workplace practices are not going to change in the near future, so feasibly what has to change are the attitudes and beliefs of their students. In their mind, it is much more practical to adjust students’ approaches to career development than to make attempts to change the practices found in the workplace and the economy.

*Democratic Learning*

**The First Principle for Democratic Learning**

Missing from the course were many of the elements of democratic learning as outlined by Hyslop-Margison and Graham in their 2003 study. Evident from the analysis of government documents, guidelines, and textbook materials there is an emphasis on the social relations of work and the economy as fixed and outside the control of human
agency. This runs counter to democratic learning, in that students are not encouraged in any way to see the social elements of work and the economy and are instead treated as passive objects in their career development. For democratic learning to take place, students need to view workplace and economic practices as social creations potentially controlled by human activity; otherwise, opportunities to effect change on current practices is jeopardized, leaving students to adapt rather than question in their career planning. Viewing work and the economy as a social organism provides the potential for students to take a more active approach to their career development. As stated by Dewey:

I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. (Dewey, 1929, as cited in Flinders & Thorton, 2004, p. 18)

Separating the individual from the social elements of work and the economy leaves students in a passive position to effect change on current practices and makes it difficult to find control in their career planning, "subordinating the freedom of the individual to a preconceived social and political status" (Dewey, 1929, as cited in Flinders & Thorton, 2004, p. 18).

The textbooks do a particularly good job at effacing the social relations of work and the economy, presenting many deleterious market conditions as natural and outside the control of human agency. For example, downsizing, relocation, and resulting job loss are presented in textbooks in such a way as to appear void of any
human action or choice. There is no mention of economic benefits to corporations that choose to follow these policies, nor is there any mention that the aforementioned economic and workplace practices are indeed choices made by employers. Instead, these actions are viewed to be reasonable responses to competitive markets and shifts in global economic policies. No blame is brought down on employers for choosing to lay off workers for corporate profits, nor is there any mention that employers benefit from these actions. The textbooks make a good effort to make job loss appear as a natural product of the “liberties” and “freedoms” enjoyed with free market capitalism.

Added to this, the textbooks further the natural appearance of these economic decisions by emphasizing the need for students to ready themselves for the inevitable changes in the economy, especially those changes brought about by downturns in the economy. Employing a strategy of adaptation to harsh economic “realities” without questioning or even presenting the possibility that these acts are products of the self-interested actions of corporations and industry, the textbooks further entrench the idea that economic and workplace practices operate outside the realm of individual action. It is not clear whether the textbooks are attempting to remain “neutral” in their reporting of economic change, or whether there is a firm belief on behalf of the authors that the economy functions outside of human will. There is, however, little confusion regarding the failure of textbooks to critically examine current economic practices and present them as products of human agency, providing student opportunities to critically engage with the course material and question the practices of employers.

Similarly, the curriculum guidelines position teachers and students to react to changing workplace and economic conditions, rather than explore these issues as
products of human agency. The guidelines emphasize a need for students to adapt to ever-changing work conditions and stress a need for teachers to deliver a career and guidance program that provides strategies for dealing with change. Workplace issues involving technological rationalization and job loss are presented as external happenings where employers are viewed as powerless agents reacting to economic conditions beyond their control and are not seen as possible architects in these job reorganization practices. The curriculum documents, as part of the Career Studies hegemonic project, direct teachers and textbook writers to emphasize strategies for career development that situate students in a position of adaptation rather than confrontation and change. Effectively, the curriculum documents present a form of reality that paints existing economic and workplace practices as natural, oblivious to the social constructions that give rise to inequities and that allow for some groups to experience and maintain greater control and power in the world of work.

The interviews with teachers demonstrate the effectiveness of curriculum guidelines on classroom practice. When asked what they taught in their Career Studies classrooms, all of the teachers referred to the guidelines as their framework for the course. This isn’t to say that all of the teachers adhered religiously to the guidelines. In fact, some teachers mentioned skipping some expectations that students would find uninteresting. However, as a basic guide and directional aid for the course, the guidelines were cited by teachers as very relevant, especially when compared to the textbooks. As well, the interviewed teachers’ perceptions of the general premise of the course and the expected outcomes for student development matched closely with the general expectations for the course as outlined in the curriculum documents.
Effectively, teachers agreed with the premise that Career Studies should operate as an introduction to existing economic and workplace practices, establishing an understanding of the way these practices impact upon career development, and most importantly, establishing a plan that best suits students’ strengths for navigating the world of work. Just as alternative strategies were absent in the textbooks and the curriculum guidelines, Career Studies classroom teachers were less interested in exploring alternatives to current economic and workplace practices and instead pursued a plan of career development that worked in concert with existing “realities.”

The Second Principle for Democratic Learning

The second element of PDL deals with a lack of alternatives to current economic and workplace practices. In essence, alternatives represent choice and a potential for critical engagement with the curriculum, without them, students are left in a position to reproduce existing practices. As stated earlier, Career Studies presents only neo-liberal economic and workplace practices as legitimate options to consider in career planning. When “alternatives” are mentioned, they tend to represent individualistic entrepreneurial practices or situations of precarious employment. For example, self-employment and entrepreneurship are presented in the guidelines and the textbooks as alternative employment options to more traditional nine-to-five salaried careers. As well, more recent workplace trends such as downsizing, job sharing, and part-time or contract work are presented as alternatives to more permanent and secure employment. Technically, these workplace and organizational practices could be viewed as “alternatives” to past practices. However, presenting these practices as choices is somewhat limiting, in that
it glosses over the lack of control by workers who often accept these practices simply because they have no other choice. In Gramscian terms, the “common sense” workplace and economic practices that dictate the content and pedagogy of the Career Studies classroom are merely products of preconceived notions of what could be “realistically” expected of current and future labour-market demands. In part, alternatives that could present opportunities for worker control, such as cooperatives or economic democracy, are absent simply because they could not be imagined by curriculum and textbook writers or Career Studies teachers. Prevailing attitudes and beliefs surrounding the inevitability of workplace rationalization and the “failed” attempts in the past to introduce more socially and economically democratic systems around the world help form the “common sense” that limits what students are exposed to in their career development.

The “common sense” that permeates the curriculum guides may be a function of the “common sense” that pervades society. However, as was presented in the discussion guides, there appears to be a proactive move on the part of the Ministry of Education to use guidance and career education to meet labour-market demands. According to the policy guide, the intent of establishing the guidance and career education curriculum was to prepare students for the “realities” of work and the economy (Ministry, 1999a, p. 3). The rest of the discussion document reads like a guide to finding employment, with an emphasis on understanding the demands of employers and exploring trends for future employment opportunities. Students are viewed as a resource for employers, with much of the learning taking on a more pragmatic exploration of employability skills. This learning arrangement removes
opportunities for alternative practices that empower workers in the collective sense, and replaces it with options for adaptation to employer demands.

It should also be reiterated here that the critical thinking component of the course is absent by virtue of the absence of workplace and economic alternatives from the curriculum. As successfully argued by Hyslop-Margison (2000a), critical thinking is an exercise dependent upon background knowledge, situational practices, and an understanding of alternatives or choices with which to engage and arrive at a solution. The noticeable absence of collective, socially democratic alternatives to current economic and workplace practices makes it difficult for students to employ critical thinking in their career development. Instead, the curriculum documents and textbooks present critical thinking as a problem-solving exercise where students are expected to work within current neo-liberal practices to arrive at solutions to career and workplace problems. For example, one of the textbooks presents an example of job loss as a career problem to solve (CS 10, p. 26). Students are expected to employ “critical thinking skills” to problem solve “opportunities” for career development when the fictitious company they work for is bought out and they lose their job. The scenario immediately directs teachers and students toward the notion that collective options for worker control failed or were not possible. As well, the scenario skips ahead in process and has the worker already unemployed, leaving little opportunity to explore avenues for saving jobs even in moments of economic crisis or change. Instead, the “critical thinking” is restricted and couched in current neo-liberal practices, and it is expected that students will arrive at solutions that stress opportunities for new career beginnings such as a new job, a chance to go back to school, or a chance to start a new business.
The options presented above are certainly not an exhaustive list, nor does the scenario presented in the textbook preclude options generated by teachers or students for collective action; however, the direction and starting point of the scenario, coupled with the absence of collective worker action anywhere else in the textbook, makes it difficult to believe that students would employ critical thinking in the exploration of a rather pervasive and prominent workplace problem.

Teachers do have an opportunity to introduce alternatives to the classroom, but as was evidenced by the interviews, there was reluctance on the part of Career Studies teachers to work outside the curriculum and introduce material that would question and critically examine current economic and workplace practices. Four key issues pertaining to the willingness of teachers to introduce alternatives surfaced in the interviews. The first issue dealt with the time restrictions of the course. The course is half-credit and does not afford a lot of extra time for teachers to explore topics outside of the curriculum. In fact, all of the teachers expressed the opinion that the course was already overloaded with expected learning outcomes, making it difficult to cover all of the existing course expectations. As stated earlier, many teachers felt the purpose of the course was workplace preparation, and that any additional material would be interesting to cover but not essential. Therefore, if any sacrifices were made with course coverage, it would be in areas that did not directly translate to career development in terms of increasing marketability and employment options for students. Entertaining topics on economic democracy or collective worker empowerment would only surface if all other curriculum expectations were addressed – an unlikely event as expressed by participant teachers.
The second issue impeding teachers from introducing alternative economic and workplace practices into the classroom is the problematic divide between the political and economic. The Career Studies teachers interviewed for this project felt that economic alternatives may have some worth in exploring; however, they also felt that these topics would be better placed in either the companion Civics course or a History course. The companion Civics course functions as an introductory political science course. Students are delivered a curriculum that explores the functions of government, both in Canada and internationally, examines avenues for political engagement, and defines different types of political systems (see Antonelli, 2003a). The opportunities for collective action and political empowerment are many in Civics compared with Career Studies. Civil disobedience, political protest, and grass-roots party formation are just some of the potential topics for discussion as outlined in the Civics curriculum document and present within the approved textbooks. However, despite the assumption that economic and workplace alternatives are better covered in another course, economic reforms and workplace reconstitutions placing workers in positions of power are absent from the Civics course (Antonelli, 2003a). There appears to be a divide between the political and economic with the coupling of these two courses. In Civics there is a semblance of opportunity for collective action and political change, yet in Career Studies market conditions are presented as fixed and out of the reach of human control. Coupled with this incongruence is the distinction and divorce of what should be overlapping spheres. Gramsci viewed the misguided preference to keep the political and economic spheres independent as a major stumbling block in the creation of a socialist state (Hill, 2007). A failure to relate that the political and the economic are
indeed intertwined forms the foundation for many failed movements toward social change. Individual economic and political interests are contested, leaving many disjointed movements to grapple for terrain in an ongoing war of attrition. Similar to Gramsci’s critique of the syndicalists and reformers, the division and distinction of the political and economic into separate spheres regarding the Ontario curriculum creates the potential for “bad politics and worse economics” (Gramsci, as quoted in Hill, 2007, p. 116). Students need to see that the political and the economic are part of the same struggle for social equity and control; otherwise, they run the risk of advancing contradictory and conflicting goals in their attempts to assert power and control in the workplace.

Coupled with the above disconnect of the paired courses, Sears and Hyslop-Margison (2007) point out further shortcomings regarding the introduction of the two courses. Sears and Hyslop-Margison examine the origins of the Civics course in Ontario and demonstrate that the moment of crisis paving the way for its inclusion in the formal curriculum was the high level of political apathy among young adults. Politically speaking, the system appeared to be broken in Canada and many other Western nations, with low voter turnouts in public elections stealing headlines from eventual winners. With low voter turnouts, general apathy, and a malaise toward political participation and involvement, questions of legitimacy in the political process began to take hold. It wasn’t necessary for political movements to surface and challenge the status quo; rather, higher voter turnouts would lead to a public perception that people were willing participants and, therefore, supporters of government policy and action.
The Civics course is intended to act as a catalyst to engage youth in Ontario with the political process and, for the most part, help legitimize the political process in Canada.

The moment of economic crisis that helped establish the Career Studies course was one related to the downturn in the global market. Conversely, the Career Studies course was not intended to increase student involvement and control over the economy; rather, students were viewed as a resource to boost and stabilize the national economy. The economic crisis of the mid-1990s was not viewed as a product of a dysfunctional economic system, but was presented as a failure of schools to keep pace with global change (Ministry, 1998). Students, as a future resource, would need to update their skills to meet market demands and remain flexible and adaptable to future changes in the economy. In one key way the inclusion of Civics into the curriculum mirrored Career Studies introduction: both courses offered an opportunity to legitimize and strengthen existing conditions. For Civics, the course attempts to bring about greater participation in the political process, most importantly within the law, to give the illusion that people are in control of their political world. At the same time, the Career Studies course attempts to legitimize current economic and workplace practices by presenting them as “realities” that are out of the control of human action. In both cases, students as a collective of future citizens are potentially removed from the levers of power that control political and economic processes. Paradoxically, the courses act in concert to reify the great divide between the political and economic worlds, an essential characteristic of any hegemonic state.

The third issue teachers pointed to as a barrier to exploration of alternatives was a lack of resource material and background knowledge. The lack of resources
exemplifies the hegemonic conditions surrounding the production and delivery of the curriculum material. The textbooks provide little exploration of alternative economic and workplace practices as the content must adhere to the expectations outlined in the curriculum guidelines. The current textbook approved for use in the Career Studies classroom reads more like an employment guide, shifting the focus from the changing nature of work to practical strategies for finding employment. Still absent are collective strategies for worker empowerment and control in the workplace, as well as alternatives to existing workplace and economic practices (Balaishis, 2009). In fact, the current textbook further diminishes opportunities for choice and resource support in the Career Studies classroom, both because of the narrow and limited strategy of workplace preparation found within the text and because it is the only approved-for-use textbook available to teachers. The previous choice of school boards and principals to select from four textbooks has now been limited to accepting the one approved text or nothing at all.

Adding to the dearth of resources, any supplementary material to be introduced into the classroom must support at least one of the expectations outlined in the curriculum guidelines (Ministry, 2006b). In effect, the requirement to adhere to the curriculum guidelines places great limitations on what a teacher can bring into the classroom. As stated earlier, much of the content in the Career Studies curriculum guidelines deals with employability skills, self-exploration, and job-search skills with virtually no exploration of alternative economic and workplace practices. Because the textbooks and outside resources are a reflection of the course guidelines, teachers are missing readily available support materials that could act as counter-hegemonic
learning resources. As we shall see later, counter-hegemonic resources do exist; however, the few support materials that do espouse alternative economic and workplace practices are peripheral in their use in Ontario’s classrooms and at the moment are of little threat to replace prevailing resources (textbooks, HRSDC materials, etc.).

Adding to issues of a lack of alternative resources, Career Studies teachers speculated that many classroom teachers would lack the background knowledge to introduce economic and workplace alternatives. As mentioned earlier, there is no prerequisite or certification required to teach Career Studies. The class can be (and usually is) taught by any teacher in the school regardless of their experiences with guidance and career education, their teachable subjects, or their interest in teaching the material. Several of the interviewed teachers made it clear that the course was taught by a junior staff member (lacking seniority and influence over timetables) who required another half-credit course to fill out a timetable. It was also made clear that many teachers would only teach the course once, feeling as though they had “paid their dues.” Of course, this lack of commitment to the course by some teachers leads to speculation that extra efforts wouldn’t be made to seek out alternative resource material. Because the teachers interviewed for this study were fully committed to the course, this theoretical relationship between course engagement and resource use must remain in the realm of speculation. However, it should be noted that even the committed teachers involved with this study, with years of experience teaching the course material, never thought to look to alternative resource guides as a source for career and guidance exploration.
The Third Principle for Democratic Learning

The third principle of PDL states that students need to be respected in their ability to participate in higher order thinking. Higher order thinking is stressed in many government documents (especially critical thinking); however, in Career Studies very little of this is done. A common reaction from teachers, and the fourth obstacle to introducing alternatives, is that students would be incapable of understanding complex topics associated with economic and workplace alternatives. The teachers cited a lack of maturity and grounding in background knowledge among students as a hindrance to fully understanding and engaging with alternative practices. This belief holds little credibility, as students in Grade 10 are exposed to political alternatives in their Civics and History classes (albeit in a historical and past relevance style, appearing almost dated or utopian at best) with the expectation to critically engage with the material. Despite the rather biased and preferred leanings toward the “democracy” practiced currently in the Western industrialized nations, the Civics texts and curriculum documents entertain and explore different political systems and philosophies with the hope that some level of critical engagement will take place with the material (Antonelli, 2003a). How effective the Civics textbooks and guides are at initiating critical exploration of political systems and thought is outside the scope of this thesis; however, what is important to note here is that courses outside of Career Studies are willing to introduce and explore topics that involve higher order thinking, debunking the idea that students are incapable of understanding course content that deals with economic and workplace alternatives.
As well, dealing with the Career Studies course as currently constituted, there appears to be little difference in the "higher order thinking" involved for students to research career options or economic trends as it would be if students researched alternative economic systems. If it were true that students were incapable of higher order thinking at this grade level, it would give reason to either eliminate the course or push it to a later year when they would be in a position to understand the material. Otherwise the course runs the risk of cementing existing practices and leaves little room for students to be active, critical agents in their career development.

In terms of PDL, little can be achieved in Career Studies if teachers and students are not exposed to alternative support material. The textbooks and curriculum guides stay away from exploration of alternative workplace and economic practices, choosing instead to present the course as a workplace preparation program. Teachers, restricted by time and by a duty to follow the guidelines, are left to reify existing labour practices, as they deliver employment strategies that tend to follow employer-driven and neo-liberal agendas for workplace and career development. Added to this, students are given little credit in their ability to critically engage with the material. For reasons that are not fully explained, teachers cite a lack of maturity on behalf of students as a stumbling block to explore alternative methods and practices. As we shall see later, opportunities to present a counter-hegemonic workplace curriculum are available. For alternatives to surface in the classroom, an "official" inclusion of these topics in the Career Studies course guideline needs to take place to allow teachers time and resource material to introduce alternative perspectives, thus enabling students opportunities to experience democratic career education.
Prior to an examination of counter-hegemonic projects and the opportunities for democratic learning, it is worth mentioning the potential for correspondence in the Career Studies course. As stated earlier, Bowles and Gintis’ correspondence principle asserts that schools function as a reflection of wider society; specifically, the economic conditions of society that also help define the world of work (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In effect, Bowles and Gintis critique the reproductive elements of schooling, positing that public education simply serves to acclimatize, sort, and prepare students for their place in work. In their minds, the socializing and sorting practices of public education bring about disparities in future occupational positioning, resulting in a reproduction of existing socio-economic inequities. Essentially, students from lower classes and marginalized groups remained in peripheral, low-paying work because the education they receive emphasizes skills and attitudes that best prepare them for lower-class work. Regarding Career Studies, there appears to be an element of correspondence relating to the expectations teachers have of students based upon their class position. As mentioned earlier, teachers and students would engage with the Career Studies curriculum differently depending upon the socio-economic status of the student body. For schools with a primarily upper-middle-class student body, teachers would spend most of the course examining educational opportunities at the university level and occupations in the managerial and professional classes. Conversely, students from mixed schools were exposed to a wide array of post-secondary options, ranging from apprenticeships to colleges and universities. It could be argued that at a micro level, the Career Studies classroom helps to sort, educate, and place students in future work based upon their
socio-economic background. Direct linkages are made with student interests, values, and abilities to market conditions and labour-market demands as part of the curriculum expectations. As stated by one teacher, the compromises and decisions students make related to their career development is heavily influenced by current economic and workplace “realities,” as well as future trends in labour demands, and “smacks of economic determinism.” The learning and student development within this course is inextricably tied to economic conditions and market demands. Although criticized as structuralist in its approach to understanding socialization through public education, Bowles and Gintis’ correspondence principle appears to be playing out to some extent in the Career Studies classroom. The degree and level of accuracy with which this principle explains reproductive elements of inequality associated with Career Studies and future work experiences is still up for debate; however, the clear agenda of the course as a work preparation program coupled with the economically driven guidelines for the course point to the possibility that correspondence is at play. Although outside of the original intent of this study, findings indicate that Bowles and Gintis’ theory may apply to Career Studies; however, further research is needed to determine the strength and validity of this relationship and whether, over time, the course has any substantial effect upon the career plans and outcomes of students.

**Counter-Hegemony**

Prior to entering into an exploration of possibilities for counter-hegemonic learning, it should be noted that teachers, although hindered by a lack of time and resources, often spoke of working outside of the “official curriculum.” Opposition to
curriculum content teachers found to be unnecessary, irrelevant, or uninteresting, was expressed through teacher driven and created classroom content that they thought better suited the needs of their students. In other words, once teachers viewed the curriculum expectation or textbook material to be “inappropriate” for their students, there was little hesitation to either replace or skip the lesson for something that would be a better fit for their classrooms. The willingness for teachers to teach outside the curriculum was present in the interviews, even in the face of administrative or parental pressure, simply because the teachers saw value in the replacement lessons. With respect to counter-hegemonic practices, the potential for teachers to work outside of the curriculum presents an opportunity for critical pedagogy to enter into the classroom.

**Counter-Hegemonic Career Education**

Comparative research on career education practices internationally conducted by Watts and Sultana (2004) yielded the conclusion that the content of these programs was highly dependent upon and unique to the social and market conditions of the countries in which they operate. Not surprisingly, across the 37 countries involved in their study, labour demands and future trends in global employment dominated strategies for student preparation in their career planning. Even in more socially democratic nations such as Sweden, recent downturns in the economy have prompted governments to rethink the content and delivery of their career-education programs, often resulting in curricular shifts that “better” meet market demands (Lundahl & Nilsson, 2009). However, what is unique in Sweden compared with other Western nations is a willingness on behalf of government officials to tailor career-education programs to the
unique needs of geographic regions and the students they serve. In other words, there is still a semblance that the consumers of career education (students and their communities) have an influence over the content of the course material. Rather than have a national program of economic advancement and global competitiveness dominate the curriculum, an opening exists for alternative programming unique to and empowering of students and their communities.

Despite recent shifts toward more neo-liberal career education, Sweden’s past experiences with more local, community-driven career curriculum represents a counter-hegemonic practice to the dominant ideological practices of the time. Similarly, Luis Armando Gandin and Michael Apple’s (2002) study of Porto Alegre, Brazil, demonstrates a counter-hegemonic movement that placed the subordinated people of a city into positions of greater control and influence. Porto Alegre is a city of 1.3 million people in the state of Rio Grande do Sul where The Workers’ Party leads a coalition of left-wing parties holding political power in the city (Gandin & Apple, 2002, p. 261). The Workers’ Party has made every effort to allow the citizens of Porto Alegre the chance to participate in governing the city. The “Popular Administration” (self-titled municipal administration) has not only asked citizens to direct public policy, but has involved citizens in budgetary matters. Direct involvement from the people in the administration of government has led to improvements in infrastructure and schools (Gandin & Apple, 2002, p. 261).

The “citizen school” project in Porto Alegre has put in place a participatory form of education that allows students to learn the curriculum through their own cultural lens, while at the same time studying the strengths of self-organization and group action.
Rather than pay lip service to the existence of collective action in other parts of the world or during other moments in time, by studying their own experiences, the students in Porto Alegre are immersed within a climate of political change and examine the possibilities that can come about through collective action. Porto Alegre serves as an example of a school system that chose to operate against prevailing neo-liberal winds and empower its students with the opportunity to critically examine their world and gain a sense of empowerment through collective participation and control of their schools.

Similarly, the Landless People’s Movement of Brazil has taken control of education in parts of Brazil. Tristan McCowan’s (2003) study of the Landless People’s Movement in Brazil describes similar events to the ones taking place in Porto Alegre. The Movement establishes participatory schools that immerse students in the practices of radical democracy (McCowan, 2003). The reasoning for this shift in political thinking is quite simple – if students are to understand the importance of democratic action, and to potentially hold power for themselves, they must experience democracy in action:

To consider democracy a pedagogical principle means, according to our education framework, that it is not enough for students to study or discuss it; they need also, and most importantly, to experience an arena of democratic participation, educating themselves for social democracy. (MST, 1999, p. 20 quoted in McCowan, 2003, p. 5)

The Landless People’s Movement established a system of schools in Brazil that provides an opportunity for students to experience democracy in action. “Participation in the MST (Landless People’s Movement) is based on direct and not representative democracy, and is empowering rather than instrumental, in that it leads to an increase
in control over decision-making rather than more efficient implementation of externally-formulated policies” (McCowan, 2003, p. 14). A more inclusive system of schooling that allows for community partners and students to formulate school curriculum and policy would lead to a greater democratization of schools. As Paulo Freire stated: “Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated” (Freire, 1970, p. 52). Along with greater attempts to democratize education, schools must present a greater array of options from which students can make a clear and well-informed choice as to the direction they wish to take their own lives and their communities.

Within the Canadian context, there are several counter-hegemonic resources for use in the Career Studies classroom (Antonelli, 2003b; BCTF, 2001; Simon, et al., 1991). A product of more “organic intellectual” union and teacher federation activity, these resources highlight the contradictions between employer demands and worker empowerment in career development. Rather than place the economic conditions and demands at the center of the curriculum, these resource guides place student development and empowerment as central tenets to workplace preparation. Similarly, youth employment proposals (Sawchuk, 2009) geared toward employers and union leaders shift conventional thinking around employment from practices that look to satisfy employers’ needs to ones that address the needs of marginalized youth. These critical shifts in career planning present opportunities for students as future workers to be in greater control over workplace practices. The democratic learning practices found
within these resources allow students to question existing practices, search for alternatives, and critically examine their own career development.

Current forms of career education in North America have only been in place for a few years, making it difficult to assess the effect that workplace education has upon students. Most of these developments have taken place during crisis moments in the economy where a return to neo-liberal practices was perceived to be the best path toward rehabilitation (Laxer, 2009). However, since the mid-1990s there have been further economic failures and catastrophes associated with the neo-liberal reforms meant to save national economies, effectively establishing a moment of resettlement. There is an opportunity for educators, governments, and community partners to assess the worth of a Career Studies curriculum that places market demands at the centre of student learning and development. Reforms in content and pedagogy that take into account different definitions of progress, such as worker empowerment and ecological sustainability, can now be entertained to replace neo-liberal conceptions of economic and workplace success.

Conclusion

Early attempts by secondary schools to establish career education produced curriculum material with a preference toward a neo-liberal agenda. More recent workplace and guidance curriculum continues to support free market system policies of capital exchange and accumulation. Within the Career Studies curriculum these economic and workplace practices are presented as “normal”; in particular practices such as downsizing and temporary work are viewed as “natural” and “expected” options to deal with economic problems. This thesis has examined the creation,
implementation, and delivery of Career Studies as an example of a hegemonic project in action. Surfacing from a moment of economic crisis, the Royal Commission’s report presented career education as an avenue for economic repair. Once again, schools were thrust into the spotlight and perceived shortcomings in public education were viewed as the source of economic lagging in Canada. Ministry policy and discussion documents echoed this sentiment and initiated a curriculum writing and course implementation process that would “better prepare students for the world of work.” To “better prepare” students for work, Career Studies identified key employability strategies, attitudes, and skills intended for students to adopt in their career planning. The employability skill and attitude sets come directly from HRSDC and CBOC, and are clearly influenced by corporate and neo-liberal market agendas. The course delivers a workplace preparation curriculum that emphasizes deference to market demands and employer authority, individual career preparation and employment action in the forms of self-employment and entrepreneurship, and adaptability over confrontation when dealing with workplace change. Effectively, the general philosophy of the course places human agency outside of the functions of work and the economy, and treats these practices as natural and fixed.

Two key shortcomings are present within the philosophy that essentially guides the course. The first shortcoming of the course is that it blames the victim for failings of the economy. Workers, rather than employers, industry, and business, are viewed as lacking critical skills for economic expansion and success; hence, the use of employability profiles and skill sets. This assumption glosses over the underutilization of skills in the workplace (Livingstone, 2004) and erroneously puts forth the notion that
more skilled workforce is what is needed in Canada to counter downturns in the economy. As well, much of the top-down control and eventual damaging policies over economic and workplace practices is left out of the equation, as recent neo-liberal reforms and trade practices instituted and implemented by governments on behalf of corporate interests is not mentioned in the revised guideline and most recently approved textbook (Laxer, 2009). The distancing of government policy from corporate actions helps blur the political and economic relations and, in effect, aids to cement the permanence and natural appearance of deleterious workplace practices like downsizing, outsourcing and job relocation.

The second key shortcoming extends upon the first, as students are provided strategies of adaptation rather than critical inquiry to address instabilities in labour markets and the economy. Because the guidelines and textbooks present damaging economic and workplace practices as natural and not originating in the actions of businesses and employers, students are placed in a passive position to accept and adapt to these practices in their career development. Even if we make a leap of understanding and accept that the course is genuinely concerned with student welfare, the adaptation strategy found within the course removes students from a position of control to one of passivity and reifies existing inequities in the distribution of power and reward within the economy and work. Extending upon the guidelines, the textbooks take up the general philosophy of the course and present strategies for career development in the framework of neo-liberal economic reforms. Students are told to embrace change and find opportunities for career success in all situations, even those that are deleterious to human agency and control in the workplace. Failure to do so
signifies a defect in the student’s personality, such as not possessing the right attitude for career success.

Teachers, hamstrung by time, pressures to follow the guidelines, and a lack of resource support, exhibit tendencies to reproduce the dominant ideology, in part because they believe what exists is what will always exist. A big obstacle for teachers to reform their pedagogy is that they are given a very limited framework from which to operate. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, Career Studies is a short and often hurried course that focuses mainly on introducing students to existing economic and workplace practices. The mandate of the course needs to change to afford teachers opportunities to teach alternative practices. This begins with curriculum reform that allows for greater time, resource support, and expectations that emphasize an awareness of alternate possibilities. Failure to do so will result in teachers making the decision to simply prepare students for what exists rather than encourage exploration of what could be.

Employing strategies of PDL, Career Studies has the potential to offer students an opportunity to understand and better prepare themselves to challenge existing economic and workplace practices. Students, through a course on workplace education, can critically examine some of the unfair and inequitable economic and workplace practices. As well, connections can be made between work and the community, with an emphasis on establishing sustainable economic and workplace practices, both environmentally and socially. Introducing alternative resources such as the ones previously mentioned (Antonelli, 2003b; BCTF, 2001; Simon, et al., 1991) affords students and teachers an opportunity to engage in critical discourse and thought on issues of workplace change and control. Finally, and most importantly, the course
must operate from an acceptance of students’ ability for rational, higher level thinking and grant them the opportunity to embrace change, to see what is possible rather than what is, and to truly have control over their careers.
Appendix – Interview Schedule

Career Studies Interview Questions for Thesis

Background questions
1. Could you briefly describe your school? Size, type, student population, academic level, SES
2. Could you briefly describe your work experience outside of teaching (past and present)?
3. How long have you been a teacher?
4. How long have you taught in your school?
5. How long have you taught Career Studies?
6. How did you come to teaching Career Studies?

General feelings about the course
7. How relevant do you think the course is for high-school students? Why?
8. Do you think the course should be mandatory?
9. Could you comment on the ease/difficulty in teaching Career Studies?
10. What is the general attitude of students toward Career Studies? Why do you think this is?
11. Generally, how do you organize the curriculum? (E.g. follow the textbook or curriculum documents)
12. Do you draw on students’ experiences?

Thoughts on career education
13. How would you describe the economic and workplace “realities” of today? Do you see these realities changing?
14. What do you think is important for students to learn from this course to “best equip” them for the world of work? What are the skill sets, insights, and knowledge you hope they will take from this course? How do you help students obtain these skills? Could you give an example?
15. How important is it for students to develop critical thinking skills/abilities? Do you think these skills/abilities are developed in Career Studies?
16. Do you think that the content within the curriculum documents and textbooks best address the needs of students?
17. What do you think needs to be added or removed from Career Studies to make the course more effective as a workplace education course?

How they teach the course
18. What resources do you use to teach the course?
19. Were you provided with any support materials to teach the course? How helpful were they?
20. Do you have access to educational materials or resources that may present alternative workplace and economic practices? (If “no”, why?)
21. Do you teach outside of the textbook or curriculum documents? Why/Why not?
22. If they answer yes, ask for an example of a lesson where they taught outside of curriculum.
23. If they have an example, ask how the lesson was received by students.
24. Do you think a teacher should teach outside of curriculum? Why/Why not?
25. If their example of alternative teaching practices did not include alternative workplace or economic practices, ask if they have introduced alternative workplace or economic practices to the course. (provide examples, cooperative workplaces, shortened workweeks, socialist or Marxist economic systems, etc.)
26. Why did/didn’t you introduce these alternatives?
References


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