

PERCEPTIONS OF SOME ASPECTS OF A CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAM AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL*

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Abstract

The present research project was undertaken to assess the opinions and perceptions of students, parents and community representatives of a number of aspects of a typical secondary school career guidance program. And, secondly, the study was designed to elicit opinions of the ways in which career guidance could most effectively be improved and facilitated. The responses to questionnaires and interviews completed by random samples of the three target populations indicated a wide distribution of opinion on certain aspects of the program and a marked consensus on other facets of the same career guidance program. In particular, it was found that there was little relationship between students' career choices and knowledge of the educational training required for the choice, as well as a vast difference between the proportion of parents who positively evaluated the guidance program with respect to academic counselling and the proportion of parents who positively evaluated the guidance program with respect to career counselling. There was, however, marked agreement between parents and community representatives with regard to the nomination of potentially effective methods for the improvement of career guidance programs.

Résumé

Le présent projet de recherche voulut premièrement déterminer les vues et les opinions d'étudiants, de parents et de représentants de bureaux de placement concernant plusieurs aspects d'un programme d'orientation professionnelle à l'école secondaire. En second lieu, cette étude fut menée afin de susciter des opinions chez ces personnes quant aux façons selon lesquelles l'orientation professionnelle pourrait être le plus efficacement facilitée et améliorée. Les réactions de ces trois groupes de personnes aux entrevues et aux questionnaires administrés au hasard ont indiqué que l'opinion est diverse relativement à quelques aspects du programme et en harmonie relativement à d'autres aspects du même programme. Notamment, on a trouvé qu'il y avait peu de rapport entre le carrière choisie par l'étudiant et sa familiarité avec l'éducation et les qualifications requises pour cette profession. De plus, il y avait une différence notable entre la proportion de parents qui faisaient une évaluation positive du programme d'orientation en ce qui concerne la consultation académique, et la proportion de parents qui en faisaient une évaluation positive en ce qui concerne l'orientation professionnelle. Il y avait, cependant, un accord prononcé entre les parents et les représentants de bureaux de placement en ce qui concerne l'identification de méthodes qui pourraient améliorer l'orientation professionnelle.

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The broad aim of secondary school career guidance programs is to stimulate student career decision-making. In facilitating this aim, school guidance personnel typically focus their efforts on encouraging students to become aware of their own personal and educational strengths and on developing the students' knowledge of the available vocational alternatives and the qualifications necessary to enter these occupations. While the former aim may be realized through individual consultation and group discussion, a variety of methods are commonly utilized to accomplish the latter. For example, students may be brought into direct contact with various career environments through field trips, visitations, career fairs or invited speakers. Alternatively and perhaps more commonly, career information is provided through films, career display boards and printed materials.

Although a number of studies have attempted to identify the various influences upon secondary students' career decision-making (Breton and McDonald, 1967; Friesen, 1969), little attention has been paid to the attitudes and opinions regarding career guidance by the consumers of that guidance, viz., students and their parents. The purpose of the present study was to assess the relevant target populations' attitudes, opinions and perceptions regarding some of the more common career guidance methods and materials employed in guidance and counselling settings in junior and senior high schools.

While the concern of this study was career guidance in general, one particular focus of the study was upon career display boards. These boards typically display information which is designed to give students some knowledge of the variety of career opportunities available and the qualifications required to take advantage of those opportunities. The initial impetus for the study arose out of the introduction of career display boards into the junior and senior high schools in the Edmonton Public School System (E.P.S.S.). During the course of pilot evaluation of the effectiveness of the career display boards in meeting objectives of the career guidance program, it was discovered that there was little information concerning the actual perceptions, opinions, and attitudes about the career display boards in particular and career guidance in general. The present survey study was thus designed to collect information about the career display boards and their relation to general career guidance. In particular, this study at-

tempted to assess and compare the attitudes toward career display boards and general career guidance of those most vitally concerned with such programs, that is, the students, parents, and representatives of the various agencies and institutions in the community. In addition, the present study attempted to assess these individuals' perceptions of the ways in which career guidance aims could most effectively be facilitated.

The focus of the study was the career guidance program which operates in senior high and junior high schools in the E.P.S.S. This program is coordinated by a team of career consultants in the E.P.S.S.'s Guidance and Counselling Department and is operationalized by school counsellors and/or guidance teachers within the schools.

METHOD

Sample and Instrumentation

Three target populations were selected for the study. First, a stratified random sample of two senior high and five junior high schools was selected from among the schools administered by the E.P.S.B. Within these schools, random samples of senior high (N=58) and junior high (N=116) students who passed by the school's career display boards during a four hour observation period were selected and each student was interviewed using a standardized interview format. Each student was asked to indicate: (1) whether he had made a career choice; (2) whether he knew the qualifications required for his occupational choice; (3) who he felt was most able to assist him in his career deliberations; and (4) his evaluation of the career boards displayed in his school.

The second target population consisted of parents of the students enrolled in the selected schools. Standard questionnaires were sent to a random sample of junior high school (N=340) and senior high school (N=326) parents who had a child enrolled in any one of the seven target schools. Over 42% of the parents to whom questionnaires were sent responded. The parents' questionnaires requested them to indicate: (1) whether the school attended by their child had a guidance counsellor; (2) whether they had communicated with the guidance counsellor; (3) whether their child received enough guidance from the school concerning school courses; (4) whether their child received enough guidance from the school concerning his suit-

ability for different kinds of work; (5) whether their child received enough guidance from the school concerning the availability of different kinds of work; (6) the age at which they felt a child should begin to think seriously about an occupation; (7) whether their child had talked to them about vocational matters; (8) whether their child had made a career choice; (9) who would be most able to assist students in making career decisions; and (10) the most effective and least effective methods of career guidance.

The final target population consisted of representatives of the agencies that recruit secondary students and supply vocational material to the schools. Interviews were conducted with two representatives of each of these three types of agencies, business or profit-making organizations, post-secondary institutions and governmental or service agencies. These representatives were required to indicate: (1) how knowledgeable students are about the vocations for which they apply; (2) who, in their opinion, is most able to assist students in making career decisions; and (3) the best methods for stimulating student interest and awareness in careers.

Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

Reliability. A panel consisting of the four Career Center consultants, the Director of Counselling and two independent research experts was asked to analyze critically the first draft of the instruments in terms of phrasing, sequencing, and length of all items. In addition, the panel made suggestions concerning the need for addition or deletion of items. Items were modified, added and deleted until consensus was reached among the panel members that the instruments were structured to provide sufficient reliability, based on the definition provided by Kerlinger (1967). In addition, reliability of the interview procedure was promoted by utilizing trained and experienced interviewers who followed the interview formats in every detail (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook, 1959).

Validity. The content validity of the questionnaires was assessed through the judgments of the same panel members who worked on ensuring the reliability of the instruments and the interviewing procedure. Members of the panel were asked, independently and in groups, to evaluate the questionnaire and interview items in terms of their representativeness with regard to the broader dimensions to which the study was addressed.

RESULTS

The responses of each of the three sampled groups were combined and converted into percentages. These data give some indication of the attitudes, opinions and perception of the career display boards and the career guidance program.

Responses from the student group revealed several particulars which should be of interest to counsellors. Approximately 50% of both junior and senior high school students indicated that they had made a career decision already. Yet 29% of these at the senior high school level and 65% at the junior high school level indicated that they did not know what educational skills would be required to attain their vocational goals. Approximately 50% of the students considered that most or all school counsellors are generally willing to help them plan their careers, 33.3% of the students felt that at least some of the counsellors are willing to assist, while only 7.5% indicated that they felt counsellors are generally not willing to assist in career planning. With regard to the career display boards in particular, 93% of the students considered that these displays were generally useful to students, but only 41% indicated that the displays were useful to them personally in their career deliberations.

Parents' responses also reveal some interesting opinions concerning the career guidance program. As Table 1 indicates, more than half of all parents considered that the school provided adequate guidance to their child regarding *courses of study*, only about one-quarter of the parents felt their child received adequate guidance regarding either the *kinds of work* the student might be suited for or the *kinds of jobs* that are available.

Only 8% of the parents indicated that either the school which their child attended did not have a counsellor or that they did not know if the school had a counsellor on staff. Each of the seven schools did, in fact, have at least one counsellor on staff. Of all the parents, slightly more than two-thirds indicated that they had not had any type of communication with the counsellor in their child's school. In fact, of the remaining 32% of the parents, most were chiefly concerned with their child's course selection and progress, and only 10% of the total number of parents had discussed their child's future career decisions with the school's counsellor. Table 2 provides one possible explanation for the relatively small percentage of

Table 1
Parental Perceptions: Adequacy of Guidance in the Schools

Type of Parent	Type of Guidance								
	Adequate Guidance on Different Aspects of School Work			Adequate Guidance on Kind of Work for Which Student is Suited			Adequate Guidance on Jobs Available to Student		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes	No	Don't Know
Junior High (N=154)	50.0%	35.7%	14.3%	24.7%	40.3%	35.0%	27.0%	40.1%	32.9%
Senior High (N=124)	51.6%	35.5%	12.9%	26.6%	48.4%	25.0%	25.6%	44.6%	29.8%
Totals (N=278)	50.7%	35.6%	13.7%	25.5%	43.9%	30.6%	26.4%	42.1%	31.5%

Table 2

Respondents' Perceptions of Who is Most Able to Assist Students in Making Career Decisions

Sample Groups	Groups Perceived As Being of the Most Assistance To Students in Making Career Decisions							
	Parents	School Counsellors	School Teachers	School Principals	Peer Groups	Businessmen	Others	Don't Know
Junior High Parents	38.1%	19.6%	9.4%	2.9%	5.2%	20.0%	3.5%	1.3%
Senior High Parents	36.7%	17.8%	9.3%	0.4%	6.0%	21.8%	5.6%	2.4%
Junior High Students	38.7%	26.6%	6.7%	2.0%	10.0%	12.0%	3.3%	0.7%
Senior High Students	31.5%	35.6%	6.8%		41.1%	9.6%	11.0%	1.4%

parents who discussed their child's future career choices with the school counsellor. As indicated in this table, 36.7% of the senior high and 38.1% of the junior high parents indicated that they consider parents to be the people most able to assist children in making career decisions. In fact, 95% of the senior high and 68% of the junior high parents indicated that they had discussed career possibilities with their child and 64% of the senior high and 49% of the junior high parents indicated that their child had already made a career choice.

Finally, the parents and community agencies were asked to indicate the methods they considered would be most effective in stimulating student interest in career decision-making. Ten alternative methods of accomplishing this were supplied to the parents interviewed and they were asked to indicate the three methods they considered to be most effective and the three methods they considered to be least effective. As indicated in Table 3, approximately two-thirds of the parents felt that field trips and career days are among the three potentially most effective methods, while talking to parents, reading brochures and talking to school counsellors are methods similarly rated by approximately one-third of the parents.

Although the attitudes of only six representatives of community vocational sources were assessed, their responses were markedly in agreement with those of the parents. Thus, field trips and career fairs were each nominated by two of the representatives as the best means of stimulating student interest in careers, while utilizing display boards and providing information directly to parents were the other potentially effective methods mentioned.

DISCUSSION

The findings obtained in this survey indicated a variety of attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of the career guidance program and the career display boards. First, consistent with the results of a number of previous studies (Breton and McDonald, 1967; E.P.S.B. Study, 1966; Noeth, Roth and Prediger, 1975) a significant number of students express the belief that they lack an adequate knowledge of the requirements of their chosen vocation, even though the majority of students expressed the opinion that school counsellors are willing to assist them in their career planning. Secondly, the present research indicates that students, and particularly parents, perceive the school counsellor and parents as the most valuable sources of assistance in career

Table 3
 Parents' Perceptions of the Most and the Least
 Effective Methods of Student Career Guidance

Method of Providing Career Guidance	Percentage of Respondents (N=281) Who Listed Method As One of the Three:	
	Most Effective Methods	Least Effective Methods
Field trips to post- secondary institutions and/or places of business	66.2%	1.8%
"Career days" in schools (speakers)	63.3%	6.4%
Talking to parents or relatives	39.1%	11.4%
Reading brochures, etc.	33.5%	14.9%
Talking to school counsellors	31.3%	5.0%
Talking to friends (peer group)	15.7%	58.7%
Display boards	13.5%	20.3%
Talking to principal or teachers	10.7%	12.8%
Reading ads from newspaper and/or magazines	6.8%	54.1%
Watching TV, movies, etc.	4.3%	76.5%

decision-making, again replicating other studies of the phenomenon (E.P.S.B. Study, 1966; Friesen, 1969; Hansen and Borow, 1973). The present results also indicate that the proportion of students who consider the school counsellor to be the most valuable source of assistance in their vocational considerations increases from junior high to senior high. The latter finding, of course, parallels the results of studies which have demonstrated that younger children are more responsive than older children to parental influences (Friesen, 1969).

Another interesting set of attitudes and perceptions of the career guidance program emerges

from an examination of a number of the specific findings. The increasing complexity and specialization of society may be demanding increased educational training for careers of all sorts. This may provide an explanation for the parental opinions expressed in Table 2. It is obvious that parents are more concerned with adequate guidance in terms of various aspects of school work than they are with career guidance and that a substantial proportion are unable to express opinions about suitability for and availability of different occupations. It may be that parents do not discuss their child's future career choices with the school counsellor, especially at

the junior high school level, because they feel that they, that is, parents are most able to assist their child in making career decisions.

Assuming that the guidance program which was surveyed is representative of the guidance programs which are typically implemented in secondary schools, these findings have important implications for school guidance personnel. First, it is apparent that there is a need for counsellors to devote more of their efforts to communication; specifically, communicating to students and their parents that they do have the expertise and the desire to make a significant contribution to students' vocational decision-making. Secondly, as has been noted in other studies (Flanagan, 1973) there is a need for counsellors to employ more effective means of disseminating career information. Also, in general, students were favorably impressed with the career display boards used in the schools; this method could be incorporated with more success (Penner, McLeod, Nichols and Grant, 1976). Aside, however, from increasing the amount of individual consultation undertaken between the counsellor and student, other, more direct, methods may be employed. And, according to the parental and community groups, these might include the increased use of field trips and visiting speakers. This suggestion is consistent with Wehrly's (1973) contention that, "the community needs to be brought to the school as well as the school to the community" (p. 127).

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