
Junior High Career Planning: What Students Want

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ABSTRACT

This research used the Comprehensive Career Needs Survey to assess the career counselling needs of 3,562 junior high students in Southern Alberta. This article examines junior high students' responses regarding their perceptions of (a) the relevance of career planning, (b) who they would approach for help with career planning, and (c) what help they would like during the career planning process. Results indicate career planning is important to junior high students; they are most likely to rely on parents and friends rather than teachers or counsellors for help with career planning; and they would like help with career decision-making, obtaining relevant information and support, and choosing appropriate courses. Implications for teachers, school counsellors, parents, and community services are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude s'appuie sur « Comprehensive Career Needs Survey » [Enquête exhaustive sur les besoins en matière de carrière] (Magnusson et Bernes, 2002) afin d'évaluer les besoins en orientation professionnelle chez 3562 élèves du premier cycle de l'enseignement secondaire au sud de l'Alberta. Cet article analyse les réponses fournies par les élèves concernant leurs perceptions (a) de la pertinence de la planification de carrière, (b) des personnes à qui ils demanderaient de l'aide pour cette planification, et (c) de l'assistance dont ils voudraient bénéficier au cours du processus de planification de carrière. Les résultats indiquent que les élèves du premier cycle du secondaire estiment que la planification de carrière est importante; ils se fient surtout aux parents et aux ami(e)s plutôt qu'aux enseignant(e)s et aux conseillers et conseillères lors de ce processus. Ils voudraient qu'on les aide à faire des choix professionnels, à obtenir des renseignements pertinents et du soutien, et à choisir les cours appropriés. Les implications pour les enseignant(e)s, les conseillers et conseillères d'orientation scolaire et professionnelle, les parents et les services communautaires sont présentées.

Career planning generally becomes important during adolescence, when individuals typically begin to explore their abilities, values, interests, and opportunities in preparation for career exploration (Dupont & Gingras, 1991; Gati & Saka, 2001; Julien, 1999). However, most research on career planning has focused on perceptions and needs of high school and post-secondary students (Hiebert, Kemeny, & Kurchak, 1998), rather than junior high students. The researchers posit there is a need to explore the career planning perceptions and

needs of junior high students in order to implement appropriate career planning services and support for students. The purpose of this research was (a) to examine how important career planning is to junior high students; (b) to determine which individuals junior high students are most likely to approach for information and advice about career planning; and (c) to determine what career planning needs junior high students have at this time.

A review of the literature related to adolescent career planning is presented, followed by a description of research conducted with 3,562 junior high students in Southern Alberta utilizing the Comprehensive Career Needs Survey (CCNS) (Magnusson & Bernes, 2002). The results, including implications for school counsellors, teachers, parents, and community services, are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been reported that career planning is important to adolescents (Gati & Saka, 2001; Kracke, 1997; Pyne, Bernes, Magnusson, & Poulsen, 2002). In fact, Hiebert (1993) stated, "choosing a career is perhaps second only to choice of mate in terms of the pervasiveness of the impact on one's life" (p. 5). Celotta and Jacobs (1982) found students are concerned about their futures and would like to develop better self-management and interpersonal skills in order to meet their future career goals. This awareness of the importance of career planning appears to arise because of specific developmental stages. According to Piagetian theory, formal operational thought begins to develop at approximately 12 years of age and older, during which adolescent cognitive ability differentiates from that of children (Piaget, 1959, 1967, 1981). During this stage of development, individuals acquire the ability to project into the future and construct possible scenarios for a hypothesis (Piaget). This hypothetical-deductive reasoning requires adolescents to reason through possibilities and determine possible results in a systematic manner (Piaget; Winzer, 1994). This stage of formal operational thinking assists adolescents in examining scenarios related to future goals (Pyne et al.), which greatly influences the importance of career planning at this time in their lives.

Despite being capable of examining career-related options and being concerned about their future (Gati & Saka, 2001; Kracke, 1997; Pyne et al., 2002), adolescents tend to encounter a number of barriers during their career planning process (Gati & Saka; Julien, 1999; Mau, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998; Rainey & Borders, 1997). These barriers cause individuals to delay or avoid making career-related decisions and/or rely on someone else to make a decision for them, which results in less than ideal choices (Gati & Saka). Barriers encountered during the career decision-making process include a lack of readiness, lack of information, unreliable information, discouragement by individuals approached for information, a perception of inadequate financial resources, lack of self confidence or communication skills, and external or internal conflicts (Gati & Saka; Julien; Mau et al.).

A specific barrier to adolescent career planning is an inability to identify questions to ask in order to find one's desired career-related information (Julien, 1999). Students may lack knowledge about potential sources for information, find the information does not exist, or become overwhelmed by the volume or variety of information needed to make an informed career decision. Julien also suggests students may feel intimidated by or lack confidence in people who appear to have the authority to help (e.g., difficulties with guidance counsellors or people not giving straight answers). Although a wealth of information is available from a large number of sources (e.g., parents, siblings, other family members, friends, peers, guidance counsellors, teachers, school and public library resources, the mass media, government career centers, etc.), students often do not know where to turn, except to the people closest to them (Julien).

Adolescents appear to approach their parents more than any other source for answers to their career-related questions (Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Papini, Farmer, Clark, & Micka, 1990; Saltiel, 1985; Sebald, 1989). Parents themselves appear eager to help their adolescents in regards to career planning (Young & Friesen, 1992), and are often the individuals most likely to interact with adolescents during their career planning process (Sebald). Parent-adolescent relationships that are child-centered, supportive, and reciprocal may encourage adolescents to actively explore career options (Kracke, 1997). Many parents of adolescents are in a position to influence their child's career development because they have observed their child's development, know their interests and strengths, and have developed a trusting relationship with them. However, there are both positive and negative aspects of the dynamic relationship between parent and child in regards to making career-related decisions. An adolescent's dependence on his or her parents may cause him or her to over-rely on parental input and therefore limit or eliminate career possibilities (Rainey & Borders, 1997). Parents' educational and occupational status, attitudes and personal biases toward their own and other's occupations, financial concerns, and rules and expectations also affect the information they pass on to their adolescent about careers (Rainey & Borders; Young, 1994; Young et al., 1997). As well, an adolescent's perceptions of parental expectations also influence his or her career decision-making (Mau et al., 1998).

Close interpersonal relationships, such as those with family and friends, are crucial to an adolescent's career development process (Felsman & Blustein, 1999). Peer relationships provide emotional and personal support as well as job-related and personal feedback in career decision-making (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Adolescents with close peer relationships are more likely to explore career alternatives and commit to career choices because of their strong support systems (Felsman & Blustein). Anxiety inherent in career decision-making may be alleviated by supportive and encouraging relationships (Felsman & Blustein).

Although guidance counsellors are expected to be able to provide students with career-related advice and information, only a small number of students may seek and receive such services (Alexitch & Page, 1997). Lehmanowsky (1991)

found that counsellors tend to see students for schedule changes and registration once a year, and only work in-depth with a small percentage of students. Students also may believe that teachers can provide more useful information than guidance counsellors (Lehmanowsky). As well, students are not satisfied with the types of advising they receive from counsellors because they perceive their specific questions and concerns are not being addressed satisfactorily (Alexitch & Page; Aluede & Imonikhe, 2002; Taveira, Silva, Rodriguez, & Maia, 1998). Alexitch and Page found students are discouraged because they perceive they are not being provided with information tailored to their individual needs. Trustworthiness (Julien, 1999) and perceived usefulness of information (Mau et al., 1998) appear to be the most critical indicators of who adolescents will approach for career-related information.

The manner in which adolescents seek help for career planning may be problematic. By seeking help from parents and friends, adolescents may not receive the information and support they desire (Mau et al., 1998; Rainey & Borders, 1997; Young, 1994; Young et al., 1997), yet adolescents do not appear to turn to guidance counsellors who are expected to have the answers to their career-related questions (Alexitch & Page, 1997; Aluede & Imonikhe, 2002; Taveira et al., 1998). Still more problematic is the fact that many counselling programs tend to be based on “adult perceptions ... [that] lack meaning for students” (Hiebert et al., 1998, p. 8). It appears that school administrators, teachers, and parents have the most influence on adolescent career planning programs, when it is the students who are most affected by these programs (Hiebert et al., 1998).

Adult perceptions of student needs and student perceptions of their needs appear to vary greatly (Hiebert, Collins, & Robinson, 2001). For example, Hiebert et al. (1998) found adults rated problem-focused, reactive needs (e.g., crisis intervention) highly, while students rated proactive, non-crisis needs (e.g., career planning and physical building environment) highly. Students also reported they are interested in specific career planning and exploration (Hughey, Gysbers, & Starr, 1993; Taveira et al., 1998), help with course planning, college planning and preparation, and more publicity about available guidance programs (Hughey et al.). It is apparent that students' career planning needs may not be met because programs are being designed by adults whose perceptions of student needs are very different from what the students actually want (Hiebert et al., 2001).

Hiebert et al. (2001) suggest effective and comprehensive guidance and counselling programs need to begin with a comprehensive assessment of student needs. Listening to the students themselves, rather than making assumptions about what they want and need based on adult biases and concerns, may make the process more relevant to the students and thus ensure students' actual needs are being met (Hiebert et al., 2001). A review of the literature found that: career planning is important to adolescents, they may encounter a number of barriers during their career planning process, they are likely to approach their family and friends for help with career planning, and adult perceptions and student perceptions of student needs differ. Examining the career planning perceptions

and needs of junior high students is important to determine developmental differences and/or similarities in order to inform future program planning as well as involve students in career planning programs that may have a direct impact on their lives. This research targets the primary source for junior high students' career planning perceptions and needs—the students themselves.

METHOD

The Comprehensive Career Needs Survey (CCNS) (Magnusson & Bernes, 2002) was developed to assess the career needs of junior high and senior high school students in Southern Alberta. The CCNS consisted of five different forms; the form utilized in this research, however, was the junior high form distributed to 54 junior high and senior high schools in the Southern Alberta region. Students completed the form in approximately 30 minutes during school hours. Fifty-two schools returned completed forms. The survey asked for sociodemographic information and consisted of questions evaluating students' career education and support needs. Topics included perceived resources and needs, educational needs, and future goals and aspirations. The questions required both quantitative and qualitative responses.

Respondents

This article explores the responses of 3,562 junior high students to the junior high form of the survey. Sociodemographic information was divided into four categories: age, grade, town size, and school size (see Table 1). Throughout the reporting of the results, school size will be reported as small (less than 100), mid-size (greater than 100 but less than 500), and large (greater than 500 but less than 1,000). Town size will be reported as small (less than 1,000), mid-size (greater than 1,000 but less than 10,000), and large (greater than 10,000).

TABLE 1
Sociodemographic Information on Junior High Respondents

Students' Age	<i>n</i>	(%)	Students' Grade	<i>n</i>	(%)
11	17	(0.5)	7	1,146	(32.2)
12	890	(25.0)	8	1,214	(34.1)
13	1,181	(33.2)	9	1,195	(33.6)
14	1,162	(32.6)			
15	304	(8.5)			
School Size	<i>n</i>	(%)	Town Size	<i>n</i>	(%)
<100	88	(2.5)	<1,000	426	(12.0)
100 to 500	2,252	(71.9)	1,000 to 10,000	1,772	(49.7)
500 to 1,000	903	(25.4)	>10,000	1,334	(37.7)

Questions and Data Analysis

Four specific survey items from the junior high questionnaire were used for this research and are described as follows:

1. How important is career planning to you at this time in your life? (Choices included “very important,” “quite important,” “slightly important,” and “not at all important.”)

2. If career planning is not very important to you now, when might it become important to you?

3. Please rank (1st, 2nd, or 3rd choice) the people you would feel most comfortable approaching for help with your career planning (classroom teachers, health teacher, school counsellor, parent(s), other relatives, friends, someone working in the field, other people I know and trust, no one).

4. If career planning is important to you, what would be most helpful to you right now in your career planning?

The data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Frequency counts were used to describe junior high responses. Chi-square analyses were conducted in order to determine differences between various demographic subsets of the student sample (i.e., age, grade, town size, and school size). Only statistically significant differences are reported ($p < 0.05$). A constant comparison process was used to verify themes in the open-ended data. Twenty randomly selected items were obtained from each grade, and potential themes emerging from each survey were recorded by a member of the research team. If a new theme emerged, it was compared to the previous samples and reviewed as to its relevance to other themes. When it appeared no new themes were emerging, the researchers reviewed all of the data compiled and sorted each statement into the relevant themes that had been discovered. Themes were then validated by three individuals who were not part of the research team.

RESULTS

Importance of Career Planning

Overall, junior high students indicated they believed career planning to be either “very important” ($n = 1,356$; 38.5%) or “quite important” ($n = 1,319$; 37.5%) at this time in their lives (see Table 2). Chi-square analyses revealed that importance of career planning decreased as age ($\chi^2(12, N = 3,511) = 34.77, p = .001$) and grade ($\chi^2(6, N = 3,512) = 14.98, p = .020$) increased. Chi square analyses also revealed that importance of career planning decreased as school size ($\chi^2(9, N = 3,511) = 17.717, p = .046$) and town size ($\chi^2(6, N = 3,505) = 19.14, p = .004$) increased.

Junior high students who did not believe career planning was very important at this time ($n = 1,356$; 38.8%) indicated it may become more important “in a year or two,” “in high school,” when they are “older and looking for work,” and “when [they decided] what to do.” There were no thematic differences between

grades seven, eight, or nine. These results indicate that junior high students who are putting off career decision-making at this time in their lives anticipate it will become more important to them sometime in the future.

TABLE 2
Junior High Students' Perceptions of the Importance of Career

Students' Age	Very Important		Quite Important		Slightly Important		Not at all Important	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
11	9	(52.9)	5	(29.4)	0	(0)	3	(17.6)
12	358	(40.7)	324	(36.9)	130	(14.8)	67	(7.6)
13	473	(40.4)	431	(36.8)	182	(15.6)	84	(7.2)
14	416	(36.2)	458	(39.9)	204	(17.8)	70	(6.1)
15	98	(33.0)	98	(33.0)	71	(23.9)	30	(10.1)
Total	1354	(38.6)	1316	(37.5)	587	(16.7)	254	(7.2)

Students' Comfort Levels in Seeking Help with Career Planning

In rank order, junior high students chose parents, friends, relatives, someone working in the field, classroom teacher, other people they know and trust, school counsellor, no one, and health teacher as individuals they would feel most comfortable approaching for help with career planning (see Table 3). Results of the chi-square analyses are presented in Table 4.

Parents. Overall, junior high students reported they were most likely to approach their parents ($n = 1,992$; 59.1%) first for career planning help. Results indicated as age increased, junior high students' likelihood of approaching their parents first for help with career planning decreased.

Friends. Friends were ranked highly as individuals that adolescents would choose to approach for help with career planning. Results indicated that as age and grade increased, junior high students were more likely to approach their friends for help with their career planning.

Other relatives. Other relatives were ranked highly as individuals junior high students would choose to approach for help with career planning. Results indicated the younger the student, the greater the likelihood of approaching other relatives for help with career planning.

Someone working in the field. Overall, junior high students reported they would approach someone working in the field over their classroom teacher, health teacher, or school counsellor. These results indicate that as students progress from grade seven to nine, they are more likely to approach someone working in the field for help with career planning. It also appears a greater percentage of students who live in small towns ($n = 154$; 41.2%) may choose someone working in the field than would students in mid-size ($n = 526$; 33.4%) or large towns ($n = 391$; 29.7%).

TABLE 3
Who Junior High Students Feel Comfortable Approaching for Help with Career Planning

Sources of Help	First Choice		Second Choice		Third Choice	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Parents	1,992	(59.1)	495	(14.7)	204	(6.1)
Friends	387	(11.7)	722	(21.8)	657	(19.1)
Field worker	276	(8.4)	356	(10.9)	442	(13.5)
Relatives	117	(3.6)	688	(21.0)	550	(16.8)
Teachers	102	(3.1)	304	(9.3)	375	(11.5)
Trusted others	95	(2.9)	211	(6.5)	404	(12.4)
Counsellor	73	(2.3)	150	(4.6)	167	(5.2)
No one	59	(1.8)	50	(1.6)	96	(3.0)
Health teacher	28	(0.9)	54	(1.7)	65	(2.0)

TABLE 4
Chi Square Analyses for Students' Comfort Level in Asking for Help with Career Planning

Sources of Help	Students' Age				Students' Grade				Town Size				School Size			
	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>p</i>
Parents	66.18	12	3,363	.000												
Friends	31.50	12	3,304	.002	62.21	6	3,271	.000								
Relatives	59.54	12	3,269	.000	29.64	6	3,271	.000								
Field worker	62.61	12	3,269	.000	62.21	6	3,271	.000	20.21	6	3,264	.003				
Classroom teacher					12.59	6	3,251	.050	19.14	6	3,505	.004				
Counsellor	61.43	12	3,229	.000	67.70	6	3,231	.000	35.14	6	3,224	.000	43.85	6	3,229	.000
Health teacher					17.43	6	3,206	.008	21.95	6	3,200	.001	21.37	6	3,204	.011
Trusted others					62.21	6	3,271	.000								

Classroom teacher. Fewer than 24% of junior high students ($n = 787$; 23.9%) reported they would choose their classroom teacher as their first, second, or third choice as someone to approach for help with career planning. A greater number of students in grade seven ($n = 281$; 26.7%) reported they would approach their classroom teacher than did students in grade eight ($n = 238$; 21%) or grade nine ($n = 261$; 24%). A greater percentage of students living in small towns ($n = 123$; 33%) reported choosing their classroom teacher than did students living in mid-size ($n = 357$; 22.9%) or large towns ($n = 391$; 29.7%).

School counsellor. Approximately 12% of junior high students ($n = 390$; 12.1%) reported they would approach their school counsellor. A greater number of students in grade nine ($n = 199$; 18.7%) reported they would approach their school counsellor as compared to students in grade seven ($n = 84$; 8.2%) or eight ($n = 107$; 9.5%). A greater number of students who live in mid-size towns ($n = 234$; 15.1%) reported choosing their school counsellor first than did students living in small ($n = 32$; 7.8%) or large towns ($n = 121$; 9.2%). A greater number of students who attended small schools ($n = 64$; 2.8%) reported choosing their school counsellor first than did students who attended mid-size ($n = 8$; 0.9%) or large schools ($n = 1$; 0.1%).

Health teacher. Very few students ($n = 147$; 4.6%) reported that they would approach their health teacher for help with career planning. It should be noted that for the purpose of this survey, the role of health teacher was seen as comparable to the role of senior high Career and Life Management (CALM) teacher, although students may not have been aware of that distinction. A greater percentage of students in grade nine ($n = 65$; 6.2%) indicated they would approach their health teacher for help with career planning than did students in grade seven ($n = 33$; 3.3%) or grade eight ($n = 48$; 4.2%). A similar result was found for age, with a greater number of older students than younger students indicating they would approach their health teacher for help with career planning. A greater number of students from small towns indicated they would approach their health teacher for help with career planning ($n = 23$; 1.0%) than did students from mid-size ($n = 5$; 0.6%) or large towns ($n = 0$; 0%).

Other people I know and trust. Students were not asked to specify who they perceived to be "other people I know and trust," although nearly 22% of junior high respondents ($n = 710$; 21.8%) indicated they would choose them for help with career planning. A greater percentage of students in grade nine ($n = 250$; 23.7%) indicated they would choose other people they know and trust as compared to students in grade seven ($n = 210$; 20.1%) or grade eight ($n = 249$; 21.8%).

Overall, the results of the Comprehensive Career Needs Survey (Magnusson & Bernes, 2002) indicated junior high students were more likely to approach their parents, friends, relatives, or someone working in the field rather than teachers or school counsellors for help with career planning. Results also showed that as students' age increased, they were more likely to approach people outside their family and friends (i.e., someone working in the field, teachers, school counsellors) for help with career planning.

What Students Want

Varying themes were found related to what students thought would be most helpful in their career planning. In response to the open-ended questions, grade seven students indicated that “increased skill training,” “higher grades,” “[deciding] what I want,” “getting help [from a] career center,” “specific courses,” “scholarships,” a “role model,” and “school and family support” would be most helpful to them for career planning. Grade eight student responses included the same themes as the grade seven students. Themes that were unique to the grade eight responses were “information on post-secondary [programs],” “financial assistance for post-secondary,” and “job experience.” In addition to the themes mentioned by grade seven and grade eight students, grade nine respondents had “more concerns in determining which courses they should be taking now.” Grade seven, eight, and nine students wanted help with decision-making, exploring career options, and obtaining support for career decision-making. Grade eight and nine students wanted specific information about post-secondary institution requirements and specific occupation requirements. Grade nine students appeared to have more concerns about choosing appropriate courses that would influence their future career decisions. These results indicate increasing sophistication of expressed needs.

DISCUSSION

The results of this research suggest junior high students perceive career planning to be important, which supports previous findings (e.g., Gati & Saka, 2001; Kracke, 1997; Pyne et al., 2002). It appears students who do not perceive career planning is important at this time believe it will become important to them at some time in the future, specifically during high school, when they have made a decision about a career, or when they are looking for a job. This suggests most students in junior high are thinking about their futures. Introducing the process of career planning to students at the junior high level may serve to increase students’ awareness of the relevance of career decision-making and influence their willingness to explore possible options, rather than putting off career planning until they are forced to make a decision.

This research supports previous findings that junior high students prefer to approach their parents (Middleton & Loughhead, 1993; Papini et al., 1990; Saltiel, 1985; Sebald, 1989) and friends (Felsman & Blustein, 1999; Kram & Isabella, 1985) rather than their school counsellors for help with career planning. A natural alliance between adolescents and their parents and the increasing importance of peer relationships during adolescence may account for this preference. As well, the importance of trustworthiness (Julien, 1999) and perceived usefulness of information (Mau et al., 1998) may further contribute to students’ choices in determining who they are comfortable approaching for help with career planning. Adolescents who have relied on their parents for decision-making in other areas of their lives may continue to rely on their parents to influence their career decisions.

Increasing parents' understandings of the career development process may help them develop shared understandings of their children's views of careers and the future. Parents may be better able to understand their children's perspectives and career needs as well as provide appropriate support if they are more aware of the career planning process. They may be able to provide encouragement and direction when their children encounter difficulties during career decision-making, and help them make decisions regarding their futures, if they are more aware of the practical aspects of courses offered in junior high, high school, and post-secondary institutions (Gati & Saka, 2001; Schmidt, 1997). Training parents to assist their children with career-related decision-making may further enhance the natural alliance between parents and adolescents.

There are substantial reasons for involving parents more extensively in adolescent career planning; however, adolescents also require career information and support that is separate from explicit and implicit family expectations (Young et al., 1997). Adolescents are likely to detach themselves from their parents by developing close peer relationships (Felsman & Blustein, 1999), then extend their sphere of influence to include other sources of support (e.g., teachers, school counsellors, career information centers, post-secondary institutions). A balance between familial and external supports is important to increase adolescents' willingness to explore career options, their sense of independence, and their confidence in their decision-making abilities.

Students in this research did not choose school counsellors as their first, second, or third choice for help with career planning. This is problematic for two reasons: (a) school counselling services are not being utilized for career counselling, and (b) students are neither seeking nor receiving career-related information or support from individuals who are there to meet their needs. Alexitch and Page (1997) found students may not use counselling services because they perceive that they are not being provided with information tailored to their individual needs, and Lehmanowsky (1991) found students are more likely to approach teachers than counsellors because of perceived usefulness of information and closeness of relationship. Hiebert et al. (1998) suggest that counselling services may be underutilized by students because counsellors tend to be reactive and crisis management oriented rather than proactive.

A proactive career counselling approach would include building trusting relationships with students, encouraging students to closely examine and explore their occupational interests, providing students with information about stages of decision-making involved in career planning, and guiding them in their search for the information. Counsellors who wish to become more actively involved in students' career planning may need to become more actively involved in students' everyday lives.

Other people (e.g., teachers, people working in the field) may be able to provide appropriate information and support to students during their career planning. For example, guest speakers from different community services may increase students' awareness of sources of career-related information and support. Increased

opportunities for job shadowing and work experience may also increase students' exposure to community services, develop their skills in a variety of areas, and encourage them to explore a range of occupational interests. Giving students greater opportunities to involve a number of individuals in the career planning process may encourage them to enlarge their sphere of influence and help them find the information and support they are seeking.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted in rural Southern Alberta, in centres with populations of 500 to 75,000 people. Although these results are valid, based on the large number of respondents, results may not be generalized to junior high students beyond Southern Alberta. As well, the CCNS (Magnusson & Bernes, 2002) is a broad survey instrument. This research is based on student self-reports, and the results reflect respondents' perceptions of reality at that moment in time. The data collected in this survey do not allow for elaboration, personalization, or reflection on individual questions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Students rated career planning as either very important or quite important, indicating that longitudinal research in determining the importance of career planning as students age may be useful. Students reported they would approach their parents and friends first for help with career planning. Students also reported that they were not likely to approach their school counsellor for help with career planning. Research into the variables that contribute to students' comfort levels in asking individuals for help with career decision-making may be valuable in contributing to future program planning. As well, these junior high students indicated a number of areas where they would like help with career planning. Research into the barriers that prevent students from obtaining the help they are looking for may provide useful information for future program planning.

CONCLUSION

The results of the CCNS (Magnusson & Bernes, 2002) indicate that many junior high students perceive career planning as either very important or quite important, prefer to approach their parents first for help with career planning, and would like specific career-related information and support during their career planning process. The results suggest a proactive approach to junior high student career planning may be helpful to meet student needs. School counsellors may become more proactive by providing instruction and support for parents on how to help their child with career planning, developing relationships with students, and integrating community services into junior high career planning.

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