Post-Secondary Preparation:

Resources Secondary Schools Provide Students To Make Informed Post-Secondary Decisions

By

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Abstract

Although there have been many researches examining the effective strategies to assist adolescents with their career decisions, it was seen in this study that there is little to no implementation of these strategies within Ontario secondary schools. This qualitative research investigates the strategies/tools current teachers are using in their classrooms and the improvements required to better assist students and teachers with regards to post-secondary preparation. The data collected was through semi-structured interviews with educators to understand their views regarding post-secondary preparation methods implemented in secondary schools. The study examined three key elements regarding post-secondary preparation of adolescents. First, the study examined students’ attitudes and beliefs regarding post-secondary decisions through teachers’ perspectives. Second, the study analyzed the resources implemented into secondary schools that ensure students make informed post-secondary decisions. Lastly, teacher support regarding post-secondary preparation was examined. The results indicated that there is a lack of student and teacher support within secondary schools to assist adolescents with their post-secondary decision process. Thus, many improvements regarding the post-secondary preparation process of adolescents should be made by the Ministry of Education, curriculum advisors, school administrators and within classroom practice in order to better assist students to make informed post-secondary decisions.

Keywords: post-secondary preparation; secondary schools; career strategies; teacher support; student support; career decisions
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Chapter 1- Introduction

Career decisions are an integral part of one’s life. A career is essential for modern living (Creed & Blume, 2013). The more enjoyable a person perceives their career, the happier their life will be (Sharf, 2013). It is essential for schools to determine the proper methods and common mistakes when implementing any career decision programs.

The career choice process can be a very stressful situation due to the many possibilities of post-secondary options and obtaining the GPA requirements to enter into certain programs (Rowh, 2008). In addition, adolescents who are uninformed with the post-secondary decision process tend to feel overwhelmed when making a decision (Rogers & Creed, 2011). Thus, the adolescents who experience the added stress created with the post-secondary decision will try to avoid the situation and entrust that decision to their parents or to the opinions of peers (Feldman, 2003).

There have been extensive studies examining the factors that hinder career development and the methods that should be used for career development, such as career-exploration and self-exploration. Although many studies have examined these methods, there is little to no research that has been conducted on the implementation of these methods in classrooms.

1.1 Research Problem

Adolescents tend to choose career goals that are unobtainable due to their strengths and weaknesses they may possess (Croll, 2008). When adolescents are unable to obtain their desired career goal, they may experience depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress (Furr, 2001). The lack of knowledge of the workforce and post-secondary options possessed by adolescents, results in the inability to make effective career decisions (Bloxom, 2008). The lack of knowledge
regarding the post-secondary decision process is often a result of the ineffective methods implemented by secondary schools (Cheung, 2006).

Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, and Witko (2004) have examined methods that secondary students want in their education regarding post-secondary preparation. However, it was seen by Feldman D. (2003) that young adults still struggle with career indecision. This study aims to investigate the resources/strategies that assist students through the career decision process.

1.2 Research Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the resources/strategies that teachers use in their classroom to help students with their career decision process.

In this research, the following questions will be addressed:

• What resources/strategies are implemented into secondary schools to assist students with their post-secondary decision process?
• What resources/strategies do the teachers use?
• What support do teachers receive to help their students?

1.3 Research Purpose

Research conducted regarding the career decision process has determined the many factors that affect career decision, methods to use for proper career guidance, and career outcome of adolescents in their future. Although there have been extensive studies on the methods of career planning, there are still cases of failed career aspirations which may lead to the development of mental health issues after secondary school.

This study aims to investigate the areas of improvement with regards to the post-secondary planning process of adolescent in secondary schools. In addition, the study aims to
explore the effective methods that are currently in placed within secondary schools for post-secondary preparation. This knowledge will allow schools to further develop their post-secondary planning initiatives and provide insight on failed processes.

1.4 Background of the Researcher

When I was in secondary school, I was pushed into the science field because simply I excelled in science classes. I was not encouraged to explore different options and was unaware of the many possibilities in the workforce. I would always have a huge focus on the careers that seemed prestigious as a teenager such as a doctor or lawyer. Careers class seemed pointless to me at the time. I was just taught the basics of creating a resume to obtain a job as a teenager. There was never any mention of the specific requirements needed to obtain certain career aspirations or the difficulties that may arise along the way. I felt that my secondary school did not provide proper career planning methods for the students.

When I entered University I was focused on being a doctor, since I had been encouraged to pursue that career from my parents and siblings. As I was pursuing courses to fulfill the requirements of Medical School, I felt very unhappy. I enjoyed learning about certain science topics, but was very unhappy pursuing the Medical pathway. I soon realized that I had no passion to pursue a Medical degree, and was only fulfilling goals set out by others. I became frustrated as I felt I had no career-exploration opportunities in secondary school to realize certain careers or programs I may have enjoyed. I felt that secondary school did not provide me with the proper knowledge and tools to make a proper career decision. In that moment, I realized my school lacked the ability to provide me with any career guidance.

In addition, I noticed that my peers were unhappy with certain programs they had chosen in Grade 12 to pursue. They had entered a post-secondary path that they either had no desire
pursuing or did not have the skill sets to succeed in that path. Many of my peers who were unable to pursue their post-secondary paths due to low GPA or lack of skills started to exhibit depressive symptoms. My peers became depressive due to the inability to handle the difficulties that they encountered while pursuing their goals.

Furthermore, I witnessed many of my peers struggle to obtain a job after University, even though they had a prestigious University degree on their resume. It was believed by many that a career would be easily obtainable if they had a University degree, which was not the reality. Many of my peers started to work at Starbucks or grocery stores; some even started college degrees due to the inability to obtain a career with their University degree.

This experience made me realize that there is a huge lack of effective post-secondary preparation for secondary students. Secondary schools need to implement effective post-secondary preparation strategies/tools to properly prepare students to succeed in their future endeavors.

1.5 Overview of Research

I have conducted a qualitative research study that used purposeful sampling to interview three teachers on the methods that they provide students on making informed post-secondary choices. In chapter 2, I reviewed literature in the areas of the career planning process and the factors influencing adolescent’s career decisions. In chapter 3, I have elaborated on the research design. In chapter 4, I reported my findings and discussed the data found that are related to the literature. In chapter 5, I identified the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and areas of improvement for secondary schools regarding the post-secondary planning process for students.
This study focuses on the career guidance of adolescents in secondary schools, and the methods/strategies teachers that should be implemented into secondary schools to effectively prepare students to make informed post-secondary decisions. The study investigated the areas of improvement required in secondary schools for effective post-secondary preparation. The next chapter will focus on the studies that were previously conducted in the topic of career choice in youth.
Chapter 2- Literature Review

Career decision is of high priority to students in secondary schools, especially in their senior year (Bardick, 2004). Research studies have been conducted that explores various strategies/tools used to ensure students make informed post-secondary decisions. Furthermore, researchers have analyzed the factors that affect adolescents’ career decisions. Cheung and Wong (2006), Croll (2008), Howard, Carlstorm, Katz, et.al (2011) are a few of the researchers that have analyzed various factors affecting adolescents career choices. Although, there has been extensive research regarding students’ career decision process, there has been little studies analyzing the implementation of these strategies into practice.

This chapter explores an adolescents’ career exploration, factors influencing adolescents’ career choice, occupation aspirations, and the outcomes of students’ post-secondary decisions. The purpose of exploring these categories is to understand adolescents’ career decision process and how it may affect their future. Lastly, investigating these categories can provide insight on areas of improvement within schools for post-secondary decision development of students.

2.1 Adolescent Career Development

Choosing a career path is a huge stage in one's life. This decision shapes the education an adolescent will pursue, the jobs they will have access to, and will affect their overall satisfaction in life. If an individual is unsatisfied with their career, their personal life is often affected. This decision making process starts at a young age (Rogers & Creed, 2011). Adolescents who experience an effective career planning program are better able to understand their abilities and make an informed career decisions (Cheung, 2006). Career planning programs are essential for adolescents to make informed and realistic career decisions; therefore research in this area is important.
2.1.1 Self exploration. Self-exploration occurs over one’s lifetime. It is the discovery of one’s own personal interests, skills, abilities, values, and personality. Career planning begins with an adolescence self-exploration. The process allows adolescents to identify their strengths and weaknesses to guide their post-secondary decision. Unfortunately, secondary schools do not allow students to effectively self-explore, which results in the lack of knowledge adolescents have regarding their own strengths and weaknesses (Feldman, 2003).

Adolescents who lack self-exploration usually make inadequate career decisions since they are unable to grasp their strengths and weaknesses. This results in career decisions that are unobtainable (Feldman, 2003). Thus, secondary school students who base their post-secondary education and even their final career decision solely on their interests struggle with identity formation (Kimweli & Richards, 1999). These students will tend to base their post-secondary majors on their interest in high-school, which may result in a lack of appreciation for a certain career decision in an adolescent’s future (Marcia, 1980; Marcia, 1987; Schiedel & Marcia, 1985; Waterman, 1985).

2.1.2 Career planning. Career planning is associated with career decision self-efficacy and high levels of goal-setting (Rogers et al., 2008). Career planning is affected by an adolescent’s emotional state, social skills, and knowledge. This section analyzes factors hindering proper career planning and effective methods for proper career decision making to occur.

The type of career that an adolescent wants to pursue is a high priority for students in secondary school (Bardick, 2004). Adolescents become fearful when making this decision due to the lack of knowledge they have regarding post-secondary options. The fear that adolescents experience tends to stem from the disapproval of adolescent’s parents with regards to their post-
secondary decision. This fear affects students which may cause them to rely on their parents and friends to make their post-secondary decision for them (Gati, 2001). Furthermore, students who are fearful of their post-secondary decision, tend to suffer career indecision, which results in changed career paths once a roadblock is encountered (Feldman, 2003). In comparison, adolescents who are well informed and knowledgeable about career planning are confident when making career decisions and motivated to set goals (Rogers & Creed, 2011). Eliminating this fear by informing students of the career planning process creates an environment conducive to career planning.

Rogers and Creed (2011) identified that Grade 10 is a critical time in an adolescent’s life for career planning to take place. It was seen that Grade 10 was the time when students began their conversations with their parents, teachers, and peers regarding potential certain pathways to pursue in Grade 11 and 12. In addition, students who were more capable of handling stress in Grade 10 had an increase successful career planning process. Thus, students require a safe and comfortable environment for them to confide in the teacher about possible post-secondary pathways (Rogers & Creed, 2011). However, Bardick (2004) study indicated that students felt their teachers and guidance counselors offer little assistance or support with their career planning process, thus they would rely on their parents and friends for this decision.
2.1.3 Career exploration. Career exploration is a process that can help an adolescent learn about themselves and the career potential for them. This process can help an adolescent identify career possibilities and set an effective pathway to fulfill their future endeavours. Career exploration allows an adolescent to have a clear and accurate analysis of their strengths, weaknesses, and skill sets in order to make an informed career decision (Jordaan, 1963; Phillips, 1982). Career exploration plays an important role in the final career decision.

Career exploration involves job shadowing, internships and summer jobs in areas of interest, which allows students the opportunity to explore their interest, and identify their strengths and weakness (Rowh, 2008). Students who experienced career exploration in high-school were able to make informed career decisions. Furthermore, outgoing students showed an increase in career exploration, which ultimately increased their ability to effectively career plan. However, students who were more introverted in Grade 12 exhibited a reduction in career exploration (Rogers & Creed, 2011).

2.2 Factors Influencing Career Decision

Society affects the views of all of us, which is not to adolescents’ views. Adolescents are strongly influenced by their surrounding environments and the people around them. These factors can influence an adolescent’s post-secondary decision and affect their future endeavor. An adolescent’s career decision can be affected by their geographic location, socioeconomic status, family composition, parents, and information gained from their secondary school (Splete, 1985, Duffy & Dik, 2009). This section will explore how parents and the society influence an adolescent’s career decision.
2.2.1 Parents. Zhang (2015) and Cheung (2006) studies indicated that students’ career views are largely influenced by their parents, siblings and peers, since the approval of their parents is of high importance. Thus, adolescents who lack knowledge regarding post-secondary options will often fear the disapproval of certain careers by their parents. This fear will cause adolescents to rely on their parents to make their post-secondary decision (Gati, 2001). However, Aijaz’s (2011) study found that 32% of adolescents did not enjoy the post-secondary decisions that their parents had chosen for them. In conclusion, students who rely on their parents for their post-secondary decisions may become unsatisfied further in their lifetime.

2.2.2 Society. Society largely affects an adolescent’s career decision by changing their point of view in certain topics. The societal pressures to make a decision are constantly present for adolescents. When students enter high-school, they are forced to make a decision of the courses they will take (Patton & Creed, 2001). These course decision, potentially directs students in the post-secondary pathway they will take. Following that, adolescents are forced to choose the major they want to pursue in post-secondary (Germeijs & Verscheuren, 2009). These pressures can be stressful to an adolescent or hindered them from pursuing a certain career goal. Furthermore, the societal view of a University degree is quite prestigious and thought to be the only way of increasing a person’s cultural capital and social status (Howe & Strauss, 2000). It was seen from Sharf ‘s (2013) study that students with a bachelor’s degree tended to earn more, on average, than students who do not graduate secondary school. The societal view of University being prestigious is shown can be shown by the Canadian Policy Research Network’s (2002) research data that indicates 65 percent of youth graduating secondary school pursue a university degree and 25 percent of youth pursue a college degree. The pressures of having a prestigious University degree in order to succeed in society may cause students to follow career
paths that do not align with their strengths and interest, which ultimately may create career indecision. A potential strategy to assist students through the stresses that they encounter when making a post-secondary decision is removing the societal pressures forced onto students at a young age.

2.3. Adolescent’s Career Aspirations

Students tend to choose well regarded and well rewarded careers (Croll, 2008). The top 5 occupations that students tend to choose are artist, lawyer, musician, FBI agent, and actor/actress (Howard, 2011). It was previously seen that adolescent’s career decisions are largely affected by various factors surrounding them. This section investigates the various career decisions secondary school student’s make and the factors that change those career aspirations. Specifically, this section will look at the career aspirations of students with varying identities and the impact of students’ identities on the information received from teachers.

2.3.1 Race/ethnicity differences. Robson, Anisef, Brown, and Parekh’s (2014) research revealed that access to university is still largely inequitable. Students that were in applied classes and identified as Black with special education needs had a lower tendency to attend college. In addition, students identifying as East Asian, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southwest Asians were more likely to pursue university degrees in comparison to White students. Whereas, students who identified as South and Southeast Asian were more likely to attend college in comparison to White students.

From this research, it can be seen that race may have a factor on the post-secondary pathway a student may pursue. Potentially, the way the students are assisted regarding their post-secondary pathway by teachers/schools may a large factor in the post-secondary path students pursue.
2.3.2 Socioeconomic status. Research has shown that socioeconomic status of a student affects the post-secondary pathway they may pursue. Students within high income neighbourhoods had an increase likelihood of attending university or college in comparison to students in low income neighbourhoods. The possible reason for this may be that wealthier schools have more resources to support the learning of their students. In addition, it was seen that lower socioeconomic schools had a higher number of students enrolled in the applied program compared to schools in high socioeconomic neighbourhoods. Thus, the low number of students pursuing college/university degrees in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods may be a result of the high number of students in applied courses (Robson, Anisef, Brown, & Parekh, 2014). Equitable distribution of resources within school boards may be the cause of students pursuing certain post-secondary pathways. If schools have limited resources, then the teachers are not able to provide their students with the post-secondary preparation support that is necessary for students to make informed career decisions. In addition, streaming of students at a young age into applied or academic courses can be detrimental to their post-secondary pathway.

2.3.3 Gender. Patton and Creed (2007) determined that male adolescents aspired to more professional careers, such as lawyer, doctor in comparison to females. However, Wei-Cheng and Bios’s, (2000) study found that females had higher career aspirations than males. In addition, Powers and Wojtkiewicz’s (2004) research found males and females tend to pursue professional careers at the same rate. Therefore, no conclusion can be drawn to relate gender to career aspirations pursued.

Focusing on Howard’s (2011) research in particular, it was seen that secondary school females selected the following careers; acting, fashion design, cosmetology, veterinarian, photography, dancing, psychology and elementary school teacher. While secondary school males
selected; architect, police officer, professional athlete, auto body technician, computer
programmer, computer engineer, mechanical engineer and coach. The results showed that
secondary school females choose careers that required more education in comparison to males
however, the median salary that is eventually received by both females and males was the same.

In conclusion, it can be seen that researches over the years have not indicated any
correlation between gender and career profession pursued. However, it was seen from Patton and
Creed’s (2001) research that females have an increased maturity with respect to career choices
than males. This may result in an increase in self-exploration thus allowing females to make
informed post-secondary decisions.

2.4. Outcome of Adolescent’s Career Decision

The post-secondary decision process can be extremely stressful to adolescents.
Adolescents tend to experience great anxiety and stress when it comes to making this decision
due to fear of disapproval from their parents. Thus, students tend make their decisions with
inadequate information and unrealistic expectations leading them to choose ambitious careers
that they are unable to achieve (Croll, 2008; Feldman, 2003). This section investigates the
impacts of the post-secondary decision process on adolescents.
2.4.1 Mental health. Students entering University tend to have high expectations for their GPA, however, they tend to not achieve these high grades, which can often lead to various mental health conditions (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Students who enter University experienced an increase in depressive symptoms due to their academic GPA (Furr, 2001). This was evident in Price, McLeod, Gleich and Hand’s (2006) research which indicated 7 percent of males and 14 percent of females in first year Canadian universities experienced depressive disorders.

Furthermore, adolescents in university were unable to handle obstacles when pursuing their career goals, such as failed exams, inability to pursue certain programs, and lack of experience. When experiencing these obstacles, adolescents would tend to become upset, depressive and stressed (Feldman, 2003). The inability to handle stresses that are encountered while pursuing certain career goals may be a result of ineffective post-secondary preparation implemented into secondary schools. These stresses may cause students to experience mental health conditions that can lead to the inability to succeed in their future goals.

2.4.2 Other issues. Adolescents who enter University tend to have a decrease in grades by 20 percent of their high-school GPA. The decrease in GPA can create added stress to students as they feel they are disapproving their parents (Wintre & Yaffe, 2011). The increase anxiety over lower GPA may cause adolescents to switch university majors. Rowh’s (2008) study revealed that 80 percent of adolescents will switch university majors at least once in their lifetime. As a result, students often delay graduation, increase their expenses or dropout.

Throughout this section it has been seen that research demonstrates the effectiveness of self-exploration and career-exploration to ensure adolescents make informed career decisions. In addition, various factors affecting an adolescent’s post-secondary decision were examined, including the effects of adolescents’ identities on the teacher/school support received on post-
secondary preparation. This study aims to investigate the methods/strategies schools are initiating that assist students with their post-secondary decision process to make informed career decisions. Although, there have been many investigations on the career planning method itself, many students still suffer mental health issues when they encounter obstacles in achieving their career goal. This study aims to investigate the areas of improvement within schools to effectively prepare students for post-secondary. The next chapter will focus on the method of research used in this study.
Chapter 3- Research Methodologies

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

This chapter explores the research methodology. Exploration of the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments will occur before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. Then, the chapter will continue to explain the data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to the study. In addition, the chapter will identify a range of the methodology’s limitations and strengths. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with the key methodological decisions and rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The current study used a qualitative research approach including reviews of existing literature, semi-structured interviews with teachers and guidance counsellors to gather data. Qualitative research approaches allow for an expansive understanding of career preparation offered by secondary schools as well as the perspectives of parental pressures and control within this area.

Qualitative research allows individuals to have a voice and speak to their own personal experiences. Participants are more conversational in the research rather than just an object being researched. In addition, participant’s stories can be told and discussed in the findings. There is more complexity to a qualitative research (Shank, 2002).

Research in the areas of career and counseling psychology, tend to use qualitative methods over any other approach when collecting data (Chen, 2006; Chen & Lee, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005; Shein & Chen, 2010). This may be due to the fact that qualitative methods
allow for an abundance amount of information to be gathered on a personal level. Each person’s career is personal and their own. Individuals can make decisions on who they are, what they do, their work role and their commitments (Savickas, 2002). The decision process that takes one to a particular career choice may have been different from another’s decision making process. Thus, research in career preparation is better conducted using the qualitative method.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The following research used semi-structured interviews to obtain the findings. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants the opportunity to express their feelings, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. The semi-structured interview ensured that the participants have the opportunity to be fully understood (Murray, 1998; Thompson, 1981). The semi-structured format allowed for the interviewer to attend to questions that focus on the purpose of the research but allowed room for elaboration further exploration.

Unstructured interviews are when there are no standardized questions used. Conversation is more informal and free flowing. In this research, unstructured interviews are not used because it is difficult to draw patterns amongst participants especially when there is a small sample size (Corbin, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews provide in-depth and informative information during a 30-60 minute interview (Corbin, 2008). During the interview, participants were recorded while questions were asked. I did not record written notes as this may have distracted me, resulting in key points being missed (Creswell, 2007). Lastly, there is opportunity for the answers to be elaborated on and directed away from the questions.
3.3 Participants

The study sample is an essential part to any research. In this section, the sample criteria and procedures that were used to determine the participants are addressed. In addition, there is a section dedicated to introducing each of my participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. The following criteria were applied to teacher participants:

1. Teachers must have 10+ years of teaching years of experiences.
2. Science Teachers
3. Teachers must be teaching upper year courses (Grade 11/12)

Teachers that have greater experiences in the field of education tend to have more personal stories and are able to speak more to the changing society; especially when it comes to the workforce and the changing attitudes towards careers. Over the past 10 years, society has seen a huge change in the amount of careers available to young students when they graduate High-School, College and University. I wanted to look at the affects that the changing society may have on the attitudes of schools and teachers towards the career development tool/strategies used to prepared students. Thus, I decided to interview teachers with 10+ years of experience who were able to speak best to these situations. In addition, I wanted to interview science teachers, to keep my study specific to science related courses. Lastly, upper year course teachers have more experience working with students of all grades, which allows them to have a greater perspective on the career preparation process provided to students.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures. The research has two very big constraints: time and an ethical protocol. Due to these constraints, a small sample size was only researched and within that sample size, only teachers were able to be interviewed. Since the research was limited to a small
sample size, it was mandatory to use a purposeful sample. Purposeful sampling ensures that productive participants are chosen to provide a deeper understanding and insight of the subject matter (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008).

In addition, due to the time constraint convenience sampling was used, which is when the most accessible participants were used (Marshall, 1996). The research was conducted within two years thus the time-frame was confined, choosing teachers was based on who was willing to volunteer and who fit within the criteria.

I chose participants using the convenience and purposeful sampling technique. The criteria are required when making my selection to ensure I make a purposeful selection (Cleary, et al. 2014).

3.3.3 Participant bios. My first participant, Carly, was a secondary Chemistry/Science teacher from the Toronto District School Board. She has been teaching for twenty one years at her present school. She has experience teaching Grade 9, 10 Science and Grade 11, 12 Chemistry. Carly has experienced teaching over the years and adapting accordingly to the changing economy. She has been able to witness students’ progress through their high-school career and was fortunate to hear stories from her previous students of their secondary experience.

My secondary participant, Lila, was a secondary Biology/Science teacher from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. She has experience teaching at many different schools over her ten years of teaching. She is currently teaching the IB Grade 11/12 Biology at her secondary school. This has given Lila the opportunity to witness students in applied, academic, and IB courses, which allows her to speak to the different views of post-secondary aspirations.
My last participant, Anna, was a secondary Biology/Science/English/Law teacher from the Halton District School Board. She has experienced the many views of students in various courses over her twelve years of teaching. Anna herself has experienced many career changes over her years, thus she is a figure that provides students with a different perspective on post-secondary aspirations.

3.4 Data Analysis

After the completion of three interviews, the data was transcribed. Descriptive and in-vivo coding was used to analyze the data, in order to create codes that were later split into categories. The categories were then used to determine the final themes.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

As a researcher, I consider the concerns and needs of the teachers that I studied. The well-being of the research participants was my top priority. A trust was built between the participants and me during the study, which allowed me to establish an ethical research (Pope, 2000).

In order to build this trust, participants were first told their identities would remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their schools or students would be excluded from the research. Participants were then given a pseudonym to ensure their identities and any identifying indicators were not released. Second, to establish a safe and comfortable environment for participants to discuss their attitudes and experiences genuinely and truthfully, participants were explained that there were no known risks to participating in the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In addition, participants were re-informed on multiple occasions that they had the right to withdraw from the study. Lastly, every participant had the
opportunity to review the transcripts and was given an opportunity to clarify or retract any
statements before the data was analyzed. All data was stored on my password protected laptop
and will be destroyed after 5 years. Lastly, participants signed a consent letter (Appendix A)
giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. The consent letter provided an
overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified expectations of
participations (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview)

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

There were various limitations to the study that may have hindered the findings. The first
drawback to the study was that the data was not generalizable to the population due to the limited
number of participants. However, the small sample size allowed for an increased understanding
of the participants on an emotional and personal level. The small sample size ensured quality
research over quantity (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014).

Another limitation to the research that may have changed the perspectives was my
sample set. Due to ethical criteria I was unable to interview high-school students or graduates of
high-schools to understand their experiences with career preparation in a high-school setting.
Teachers may have a bias view compared to the students that had the first-hand experience with
the programs that affected their lives.

3.7 Conclusion: Brief Overview and Preview

This chapter explained the research methodology used to develop the data that was
analyzed in the next chapter. At the beginning of this chapter, there was a discussion of the
research approach and procedure, then the meaning and importance of a qualitative research was
explored. Next, data collection and participants were explored to give insight of the research as whole. The sampling criteria that were applied to select participants were identified and a brief explanation of each criterion was given. Following, the recruitment procedures that ensured the quality of the research was explained. Then, the participants interviewed were described and how the data was analyzed. Ethical issues such as risks of participation, right to withdraw and consent forms was then addressed. Lastly, the methodological limitations such as sample size and sample choice were examined. The next chapter will focus on the findings on the research.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

The following chapter outlines the findings that were collected from the qualitative research using a 30-45 minute semi-structured per participant. Three secondary educators were chosen who have five years of teaching experience and have taught senior science courses. Participants were selected based on convenience due to ease of access. Pseudonyms (Lila, Anna, and Carly) were used to ensure confidentiality of the participants. Analysis of data involved the use of descriptive coding (summary of the text) and in vivo coding (direct quotes or words from the participants), that was then proceeded by category grouping to discover the main themes. The study aims to investigate the various methods implemented in secondary schools to encourage effective post-secondary planning amongst adolescents. In addition, the study seeks to determine the areas of improvement that are required for effective post-secondary planning to occur in secondary schools.

Three common themes arose after careful analyses and syntheses of the data collected from the interviews. The first theme that arose was a) Teachers report on students’ attitudes and beliefs towards post-secondary aspirations. The first theme discovers the many influences that affect students’ post-secondary aspirations. Through deep analyses, the theme discusses students’ attitudes and beliefs that prevent them from making knowledgeable post-secondary decisions.

The second theme that was developed from the data analysis was b) Post-secondary preparation support provided to students. The second theme seeks to answer the research question: What resources/strategies are implemented into secondary schools to assist students with their post-secondary decision process? Furthermore, the theme identifies areas where
secondary schools should change or enhance to better inform students of the post-secondary options thus allowing students to make insightful post-secondary decisions.

The last theme that was revealed by the data was c) Teachers' support systems to better assist students’ post-secondary preparation. The third theme seeks to uncover the research sub-question: What support do teachers receive to help their students? The last theme takes a deeper look at teacher support and the areas of improvement to increase teacher support in secondary schools.

4.1 Teachers Report on Students’ Attitudes/Beliefs towards Post-Secondary Aspirations

Germeijs and Verscheuran (2009) indicated that society plays a large role in the decisions students choose for careers. Furthermore, Zhang’s (2015) study indicated that students are largely influenced by their parents, friends and siblings. Thus, students’ attitudes and beliefs towards post-secondary aspirations are largely affected by their surroundings. The data collected from the interviews revealed the many influences parents have on students, such as secondary school marks and students’ perceptions of post-secondary aspirations. Through deep analysis, this section reveals the areas where students struggle with regards to post-secondary aspirations. This understanding is used to formulate a stronger thinking for section 4.2 in order to identify the resources/strategies that should be implemented into secondary schools to better assist students with post-secondary preparation.

4.1.1 Influence of marks on students’ post-secondary aspirations. The findings from my study indicated that marks are an influence on students’ mindset in secondary schools. Carly’s experience with students and marks is as follows, “students stress levels are super high and again because they are so mark driven, even the slightest percentage makes a big
difference.” Students feel stressed and anxious if their marks do not meet certain criteria for post-secondary schools. Increased stress causes students to feel hopeless and that their goals are unachievables. Rogers and Creed (2011) discussed that students’ fear of disapproval by their parents regarding their career decision, thus many students rely on their parents to make their post-secondary decisions. From the interviews and Rogers and Creed’s (2011) research, I can deduct that fear of disapproval or failure of post-secondary aspirations can leave students stressed over marks. Fear of failure of post-secondary aspirations may be due to lack of knowledge and information about post-secondary options.

Carly made a statement, “we only learn when we are challenged and I believe we learn from our failures as stressful as they may be.” Students in secondary schools have trouble accepting failure. If something is hard, students will not pursue that goal anymore and will become stressed until they hit a mental breakdown. Lila stated a possible explanation for students’ stress levels was, “students have a hard time accepting failure, and this creates added stress and ultimately makes them not want to pursue their goals.” Lila and Carly’s statement both align with Feldman’s study conducted in 2003. Feldman’s (2003) study found that young adults who are more stressed or become frustrated with their post-secondary paths, will start to jump into and out of certain career paths, resulting in a high amount of career indecision. In addition, Noe & Bachhuber’s (1990) research found that young adults who tend to become more frustrated or stressed, will have less career resilience thus will stop pursuing their career goals if they encounter obstacles. Therefore, students who tend to become more stressed and frustrated in secondary schools, may have less career resilience further on in their life, which ultimately may be detrimental to their success in society.
Lila addressed failure and the benefits of the acceptance of failure, “students and even adults are sometimes unable to handle failure. But those students who can accept failure and move forward from it, move on to better things and deal better in University.” Acceptance of failure is something that can be hard to accomplish by everyone. Ensuring students are aware that failure is okay, can help students cope with the stresses they may encounter due to the obstacles that may exist towards students’ future endeavors.

4.1.2 Influence of parents on students’ post-secondary aspirations. Through analysis of the data, I was able to unveil that parents are a large driving force for students’ post-secondary aspirations, which correlates with Zhang’s (2015) research, stating that adolescent’s career views are largely influenced by their family and friends. Students’ thoughts and ideas of various post-secondary aspirations usually stems from their parents.

Students often feel that they are disappointing their parents if they are unable to succeed in the goals set out by their parents. The influence of parents on students’ aspirations usually takes priority over a students’ preferences, Lila states, “a lot of the students are going in career choices, in career paths, that their parents have said, and “This is what I would like you to get into.”” Parents influence is big factor in students’ post-secondary choices, however parents may be unaware of their child’s skills sets and interests; thus parents may set goals for their child that are unachievable. Carly discusses parents’ lack of knowledge of their child’s skills sets, parents do not understand the capabilities and inabilities that their son or daughter has. They sometimes believe the sky is the limit, but that’s not always the case. Parents need to look at their child and understand areas where their child can excel in and areas where their child cannot excel in.
Lack of knowledge from parents of their child’s skill sets can be detrimental to the child and increase the child’s stress. Students in Rogers and Creed’s (2011) study feared failure and disapproval of their career decision. Parents who lack knowledge of their child’s skill set could potentially be setting unrealistic goals for their child. This could create anxiety in the child if they make their own post-secondary decision that does not align with their parents set goals.

4.1.3 Perception of university versus college. University and College are two options of various others, that students can pursue post-secondary school. Students view University and College on different levels, although they both offer different career options and teaching styles. The perception of University versus College is strongly seen in academic courses, Lila discusses the views of students in her senior University level courses; “they don’t even see college as an option. They don’t even talk about it, it doesn’t even come up.” Carly also had the same opinions from her senior University level course students, she spoke towards the different views of student,

I think it comes from their parents. They want better for their children and that’s understandable. I think in people’s views, they view University as wow top notch and you have get into the top University.

The strong opinions stems from their parents and prior societal views that consider University as the higher education pathway than College. Howe and Strauss (2000) stated that society believed a University degree was the only way to increase a person’s cultural and social status. Both Howe and Strauss’s (2000) study and this research found that society’s view of University being the top and the work-force or college being lower in status was still present.

Changing the view of College compared to University starts at the secondary school level. At Anna’s secondary school, the school started to change the outlook of their students,
at University/College fairs, we introduce both Universities and Colleges together in alphabetical order. We don’t separate them into two separate categories. This way they are both on the same level. Students in grade 12 University classes will apply to both College and University.

Ensuring Universities and Colleges are both on the same level ground, gives students the view that no school is better than another. At Anna’s secondary school, students view both University and College on an equal basis. Senior students at Anna’s school apply to programs based on their interest and not because of the status of the school. Changing the school’s perception of University and College, can help to change students’ views on University and College.

My study correlated with Howe and Strauss’s (2000) research which means that the misconception of University being better still exists, even though it had been sixteen years since Howe and Strauss’s research. Fortunately, the data I collected was able to determine a possible solution to the misconception. Students’ views of University versus College can change, it just starts at the secondary school level and the views the school sets out for students.

From my findings, it was seen that the reports from teachers regarding students’ views fairly correlates with previous studies conducted on students regarding career decision. Students’ post-secondary decisions were largely impacted by their surroundings, especially parents. Parents who set unrealistic goals for their child can increase the child’s pressure due to fear of failure or disapproval of career decisions that the child may want to do. It was seen that students struggle to accept failure which results in the increase of stress over marks leading to anxiety among students. However, students who are able to accept failure are able to move forward and accomplish their post-secondary aspirations.
Knowledge and reducing misconceptions can assist students with their post-secondary aspiration process. Lack of knowledge from both parents and students develops misconception ideas about University versus College. In addition, parents who lack knowledge of their child’s skills can set goals that are unrealistic, as a result, the child will have increased stress. Howe and Strauss (2000) found that the only way to increase a person’s cultural capital and social status in society’s belief is to obtain a University degree. Therefore, students who are misinformed can have many misconceptions about University versus College. In order to reduce this misconceptions, schools and teachers should ensure students and parents are well informed which can also result in decreased students’ stress of post-secondary aspirations. The next section will examine the methods schools are implementing to ensure students gain the necessary knowledge and information to make informed post-secondary decisions.

4.2 Post-secondary Preparation Support Provided to Students

Rogers & Creed (2011) stated that secondary students who are properly prepared and informed, have higher confidence when making a career decision choice thus are more motivated to set goals. My study sought out to uncover the preparation practices implemented by secondary schools to assist students through the post-secondary decision-making process. Through insightful discussions with teachers, various support systems were found to be effective. The following section, uncovers the support systems in Ontario Secondary Schools that are currently implemented for post-secondary preparation of students.
4.2.1 Teacher experience. The findings from my study indicated that teachers largely use their secondary experience as a gateway for students to understand the difficult career decision process. Lila in particular discussed her method;

I talk a lot about my experiences and how I always thought I was going to be a nurse and I applied to nursing. I was supposed to go to Western and I never went. I didn’t want to move away and wanted to go to Mac, but the nursing program was full, so I took science program. Then I tell my students how I finished my degree and didn’t know what I wanted to do until someone recommended teaching and now I am here. It helps students to understand that the process is difficult and it isn’t cookie cutter. It also helps calm nerves of students who don’t know what they want to do.

Lila ensured her students that the process is difficult by informing them of her difficult experience. Students were able to view Lila as a relatable figure that has gone through the struggles. Lila also reduced the stress of students by ensuring students that it was not the end of the world if they did not have a pathway in mind. Anna also reassures her Grade 12 students,

it’s not what you want to do for the rest of your life; it’s what you want to do first. I went from being a lawyer to a biologist to now a teacher. Would I take anything back, no, I learned a lot and I am happy where I am.

Students in both Lila and Anna’s classes are able to understand that the career decision process is difficult and change does occur. Both teachers reassure their students that indecision does occur, and that it’s the pathway that they should focus on, not the end goal.

Rogers and Creed’s (2011) study found that Grade 11 and 12 students need to feel comfortable around their teachers to confide about their career choices. Students in both Lila and Anna’s classes were able to understand that their teacher was relatable; therefore the student-
teacher relationship was built. If students have that familiarity with their teacher then they are able to confide to their teacher about career choices, thus allowing them to become more familiar and knowledgeable about various post-secondary options.

Teacher experience deemed beneficial to students. Students enjoyed the experiences that were addressed by teachers. Gati (2001) states that adolescence become fearful when making decisions; therefore they tend to rely on their parents to make the decision. From my study, teacher experience can relive the stress of students and ensure students that indecision occurs by everyone.

4.2.2 Guidance counselors. In addition to teacher experience, guidance counselors were another student support system that assists students with post-secondary preparation. Guidance counselors differs from school to school, each student could receive different support depending on the guidance counselor they talk to. The interviews with the teachers indicated the difference in guidance counselor support for students. Lila explained the guidance department’s environment at her school;

our previous guidance department was very old school, suggested every student to take math and science courses, even if a student disliked the course and wasn’t good at it. But, it has actually changed a lot over the years. There’s a younger demographic in the guidance department and they are actually truly helpful with the students.

The guidance department can have a leading role in guiding students to their post-secondary aspirations. However, guidance counselors are often seen as a figure that offers little guidance in the career planning process by students (Bardick, 2004). Ensuring the guidance department is able to understand and connect to students, with new and informative knowledge about various post-secondary options can help ensure students rely on their guidance department for assistance.
Guidance counselors vary among schools; each school has different guidance counselors that provide different knowledge. At schools that had effective guidance counselors, it was seen by teachers, that the guidance department was beneficial to students who made use of it. However, many students did not make use of the guidance department. From each of the interviews, it was seen that most students do not tend to go to a guidance counselor unless told explicitly to or had an issue with their timetable. Carly discusses her students, “my students in particular will not go to guidance unless they have an issue with courses.” This may correlate to Bardick’s (2004) study that found students believed guidance provided little information for their career decision process. From both my findings and Bardick’s (2004) study, it can be seen that students may not rely on the guidance department due to the misconception that guidance counselor offer little to any assistance with students’ career decision process.

The participants suggested that improvement was required amongst guidance counselors. Students often feel that guidance counselors provided little information (Bardick, 2004) Thus, awareness of the guidance counselor can help to counteract this view. Lila speaks to her guidance department, “students who ask a lot of questions and take advantage of the guidance counselor receive a lot of information that help to guide them.” Carly had a suggestion for the guidance department to ensure students were gaining the benefits of guidance counselors; more workshops or seminars in grade 11. Our guidance department is fantastic but they gear towards grade 12 students. While they start early, they don’t start early enough because by grade 12 you’ve already chosen your courses, you know if you’ve made an error in choosing your courses and you have to come back another year or take summer courses.
From Carly’s thoughts, implementing workshops/seminars in grade 11 can allow students the exposure to the endless post-secondary options available to them that they would have never discovered without seeking assistance.

Feldman (2003) suggests that adolescents who lack self-exploration usually make inadequate career decision. From my findings, it was seen that students who do not seek guidance are less informed, therefore these students may lack self-exploration and are at risk of making an inadequate post-secondary decision. Schools can better prepare students by providing students in grade 11 with workshops/seminars that allow for self-exploration, as a result, allowing students to realize their potential options.

Post-secondary preparation does occur in secondary schools, however there are still some areas of improvement that schools require to increase the confidence and knowledge students have for post-secondary. Feldman’s (2003) study indicated that lack of post-secondary information a student has, the more inadequate their post-secondary decision will be. From my findings, it was seen that increasing students’ knowledge about post-secondary can better assist students their self-exploration thus leading to an informative post-secondary decision.

4.2.3 Pathway program. The third resource/strategy that was mentioned in the interviews was at Anna’s school. At Anna’s school the Pathway Program is implemented. The Pathway Program allows students to experience various career options through co-op programs. Anna discusses the Pathway Program, “students come to the school for the Pathway Program. Every student is interested in the program, even students in University level courses. It isn’t seen as a program just for struggling students.” There are co-op programs at every school, however, at this school, co-op programs are a “norm”. Students acknowledge the benefits of the co-op program and it is viewed in a positive manner. Therefore, students who participate in the
Pathway Program are given the opportunity to explore certain career pathways thus informing students’ post-secondary decisions.

Rowh (2008) states career exploration as job shadowing, internships, and summer jobs. Career exploration increases a person’s self-discovery, allowing students to explore their interest and discover their own identity. The more experiences a student receives, the more fulfilled and knowledgeable about various options a student will be. Increased self-discovery will entail increased confidence when making a post-secondary aspiration decision. The Pathways Program at Anna’s high-school ensures students are given the opportunity to explore various career options of their interest. The Pathway Program creates an environment where students can gain self-discovery, thus allowing students to reflect on their experience and gain confidence to make their post-secondary decision.

4.2.4 Careers course. The last resource that was discussed amongst interviews was the Grade 10 Careers Course. The findings from the interview indicated that secondary schools are not fully preparing students for their post-secondary aspirations. Lila and Anna indicated that there is a lack of post-secondary preparation for students within the Grade 10 Careers Course. Since, the Grade 10 Careers Course is normally not taken seriously by both students and teachers. Lila and Anna believed the following changes should occur in the Grade 10 Careers Course, Anna states;

the Grade 10 Career Course is taken as “joke” to students and teachers. You know lets write a resume, yeah that’s fine in grade 9 and 10 when you are looking for a part-time job but how is that helping you with your post-secondary options. Students need to know what their options are and explore those interests.

Lila also agreed to the many factors that Anna suggested;
once you get to grade 11 and 12, you don’t know all the options that are out there. Like, I didn’t know anything about kinesiology, in high-school. I liked that stuff, I probably would have taken that course in University. The career course needs to have more information given to them and I think it needs to be done later on in high school.

Rogers and Creed’s (2011) research suggests that grade 10 is the critical time in the career planning of an adolescent. Thus previous research does not agree to Lila’s view of implementing the Careers Course later on in high school. From the findings and previous research, I can interpret that the time of year in a student’s life where the career course is implemented is not the main factor for unpreparedness in post-secondary decisions. My findings indicated that the Careers Course needs to be more effectively executed in terms of content and information given to students. The Careers Course may not be taken seriously by students due to teachers’ views of the course. Anna discusses her experience, “I know teachers who are disappointed to see the Careers Course on their timetable. The teacher for that course is constantly changing.” To make the course better, a consistent teacher who takes the course seriously with knowledgeable information about post-secondary options needs to be implemented.

Cheung’s (2006) research found that students who experience an effective career planning program can make more well-informed career decisions. Implementing an effective career planning program for students in secondary schools starts with increased knowledge, increased self-exploration, and reduction of misconceptions. Increasing knowledge, increasing self-exploration and reducing misconceptions can be done through workshops/seminars,
guidance counselors, and the Grade 10 Career Course. Furthermore, students can gain valuable self-exploration through co-op programs with various fields.

From the analysis of teacher perspective of student’s experiences, it was seen that knowledge and information is key to student success when making their post-secondary decision. This knowledge and information stems from the teacher and schools, thus the next section will examine the methods teachers are receiving to gain the appropriate information and knowledge about the post-secondary decision process.

4.3 Teacher Support Systems to Better Assist Students’ Post-Secondary Preparation

Bardick’s (2004) study found that students felt secondary teachers offered little guidance in the career planning process. Little support from teachers may be due to the lack of knowledge and support teachers have with the post-secondary preparation process. This section seeks to discover the support systems teachers are given to increase their confidence when talking about various post-secondary options. In addition, this section analyzes the possible resources and strategies that should be implemented into schools to better support teachers to allow for a better experience from students with the post-secondary decision making process.

4.3.1 Teacher experience. The study indicated that teachers felt unable to assist students in certain situations with post-secondary aspirations. Lila speaks to her experience; “we usually defer students to guidance. There isn’t much for teachers, its more research that we have to do on our own to help our students.” Although, the interviewees mentioned the resources provided to teachers such as PLC, PD Days, and the guidance department, they often felt there was a huge lack of information regarding post-secondary preparation for students that can be provided by
teachers. Teachers often are left to do their own research about various post-secondary options to further their knowledge for their students.

Cheung’s (2006) research states that secondary students believe schools provide little guidance in the career planning process. From my findings, the lack of knowledge of teachers may be the main reason students are not properly assisted in the secondary schools. From my finding, lack of knowledge from the teacher in the area of post-secondary aspirations can create lack of confidence among teachers, thus the inability to assist students through their post-secondary decision preparation.

4.3.2 Resources/strategies that should be implemented to better support teachers. The interviews indicated that lack of information by teachers creates lack of confidence when informing students about the post-secondary aspirations. Teachers in the study wanted more information about post-secondary aspirations. Lila stated,

there should be in-services in different and each discipline. We should be able to meet with the Universities and become informed with specific programs, so we can actually incorporate it into our lessons.

Incorporating more post-secondary information sessions into teacher development can better prepare teachers for a wide variety of questions students may have concerning post-secondary. Inability to answer questions by teachers can leave students more confused and thus rely on their parents (Gati, 2001). Confusion among students is because students lack knowledge. If teachers lack knowledge then students will lack knowledge, thus creating fear of disapproval among students that was suggested by Rogers and Creed (2011). Thus, education regarding post-
secondary options, of teacher is important in order for students to gain full assistance with the post-secondary decision process.

The data from the study indicated that schools lack resources and strategies for teacher support regarding post-secondary preparation of students. The lack of resources and strategies provided to teachers may result in the lack of knowledge and confidence teachers have regarding post-secondary decisions. Thus, teachers avoid conversations about post-secondary due to the lack of confidence, ultimately affecting the students and their abilities to make a knowledgeable post-secondary decision. This section was able to deduct the main rooting factor that schools are doing to hinder students with their post-secondary decision process. The main rooting factor starts at lack of knowledge of teachers. Schools need to first address this problem before students can be affected. If teacher remains unknowledgeable then their students will too.

4.4 Discussion

Through deep analysis of the data collected from three secondary teachers, the various resources/strategies implemented into schools for post-secondary preparation were determined. In addition, areas where support is required both by teachers and schools were seen. Knowledge and information is a key driving force for post-secondary preparation. Students’ lack of knowledge and information will cause them to make uninformed decisions about their post-secondary aspirations (Rogers & Creed, 2011). The findings indicated that students are able to gain knowledge about post-secondary options from their schools but it is very minimal at most schools. However, those schools that do implement post-secondary preparation methods, such as the Pathways Program at Anna’s school, had students who showed an increase in self-exploration and confidence among students regarding their post-secondary aspirations.
In addition to the Pathways Program for assisting students’ self-exploration, the Grade 10 Careers Course can be better develop students’ knowledge regarding post-secondary options. To create an environment where students are able to effectively self-explore, the Grade 10 Careers Course needs to have teachers that are knowledgeable in the subject-manner to create an environment for students to take the course seriously. Once the course is taken seriously, students can effectively self-explore and understand the various post-secondary options available to them.

Furthermore, teacher support/strategies were very limited at most schools. Teachers would often refer their students to guidance due to the lack of knowledge in the area. Teachers suggested an implementation of seminars/workshops regarding the post-secondary decision process. Teachers believed that the seminars/workshops would deem beneficial for their confidence thus allowing them to implement the information into their lessons for students’ benefits.

The data analysis was able to answer the research question: What resources/strategies are implemented into secondary schools to assist students with their post-secondary decision process? Through the analysis of the question, resources/strategies that were effective were discovered and areas of improvements were discussed. Lastly, the data analysis was able to determine the limited resources that teachers are provided for support in the area of post-secondary preparation. Thus, implementations for teacher supports were further discussed as a result of the major gaps seen in secondary schools.

The next section will take a look at the gaps determined in the data analysis and speak to suggestions both schools and teachers should acquire to better assist students through the post-
secondary preparation process. The suggestions will address the areas of improvements schools require in order to increase students’ confidence when making their post-secondary decision.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This research investigated the methods implemented into secondary schools that encourage effective post-secondary planning amongst adolescents. In addition, the research revealed possible areas of improvements that are required for effective post-secondary planning to occur. The research explored the following research questions:

- What resources/strategies are implemented into secondary schools to assist students with their post-secondary decision process?
- What support do teachers receive to help their students?

The following chapter outlines the implications that can be made from the key findings revealed in the study. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the recommendations and areas of further research to inform educators about post-secondary decision development of students.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The findings revealed that there is a lack of resources/strategies that secondary schools offer students to effectively prepare them to make informed post-secondary decisions. Teachers identified in the study that their secondary school provided little to no teacher support regarding students’ post-secondary preparation. Therefore, teachers felt overwhelmed and lacked the confidence to effectively assist their students with post-secondary decisions. Teachers mentioned that they would typically refer their students to the guidance counsellor if questions arose regarding post-secondary decisions and options. However, it was seen from the study that some guidance counselors often do not provide much assistance to students. Thus, students can often
be left with many unanswered questions regarding post-secondary options, if the teacher and guidance counselors lack knowledge and support from the school.

The lack of resources/strategies offered to students, results in uninformed post-secondary decisions made by students which may be due to the inability to understand one’s skills and weaknesses. However, schools that presented knowledgeable resources for students such as the Pathways Program from Anna’s school, had an immense difference in students’ post-secondary exploration. Students who were given the opportunity to explore the Pathways Program were able to increase their self-exploration, thus increasing their confidence to make informed decisions for post-secondary.

As seen from the research results, the lack of knowledge from both teachers and students has an immense effect on post-secondary preparation. When students are given the opportunity to increase their knowledge of post-secondary options and their self-exploration, students were seen to increase their confidence with their post-secondary decision. Thus, knowledge and awareness are key factors to improving post-secondary preparations among adolescents in secondary schools.

5.2 Implications

The study indicated the lack of support students receive regarding post-secondary aspirations, which leads to difficulty in dealing with failure when pursuing their career goals and ultimately builds stress in the student. Firstly, Feldman’s (2003) study indicated that adolescents, who lack knowledge and self-exploration when making their post-secondary decision, will lack realistic expectations needed to make informed career decisions. In addition, Noe and Bachhuber (1990) indicated that when young adults lack realistic expectations to make a career decision,
they will tend to become frustrated and upset when they encounter an obstacle pursuing their career goal. Thus, ensuring students are knowledgeable regarding post-secondary decisions and options can help students make informed and realistic post-secondary decisions, which in turn can help students deal with the roadblocks that they may face when achieving their post-secondary goals.

5.2.1 The educational community. The study is indicative of possible gaps in the post-secondary preparations that schools present to students. In order to address these issues, changes within the educational system needs to occur. First, school boards should implement a program that is similar to the Pathway Program, to better assist student with career exploration. Second, schools/administrators should address the issues with the Grade 10 Careers Course and the teacher assigned to the course. Lastly, schools/administrators need to provide more support to teachers with the post-secondary preparation process. This will increase teachers’ confidence regarding the topic, which will allow teachers to incorporate strategies/tools into their classroom.

The first suggestion would be to school boards and for them to incorporate the Pathway Program in every school and to ensure school administrators and teachers are encouraging students to participate in the program. The Pathway Program allows students to explore various career options while still achieving the credits required to graduate. Unlike other co-op programs, the Pathway Program was very well adapted in the school. All students were suggested to join the program regardless if the student is struggling or stable in the school setting. It was created to better assist students with the career exploration process by allowing exposure to various careers which may lead to interest and potential careers choices they could pursue in the future. Allowing students the opportunity to properly explore various career options ensures students are able to make more informed post-secondary decisions (Rogers & Creed,
2011). Therefore, revamping the current co-op programs offered in every school, to include similar ideas implemented in the Pathway Program, can better assist every student with career exploration.

The next suggestion is to school administrators to reanalyze the effectiveness of their Grade 10 Careers Course offered to students. The research findings were able to indicate that teachers believe there are huge flaws to the Grade 10 Careers Course. Teachers in the study said, “…the Grade 10 Careers Course is taken as a “joke” to students and teachers.” If the course is not taken seriously by both the teacher and student, then students’ post-secondary preparation suffers. Students are unable to receive constructive information to make effective post-secondary decisions. In the study, Anna discussed, that the teacher for the Grade 10 Careers Course is constantly changing, therefore the teacher who teaches the course does not have adequate lessons plans and resources to have an effective course for students.

In addition, curriculum advisors should reanalyze the expectations covered in the Grade 10 Careers Course curriculum. The course should entail more self-exploration and career-exploration to better assist students with their post-secondary decision. Rogers and Creed (2011) suggests that Grade 10 is the critical time in an adolescent’s life for career planning to occur. If our society wants to build adolescents who are prepared to make informed post-secondary decisions, then revisions should occur within the Grade 10 Careers Course curriculum. Also, from Kimweli & Richard’s (1999) study it was seen that students who base their post-secondary aspirations solely on their interests, lack self-exploration in strengths and weakness, thus lack the appreciation for their post-secondary decision in the future. Therefore, the curriculum advisors should take into consideration the views of teachers from the study regarding the course and the findings made by previous studies, to better adapt the expectations of the course. If curriculum
advisors are able to revise the expectations covered in the curriculum documents, students may be able to experience a more informed post-secondary preparation process.

Lastly, school administrators should provide more support to their teachers regarding students’ post-secondary preparation. This can ensure that teachers are more confident when speaking about the topic, which allows teachers to be more approachable to students. From the study it was seen that students had a tendency to approach their teachers regarding post-secondary options, however, teachers felt uncomfortable answering post-secondary option questions and would regard students to the guidance counselors. This can present many problems to a student’s decision process which ultimately can affect their future. When students feel they cannot discuss career options to their teacher, they may have increased stress regarding the post-secondary decision and entrust the career decision to their parents (Feldman, 2003). Thus, increasing the confidence of teachers regarding the post-secondary decisions can increase their ability to discuss the topic to their students. When teachers are approachable about post-secondary decisions, students feel more comfortable in the environment to discuss various career options with their teacher, which can reduce students’ stress (Rogers & Creed, 2011)

The study indicated that effective self-exploration and career exploration is required for secondary students to make effective and realistic post-secondary decisions. It was seen that many schools do no offer effective resources for students to do this. However, when students are given the opportunity to effectively self-explore, students’ post-secondary decisions are better informed.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. As an educator, the study had many implications for my personal practice. The study indicated many strategies and gaps present with the post-secondary preparation secondary students receive. Teachers in the study mentioned the
stresses that students experience in their senior year of secondary school, “Students feel stressed and anxious if their marks do not meet certain criteria for post-secondary schools.” If I am able to reduce the stress for students in my classroom, students may have an increased enjoyment to learn and many would not suffer from anxiety. Rogers and Creed’s (2011) study showed that that stresses can be due to pressures of parents’ expectations. This can be the result of students’ inability to make decisive post-secondary decisions, thus relying on their parents to make the decision (Gati, 2001).

My goal to create a classroom that encourages self-exploration through the use of various activities that allows students to discover their weaknesses and strengths. For instance, I would implement many project-based activities that are collaborative with their peers but has various roles within the project for students to choose from. Students would be given the opportunity to explore different roles that are usually involved in projects, to uncover their skills that they have strengths in. Thus, students will be given the ability to self-explore their interest and skills which will allow them to make informed post-secondary decisions (Feldman, 2003).

Prior to the study, I had a major concern that the perception of University and College was persistent throughout secondary schools. Following Anna’s interview, I became optimistic that it is possible to change societal views of University being better than College. Anna’s secondary school ensured that both University and College were seen at the same level and students would apply to the post-secondary of their interest, not because of status. Ensuring students understand the key differences of University versus College without societal views posed on them, can impact students’ post-secondary decisions. This can ensure students pursue a post-secondary education based on their skills and interest rather than societal views. Reducing the stigma of College can ensure students make effective and informed post-secondary decisions.
I will remove this stigma, by ensuring I mention both College and University on an equal level. In addition, I would bring in guest from the workforce, College and University, to allow students to become knowledgeable of all the options offered to them.

Furthermore, during all of the interviews, failure was mentioned. Although my interview was not based on failure, many questions arose. If students do not fear failure, would their post-secondary decisions be more aligned with what they actually want to do, rather than what they are able to do? Rowh’s (2008) study found that students, who have a hard time accepting failure, will tend to not pursue their goals. Creating a classroom environment can effectively change students’ attitudes. I will ensure my classrooms encourage the acceptance of failure, thus effectively building students’ resilience and allowing them to easily overcome roadblocks they may face when pursuing their future endeavors. In addition, I will encourage students through positive feedback rather than negative feedback, which can allow students to realize the positive in certain issues thus allowing them to overcome the negative.

Lastly, the study had a huge influence on the knowledge and information I want to have regarding the post-secondary decision process for my students. To better inform my students, I will stay up to date with the changing job market and various careers present in today’s society. Staying informed will allow me to inform my students of their options and better implement activities to build the necessary skills for these careers.

As an educator, I want to ensure my students are effectively prepared to succeed in their future goals. Enabling students with the necessary skills to make effective and informed post-secondary decisions, can ensure students make realistic goals that can be achieved even in the event of failure.
5.3 Recommendations

Resources and strategies for post-secondary preparation were found to be very minimalistic in secondary schools. One method that was found to be very effective was the “Pathway’s Program” which increased self-exploration and career-exploration. The program was very effective as it was suggested to every student, in order to increase career-exploration. Anna mentioned, “often students in different schools have a huge stigma around co-op programs. It is often said that the program is for students who are struggling in school”. Reducing the stigma of co-op programs and promoting the program as a career-exploration opportunity can increase the enrollment of the program. If every student is able to participate in the program, then more students will be able to make more informed career decision, thus reducing the career indecision that occurs in young adults.

Secondly, the Ministry of Education should make some big changes in the curriculum documents for the Grade 10 Careers Course. At the moment, the course does not offer many opportunities for students to properly self-explore and make effective post-secondary decisions. The curriculum expectations should address proper methods for self-exploration and career exploration. In addition, teachers who teach the course should have effective training in the subject matter to effectively assist students through the post-secondary decision process. Teachers instructing the course need to feel confident with the topic to ensure their students receive the most effective learning opportunity. This can ensure students can have an increased confidence to confide to their teacher regarding post-secondary decisions. Improving the Grade 10 Careers Course can ensure effective post-secondary preparation is present across all school boards in Ontario.
Lastly, teachers mentioned the lack of teacher support that occurs within schools. Lila suggested, “…there should be in-services and we should be able to meet with the Universities.” Increasing teacher knowledge of various post-secondary options can increase teachers’ confidence, which may result in better implementation of post-secondary preparation skills into lesson plans. Colleges and Universities can provide information sessions for teachers, to better inform them of the new degrees and courses offered at the various schools. This can allow teachers to effectively answer students’ questions regarding post-secondary.

Implementing various strategies and resources for post-secondary preparation can better assist students with the post-secondary decision process and reduce students’ anxiety regarding the process. If students are able to make informed and effective post-secondary decisions, their stress will decrease.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Further research is required to better understand resources and strategies to better assist students through the post-secondary preparation process. First research should be conducted to analyze the effectiveness of the Pathway Program for post-secondary preparation. It was seen from the study, from one teacher how the Pathway Program plays a great role in students’ self-exploration, however, the bigger details of why it is effective and how the school board makes the program effective board-wide was not clearly answered. In addition, student experience within the Pathways Program was not fully analyzed. Determining the factors that make the Pathways Program effective can better inform other school boards with the flaws that are existent in their co-op programs.
Secondly, a study regarding the effectiveness of the Grade 10 Careers Course can be conducted. The study indicated that teachers have strong, negative comments regarding the Grade 10 Careers Course, which may be due to underlying issues of the course. Further studies can analyze the issues that are present within the Grade 10 Careers Course and the possible explanation for the view of the course being a “joke” in both teachers’ and students’ minds. In addition, further studies can analyze the areas of improvement that the Ministry of Education should take to make the course better.

The study examined teachers and their experiences with post-secondary preparations implemented into their secondary schools. Unfortunately, the study was unable to examine students’ experiences and the areas of improvements that students wanted. Additional research should examine students’ experiences and identify what students want for post-secondary preparation and the reasons why students may have struggled with the post-secondary preparation process.

The study was a small sample of the areas of improvement that are required for effective post-secondary preparation among secondary schools. However, the research left many unanswered questions and further research should be conducted to analyze the many issues that are occurring within our school system regarding the post-secondary preparation process.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The study sought out to determine the resources/strategies implemented into secondary schools that better assist students’ post-secondary preparation process in order to make informed post-secondary decisions. The study determined that there are many gaps within our school systems regarding this issue. Teachers indicated the lack of teacher support and the usual referral
to guidance with regards to the topic. Teachers tended to lack post-secondary preparation knowledge and information, thus they lack the confidence to better assist their students. The lack of knowledge that was among teachers, affected students’ knowledge thus post-secondary preparation skills were minimized in the classroom.

The study indicated that students who lack the information to make informed post-secondary decisions were students who were not able to effectively self-explore. However, those students who were given the opportunity to explore various careers through the Pathways Program were able to self-explore and make informed post-secondary decisions. In addition, the study determined the lack of effectiveness the Grade 10 Careers Course presents to students. If students are not given the ability to self-explore within the Careers course their self-exploration hinders thus their post-secondary decisions become less informed.

From the study, many recommendations were mentioned. The biggest recommendation for all schools is the consideration of the effectiveness of the Grade 10 Careers Course. Through interviews with teachers and analysis of the curriculum, it was seen that effective self-exploration and career-exploration did not occur in the course. The Grade 10 Careers Course is the opportunity for students to explore various careers based on their skills and interest; however, if an effective course is not offered to them, students will lack the ability to effectively self-explore. This will result in students who make uninformed post-secondary decisions.

Overall, the study was able to answer the research question sought out, however, answering these research questions, created more unanswered questions that requires further research to be conducted. Post-secondary preparation within secondary schools can have a drastic effect on students’ post-secondary decisions. As educators, we should prepare our students for their future endeavors which starts with effective post-secondary preparation in
secondary schools. Thus, further research should be conducted to ensure students receive informed post-secondary preparation.
References


Appendix A: Consent Letter

Dear ___________

My Name is Stephanie Vuong and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on Post-Secondary Decision Preparation provided to Secondary Students. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have taught senior science courses for more than five years. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be the MT Research Coordinator, Angela MacDonal d. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Vuong

MT Research Coordinator Name: Angela MacDonal d

Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Stephanie Vuong and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about career decision strategies that high-school science teachers provide for students for the purpose of understanding how teachers can better assist students for their post-secondary aspirations. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on student experiences through their senior year and career decision strategies offered by your high-school. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. The interview is confidential, and only the research team and I will have access to this recording, which we will transcribe. If you want me to stop at any time, just let me know. Is this okay with you?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1- Background Information

1. Can you describe your teaching history?
   A. How many years have you been teaching? How many years have you been teaching at this high-school?
   B. What level, grade, and subjects do you generally teach?
   C. What cultural backgrounds are represented amongst your class?
   D. What socioeconomic classes are represented by your students

2. Can you describe your students?
   A. What main goal do you observe in your students when it comes to their post-secondary aspirations? (University, College, Workforce)
   B. What is the demographic of your classes?

Section 2- Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

3. Please describe your students’ experiences through their career decision process.
   A. Are students confident when making their career decision?
B. Have you found that senior students are stressed as they approach graduation?
   A. What kinds of stresses have you observed?
C. Are their particular careers that your students lean most towards?
   A. What are those careers?
D. What are students’ views regarding University in comparison to College?
   A. Why do students’ have these views?
E. Do you feel students have a full understanding of the requirements to attain their certain career choice?
   A. Is there false hope given to students on the attainability of their career? How?
4. Do you find that parents play an influential factor in students’ choices regarding post high-school and career decisions? Explain.

Section 3- Teacher Practices
5. How do you assist your students through the processes of career decision making and their academic future? Explain in detail

Section 4- Supports and Challenges
6. What supports exist within your school for teachers to further their confidence in assisting students through the career process?
7. What resources are available to students for proper career preparation? Are these resources being properly used by students? If not, why?

Section 5- Next Steps
8. What do you believe must be implemented into schools to help students with career preparation?
9. What support systems are required to better assist teachers with student career preparation?