
History Repeats Itself: Parental Involvement in Children's Career Exploration L'histoire se répète : La participation des parents dans l'exploration de carrière pour enfants

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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in children's education remains one of the most significant predictors for children's academic achievement. This finding generally holds across the range of social group categories including race, culture, class, and family structure. However, relatively little research has been conducted on parental involvement in children's career exploration, specifically, the relationship between parents' own career exploration experiences and their approach to career education with their children. Through parents and youth participating in a career development intervention program called *Career Trek*, the current study explored three questions: (a) How do parents perceive their roles in the children's career development? (b) How do parents' educational and career histories influence their perceptions of their roles? and (c) What strategies do parents utilize in terms of fostering their children's career development needs? The parents in this study appear to perceive the facilitation of children's career exploration as "restrictive" and therefore do not create/initiate a framework for career-related discussions. Instead, they prefer to respond when their children initiate career-related discussions. The information gained in this study is important for the facilitation of greater parental involvement in children's career exploration. The results suggest that the best way to shift the intergenerational transmission of limited educational/career outcomes is to increase the career development exploration capacities of parents.

RÉSUMÉ

L'implication des parents dans l'éducation des enfants reste l'un des prédicteurs les plus significatifs pour le rendement scolaire des enfants. Cette constatation vaut généralement pour toute la gamme de catégories sociales telles que la race, la culture, la classe sociale, et la structure familiale. Cependant, peu de recherches portent sur la participation des parents dans l'exploration de carrière des enfants, notamment, la relation entre les expériences d'exploration de carrière des parents eux-mêmes et leur approche à l'exploration de carrière avec leurs enfants. Pour les parents et les jeunes qui participent à un programme d'intervention de développement de carrière appelé *Career Trek*, l'étude actuelle explore : (a) Comment les parents perçoivent-ils leur rôle dans le développement de carrière des enfants ? (b) Comment les histoires de l'éducation et de carrière des parents influencent-elles la perception de leurs rôles ? et (c) Quelles sont les stratégies utilisées par les parents pour répondre aux besoins de leurs enfants en matière de développement de carrière ?

Les parents qui ont participé à cette étude semblent percevoir la tentative de faciliter l'exploration de carrière avec leurs enfants comme « restreignante » et donc ne pas créer ou initier un cadre pour les conversations liées à la carrière. Les parents préfèrent plutôt réagir quand leurs enfants initient des discussions axées sur la carrière. L'information recueillie dans cette étude est importante pour encourager une participation parentale accrue dans l'exploration de carrières des enfants. Les résultats suggèrent que la meilleure façon de contrer la transmission intergénérationnelle des résultats scolaires et de carrière limitées est d'augmenter les capacités d'exploration de carrière des parents.

Understanding the career development processes of children and youth is an important area for researchers. Given the current social and economic context that is predicting a significantly more challenging future in terms of career opportunities for young adults entering the workforce, it is critical to further our awareness about how young people can best capitalize on their ambitions, talents, and abilities. Translating this knowledge into effective educational, economic, and social policies will subsequently benefit both the individual and the collective.

Hoyt (1984) was among the first to highlight that parents had both the right and the responsibility to become involved in their children's career decision-making. Moreover, he suggested that opportunities exist for all families to do so, including those who may be challenged by environmental, economic, sociological, intellectual, or psychological circumstances. However, much of this research has focused on understanding the influence of parents on their children's career development, most often from the perspective of children and adolescents themselves (Alliman-Brissett, Turner, & Skovholt, 2004; Kracke, 1997; Otto, 2000; Whiston, & Keller, 2004).

Little is known about the families of origin of the parents in the above-cited studies, their own educational and career experiences, and how these relate to their children's future career development. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to address three research questions: (a) how do parents perceive their roles in the children's career development? (b) how do parents' educational and career histories influence their perceptions of their roles, and (c) what strategies do parents utilize to foster their children's career development needs? This article reviews the literature on parents' perceptions of their role in children's career exploration and presents the findings of a study that explored their role in the context of their educational and career histories. Implications for practice are discussed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

During the past 60 years, a substantial body of research literature has developed that explores the relationship between parental involvement and children's academic achievement. Findings from this research are unequivocal in concluding that parental involvement is a significant predictor of children's academic success (Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2012). In contrast, knowledge regarding parental involvement in the career exploration processes of children and adolescents has only emerged within the past 25 years as a meaningful area of study. Notwithstanding

the differences in outcomes of interest, theory-based knowledge of the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement can guide the identification of key contextual factors in career exploration.

First, a key factor is how parental involvement is defined and subsequently measured. Current definitions of parental involvement include psychological factors such as parental aspirations, expectations, interests, and attitudes and beliefs regarding education (Taliaferro, DeCuir-Gunby, & Allen-Eckard, 2009). Other studies define parental involvement in children's career exploration in behavioural terms, for instance, providing feedback or advice such as encouraging children to move on to postsecondary education rather than working-class careers (Downing & D'Andrea, 1994). Helwig (2004) defined parental involvement as engaging in career-related discussions with children and determined that parental involvement was one of five key variables that predicted children's career development. Parental involvement has also been defined as general psychosocial support, which acts as a protective factor that can help promote career preparation and reduce the risk for school disengagement among urban middle- and high-school students (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). From a systems perspective, the concept of parental involvement can reflect participation along a continuum of relational connections ranging from disengaged to enmeshed within the home, school, and community contexts (Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2013; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Glasscock, 2001; Seabi, Alexander, & Maite, 2010).

Second, an important consideration in both bodies of research is the exploration of the specific needs of diverse populations. Much of the available research on parental involvement in career exploration focuses on populations that are less likely to encounter barriers in identifying careers of interest and accessing postsecondary education as the means to move into a particular career. This has led to the absence of research that examines these issues within disadvantaged communities. A number of studies have focused on identifying barriers to parental involvement in children's education for immigrant, racialized, and low-income families. These consist of instrumental factors such as inadequate access, lack of time and financial resources, and work schedule conflicts; emotional barriers that account for a history of school failure or mistrust of school systems; cultural barriers that involve language; attitudinal barriers including different perceptions, understanding, and awareness of involvement, and beliefs regarding the appropriateness of parental involvement; and structural barriers including teacher attitudes and school climate factors (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Mendez, Carpenter, LaForett, & Cohen, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009; Williams, Sanchez, & Hunnell, 2011). These findings highlight the importance of understanding barriers to parental involvement in career exploration, particularly for parents who experienced disadvantage within their own educational and career experiences.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that these findings are contextualized within the traditional perceptions and definitions of parent involvement. Several authors have suggested that minority parents are often seen by schools as less involved when evaluated based on the number of formal interactions between

the parents and the school (Hong & Ho, 2005) and that definitions reflect traditional dominant group norms (Perez Carreon, Drake, & Calabrese Barton, 2005). Lightfoot (2004) has also pointed out that traditional definitions of parental involvement reflect considerable power differentials between parents and school systems that have significant implications for minority or low-income families.

Third, research findings continue to suggest that parents' educational and income levels remain significant predictors of children attending postsecondary education and/or obtaining a professional career (Belley, Frenette, & Lochner, 2011; Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011; Huang, Guo, Kim, & Sherraden, 2010). Reasons for this may include having a "culture" of education in the home, or may reflect a lack of parental exposure to and experience with postsecondary education (McMullen, 2011). What is clear is that further research is needed to more fully understand how to develop interventions that can facilitate career exploration in youth, particularly for youth from minority and underrepresented groups.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The social ecological model is widely accepted within the social sciences as being most appropriate for understanding children's development. The salient model of analysis was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and highlighted the position that children are shaped by the interaction of both proximal (e.g., family) and distal (e.g., neighbourhood) contexts in which they live. This framework identifies factors in the critical domains of a child's life (individual, family, school, community, and societal) but, most importantly, examines the interactional nature of the multitude of relationships (child-parent, parent-school, school-community, and family-social context) between the different domains. In the context of career exploration, individual student factors include children's knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward particular careers, as well as the capacity to access, assess, and understand career-related information. Career exploration is also influenced by children's gender, values, and self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Career development is also influenced by the transactional relationships among the family, school, and community. Parents' career interests, self-efficacy, values, and abilities also have an effect on children's career exploration. Parents act as the primary role model for their children and may encourage or discourage career exploration through modelling, discussion, or providing information. Furthermore, within this model, parent-school relationships have a powerful role in facilitating or limiting opportunities for children's career choices. The socio-economic status of families varies, and this too will influence whether students identify career exploration and postsecondary education as priorities, are exposed to different careers, or live in a community that promotes postsecondary education as accessible, affordable, and important. For example, in the Manitoba context, the historical legacy of the residential school system has resulted in a difficult relationship between Indigenous families and the mainstream school system; that

in turn contributes to less positive educational outcomes for children (Levine, Sutherland, & Cole, 2013).

At an institutional level, parental perceptions regarding postsecondary eligibility criteria, costs, and funding subsidies through scholarships or bursaries, knowledge of emerging career sectors, and ability to access this information will serve to facilitate or impede the parents' career-related interactions with their children. Also at the institutional level are educational policies that mandate school curriculum. Career exploration may or may not be considered a priority of provincial governments, depending upon the perceived needs of students, demands from the private sector with respect to training future workforces, or in response to parental pressures that may see the immediate needs of basic academic skills as priorities.

The larger cultural context also influences parental involvement, as it can perpetuate career myths and stereotypes related to social group categories of class, race, and gender and, in fact, may institutionalize and perpetuate forms of race/gender/class discrimination. The socially constructed assumption that some parents, particularly those with less education or from lower socio-economic backgrounds, do not have the same desire and capacity to facilitate career exploration with their children conceals the complexity of issues related to social hierarchies, and these decontextualized analyses fail to incorporate the socio-environmental factors that contribute to perceptions of risk in the first instance.

THE CAREER TREK PROGRAM

Career Trek is an early-intervention, social inclusion initiative targeted toward students who, due to social, economic, or family structure disadvantages, may not successfully transition to postsecondary education after graduation. It seeks to increase students' and families' knowledge about potential careers that are accessible through postsecondary educational institutions via an integrated approach to experiential career exposure, the provision of information about postsecondary educational institutions, and the encouragement of parental involvement in children's career decision-making choices. Although career exploration is a component of early school curriculum, children who may be perceived as being academically at risk of not moving on to postsecondary education require additional supports in order to be successful.

The mandate of Career Trek is poverty reduction through career exploration. Each year, 240 children in grades 5 and 6 who appear to require additional academic and/or social supports are identified by school staff as candidates for the Career Trek program. The program operates for 20 Saturdays beginning in October and ending with graduation in April. Students are transported from several pick-up locations throughout the city to one of the four participating postsecondary educational institutions: the University of Winnipeg, the University of Manitoba, Red River College, and the South Winnipeg Technical Institute. Students rotate through 5 weeks of programming at each campus. The program curriculum is designed to expose students to the wide variety of careers that are accessible via

postsecondary education, as well as the broad range of careers within each discipline/subject. The program is experiential, and participants engage in the “hands-on” tasks of particular careers. For example, activities associated with the political science department include developing policies and legislation (policy analyst), engaging in a debate (politician), and writing about current events (journalist). In addition to the postsecondary institutions, the program has partnered with private sector companies that provide access to their facilities. An example is Manitoba Aerospace, which provides access to a decommissioned aircraft as part of the aerospace module at Red River College. The program includes three “Family Days” in which parents and family members are encouraged to attend the program with their children and participate in the activities.

In the context of the Career Trek program, the current study explored parental involvement in children’s career exploration with the view toward identifying factors that facilitate or impede the process. Parents were interviewed regarding their personal educational and career histories, their involvement in the Career Trek program, and how they may enhance the career development of their children in ways other than the Career Trek program.

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore parental perceptions of the nature and impact of parental involvement in children’s career exploration. The parents/guardians of Career Trek program participants in the 2008–2009 program year were sent an information letter advising them of the research project. A graduate research assistant then asked them whether they were interested in participating in the qualitative data collection.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted by the research assistant who followed a flexible interview guide consisting of 15 questions that explored parents’ family backgrounds, educational and career histories, current employment and educational status, and role in their children’s career development. The interview guide was developed from the review of the literature and research on parental involvement and children’s career exploration. Through this review, the main theoretical categories that are relevant to obtaining an understanding of parental perceptions of their role in facilitating the career exploration processes of their children were identified; these addressed parental knowledge, values, beliefs, goals, and past experiences.

The interview guide included factual questions that asked parents to describe their current employment and living situations as well as their educational and work histories, and enquired about their current level of satisfaction with their positions. In addition, there were a number of questions regarding their personal experiences of career exploration in the context of their family of origin and educational systems. An example of these questions is “In what ways would you say your parents/family were involved in helping you decide/prepare for a job after high school?” In terms of their relationships within the nuclear family, questions

included, "What would you like to see happen for your child in terms of future careers/jobs? Is there anything from your personal experiences that you would like to replicate/not replicate with your child? What would you do differently with your child? What do you perceive as your role in your child's career exploration and development? What factors hinder/facilitate your involvement with your child's career exploration?"

Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and lasted approximately 45–75 minutes. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and analyzed using principles of categorical content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The first level of analysis grouped all responses to each interview question. From this, the grouped responses were reviewed with the intent of identifying general categorical themes. All sentences were coded into one of these categories. These categories were then further narrowed into more distinct codes that captured a particular concept. Representative quotes or "principal sentences" from these categories were then chosen to highlight the identified themes.

RESULTS

Impact of Parents' Family of Origin on Their Educational Experiences

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of the participants (18 of the 33 parents) did not graduate from high school, although several pursued their General Educational Development diploma (GED) at a later time. When asked to reflect on why they did not complete high school, the majority of parents described their parents' role in their educational experiences as negative, non-involved, or irrelevant. Parents expressed that their own parents simply expected them to graduate. Notwithstanding this expectation, some did graduate, but significantly more did not. It appears from the interview data that parents adopted a *laissez-faire* position with regard to their education and appeared peripheral to their children's academic attainment. As one parent indicated,

I think back then they didn't really push that kind of thing. Like even doing your homework, they didn't really care. You were responsible, you did your own homework. If you're in trouble with the teacher, that's your problem. You know, that kind of thing. So as kids we were much more responsible for our actions in a way.

Another parent said, "I didn't graduate high school because I became pregnant. Not my senior year, but I never went back to get my grade 12."

Similar contexts existed in the area of postsecondary education and career exploration. Participants had minimal exposure to postsecondary education, and only 2 parents had completed a postsecondary degree. As expressed by one participant, "I didn't graduate high school, and I don't think they (parents) expected me to go to university or anything like that." There was a general expectation that participants would find a job or work after leaving school, but their parents

did not provide any information or any tangible assistance in terms of exploring career-related issues. One parent in the study summarized the experience of the group as “No expectations. No information.” Another parent stated, “We didn’t have parents that actually went out to colleges or brought home pamphlets. They

Table 1
Parental education and employment

#	Family structure	Education	Current position
1	Single parent (female)	Did not complete high school	Homemaker
2	Single parent (female)	High school graduate	Administrative assistant
3	Two parents	F – Did not complete high school M – Did not complete high school	F – Grocery cashier M – Government clerk
4	Single parent (male)	High school graduate	Service manager
5	Two parents	F – Did not complete high school M – Did not complete high school (GED)	F- Bank teller M- Sales supervisor
6	Two parents	F- Did not complete high school M – Did not complete high school (Vocational)	F – Not working M – Industrial painter
7	Two parents	F – High school graduate M – Did not complete high school	F – Government worker M – Painter
8	Two parents	F – 4 year university degree M – Did not complete high school (GED)	F – Researcher M – Owns business
9	Two parents	F – High school graduate M – Did not complete high school (Grade 9)	Both parents self-employed
10	Two parents	High school graduate	
11	Two parents	F – High school graduate and some university courses M – High school graduate	F – Educational assistant M – Computer programmer
12	Two parents	F – Did not complete high school M – Did not complete high school	F – Clerk M – Unemployed
13	Two parents	F – Did not complete high school M – Did not complete high school	F – Student M – Insurance sales
14	Two parents	F – Did not complete high school (vocational) M – Did not complete high school	F – Homemaker M – Labourer
15	Two parents	F – High school graduate M – High school and college	F – Homemaker M – Mechanic
16	Two parents	F – High school graduate M – Did not complete high school	F – Licensed practical nurse M – Mechanic
17	Two parents	F – Did not complete high school (currently working on GED) M – 4-year university degree	F – Food processor M – Business administration
18	Single parent (male)	M – Completed high school	Construction

just said, oh you just finish school. You finish school.” One participant described the contradictory position of her parents:

My mom always insisted that we got postsecondary but didn't provide for it. Like, financially. Even supporting me emotionally, she didn't prepare me. Didn't go out and look at universities or get applications or talk about it in the last year of high school. Just didn't touch it.

Another parent had similar experiences. Her parents were extremely critical of her as a young parent on social assistance, yet did not provide her with any support or resources in order for her to return to school.

Other participants indicated that their parents clearly did not believe that they would be successful, and career exploration or success was presented as an unrealistic possibility.

Because it had to be backed up with being able to go to school to do it, and that wasn't really an option. I didn't feel it was an option anyway. Maybe it was, but I didn't ever get that impression from them [parents] that it was.

I wanted to take a course for medical personnel, so you can work in a dentist's office or doctor's office or whatever. My mom said, you can't do that, because you can't spell. I'm like, thanks. Thanks for the vote of confidence.

One parent described the outcome of her perceived absence of parental support: “I dropped out of school, worked at McDonalds, Burger King. How did that affect me? I definitely did not have positive support there [home]. It would have made all the difference in the world I think. Big time.”

This was not to say that these parents did not have any expectations for their children. Several participants described how the family values of working hard and not being “lazy” were important beliefs that were transmitted intergenerationally, yet there was an absence of direction in terms of how or where this would occur.

I pretty much started working when I was in school and my parents instilled lots of good work ethics in me as I was growing up. And having one career was not a big thing. They instilled other things, you know, that I worked and worked hard and made a home and all that stuff that went with it.

Parental Career Histories

For the majority of participants, their experiences of early school-leaving translated into jobs, rather than careers. As one mother said, “I don't think I've ever had a career, unless you count the housecleaning I was doing for a year and a half. I've had jobs, but I wouldn't say I've had a career.” Another parent described her current position as “sales, but I don't know if I could really call it a career.” Another parent described how one outcome of her limited education and subsequent limited career path is that she deliberately underestimates her abilities. “I still second guess what I'm qualified for. I always shoot under, when I should probably be trying to get jobs I don't think I'm qualified for and see what happens.”

Although levels of satisfaction ranged from *very satisfied* to *not at all satisfied*, many parents expressed regret in terms of their incomplete education and subsequent absence of a “career.” Parents described a profound sense of disappointment over not having completed their education or not having pursued additional education at an earlier stage of life. One parent indicated that her husband had shared his thoughts with her:

His job was boring, and if he had had the kind of experience that my daughter’s going through, he may not have picked what he has today. He kind of wonders what he could be good at, if he had the same opportunity, but it’s just a question.

Parents also experienced regret in terms of disparities between current positions and salaries and those that would have been possible had they pursued further education. For those participants who were currently upgrading, they expressed regret that this was taking time from their children.

Strategies to Facilitate Career Exploration

Participants indicated that in contrast to their own histories, they considered it important to support their children. The general response reflected ideas of “being there to provide emotional, physical and spiritual support, for her that way.” The primary means by which they provided support was listening to their children and making conscious efforts to not actively steer their children in any specific direction. With respect to their children, it was clear that the participants had clear expectations of their children completing high school, yet were unable to articulate how they could support their children to ensure that this would occur. One parent noted that she “would really like him to graduate from high school because without Grade 12, nobody will even look at him.” Although participants acknowledged the importance of having greater involvement in their children’s education, in many ways they replicated the *laissez-faire* position of their own histories and appeared reluctant to adopt a proactive position with their children. As one parent indicated, “I actually think that I don’t have to say that much anymore because they know how I feel about it.”

Information as “limiting.” Contrary to the widely held belief in the benefits of providing the tools for informed decision-making, these parents perceived that providing direct information to their children was synonymous with limiting children’s capacities to explore different careers. Parents were firmly committed to the position of not wanting to influence their children in narrowing their choices, believing that their children had the ability to gather adequate information to assist in career exploration on their own or from the school context. Yet, these positions are paradoxical, as parental influence is second only to academic preparation in encouraging students to go on to postsecondary education (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002).

“I just want her to be happy.” In this study, all of the parents stated that their primary role in their children’s career exploration initiatives was to provide sup-

port, primarily emotional support. As one father stated, "When she's old enough and chooses something, my role would be to stand by and support her." However, parents were unable to articulate the specific processes or behaviours that translated support into actions. Support was most frequently described by truisms, expressing varying versions of "We know she can be anything she wants to be," "He can accomplish anything if he sets his mind to it," "We just want her to be happy," "I want them to get an education towards a career that they want, not what I want; I want them to be happy," and "She can do what she wants to do, and being 11, that's great!" Another parent stated, "I want her to do what she's gifted to do, because then it will never be a challenge and it will never be disappointing and it will never be hard."

Limited knowledge of how to participate in children's career exploration. An overarching theme in the data suggested that parents feel neither sufficiently informed about career exploration nor competent to provide active guidance/direction to their children. Many parents experienced feelings of powerlessness and felt that they had inadequate knowledge to become involved in their children's career exploration. For example, one parent admitted,

This might sound silly, but I didn't know that you could go to university in a different province. I thought if that was the province where you were born, you had to go to the [university] there. It didn't even make sense to me. I didn't understand the basic stuff. That's horrible, but I didn't.

Moreover, parents did not perceive that career exploration should be a focus, given the age of their children. Parents expressed that any career-related discussions should be child-initiated as in, "If they ask you a question, give them whatever information you know." "When he tells me, oh I did this, I'll say, well what do you think about doing that for a living?" "If there's something that she's found really interesting and wants to talk about it, I'm all ears, and it is really fascinating the stuff she's learning." Another expressed that her role would be one of "support and then I can be a sounding board to her *if* she needs me."

When asked how she can influence her child's career development, one parent stated,

I don't know how much I can; I mean she's only 11, so I don't think she's really thinking too much of a career at this point in time. I know I didn't. I didn't think about it really until I was in high school. People said, you have to figure out what you want to do with the rest of your life. I'm like, no I don't. I'm only 15, 14, whatever, you know. I've got the rest of my life to decide. But now I kind of wish I would have sort of listened a little bit more, and maybe I would have a job or a better life.

When asked how they could contribute to their children's career exploration, one parent summarized the feelings of many by stating, "At the moment, I can't do anything, but I just want them to be happy with what they choose to do and hopefully not waste their time."

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study was directed toward a group of parents whose children were selected for participation in an early-intervention career exploration program. The results of this research suggest that parents' educational and career-related schemata that were grounded in the absence of concrete support from their own families of origin may be unwittingly transmitted to their children. Findings support the conclusion that in contrast to their own experiences, parents are committed to their expressed desires for their children to successfully complete high school and be happy in their future careers. Parents were less clear in articulating their role in children's career exploration, and the overall theme described their involvement as being limited to psychosocial support. These findings replicate the context of "naïve psychology" for career exploration that is constructed from the popular discourse of matching interests and occupational roles position (Marshall, Young, Domene, & Zaidman-Zait, 2008, p. 199). The expression of support, however, does not appear to have produced concrete change in parent-child interactions. Although it is important to encourage children to pursue their talents and abilities, providing a realistic worldview is also essential to career development. Positive parent/family attitudes toward education and career planning are an important aspect of future success, but not necessarily sufficient.

Quantitative studies generally conclude that the probability of the children of less-educated parents pursuing higher education is significantly less than that of the children of well-educated parents (Bauer & Riphahn, 2007). Family income levels remain significant predictors of children's academic attainment, postsecondary participation, and career aspirations (Corak, Lipps, & Zhao, 2003; Rounce, 2004). Although parents articulated the desire for their children to attend postsecondary education, they did not describe the means, financial or other, by which their children will achieve these outcomes. This suggests that parents who themselves do not have high school or postsecondary education may be constrained in their efforts to fully understand the means by which their children will achieve their educational/career expectations.

In this study, parents appear to perceive facilitation of children's career exploration as "restricting" and therefore do not intentionally create a framework for career-related discussions. Instead, parents prefer to respond when their children initiate career-related discussions. This is in contrast to other research that suggested parents perceive themselves as providing a supportive environment in which their child may discuss and explore career options and acting a source of career-related information (Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2005). In this respect, participation in the Career Trek program acts as a catalyst for children to initiate these types of discussions. However, intentional discussions about career exploration with elementary-aged children can provide the foundation for greater in-depth discussion during the middle- and high-school years. Other studies have found that the chances of enrolling in college were almost twice as great for students whose parents frequently discussed school-related matters with them

compared with those of students whose parents rarely did so (Choy, Horn, Nuñez, & Chen, 2000). Consequently, programming targeted at parents of Grade 5 and 6 children should include suggestions of how to explore different careers in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Many parents from lower socio-economic brackets hope that their children will receive this guidance and support in their school settings, but the research presented above suggests that the parents will play a more significant role.

Clearly, it is not the intention of any career exploration program to suggest that parents should “stream” children toward specific careers; however, the idea that structured, knowledgeable, and informed discussions would limit children's opportunities needs to be challenged. Limited access to this information will result in limited access to postsecondary opportunities. It is somewhat of a paradox that these same parents would have preferred someone to take responsibility for this area in their lives and expressed the desire to have had someone “guide them along the way.” There remains a disconnect between parents' acknowledgement of how they were not adequately supported or guided in their own career exploration and how they perceive they need to prepare their own children for career decision-making endeavours.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The information gained in this study is important for service providers who are in a position to facilitate greater parental involvement in children's career exploration, particularly for those families that may be underrepresented within postsecondary education. The results suggest that one way to shift the intergenerational transmission of limited or marginal educational/career outcomes is to increase the career development exploration capacities of parents. Despite parents' articulated desires to provide a supportive context for expanding their children's career exploration, there remains a disconnect between attitudes and behaviours. Given the importance of parental involvement for children's achievement and the acknowledged benefit of early intervention to promote children's development, one means of facilitating stronger linkages is by beginning career-related discussions at the elementary school stage.

Epstein (1995) proposed a model of family-school collaboration that is applicable to parental involvement in children's career exploration. The foundation for parental involvement is ensuring that the family environment creates the context for career exploration. This suggests that an early intervention program alerting parents to the importance of their role in children's career exploration and encouraging career-related discussions within the home is a first step in the process. Additionally, effective parental involvement needs to evolve throughout children's schooling, and adapt to their different developmental needs. Parent-initiated career exploration will be different for children in elementary years than in middle school years.

A second level of involvement focuses on communication and information sharing. Although there appears to be a substantive amount of information readily available, there remains a significant unmet need for information, education, and services for parents who wish to promote the career exploration of their children. Access to information plays a critical role in motivating parental behaviours that demonstrate encouragement of postsecondary attendance (Educational Policy Institute, 2008), including saving for college or university and actively assisting children with completing admission and financial aid applications (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1998). Therefore, the more information and resources that schools and social service agencies can provide, the more likely that parents will be motivated to share this with their children.

The third level is engagement. Parental involvement in career exploration needs to extend beyond the provision of instrumental assistance and psychosocial support. Findings suggest that effective parental involvement is facilitated by an experiential component—one that exposes parents to career exploration activities that create an empathic, tangible connection between children's interests and abilities and potential career choices. It is important for parents to support their children's need for autonomy by taking children's perspectives and viewpoints, allowing children to make choices, and supporting their initiatives and problem-solving attempts (Grolnick, 2009). This requires ongoing parental motivation to remain actively involved with their children in order to sustain children's motivation for career exploration.

A fourth level involves modelling. Beyond merely providing information, perhaps a more critical role for service providers is to provide guidance that will enable parents to use information to navigate educational pathways that will result in tangible outcomes of high school completion and career exploration. Preparing children for career decision-making via postsecondary education requires a family context that has the capacity to translate expectations into achievements that may include ongoing discussion of future plans, an explicit statement regarding academic expectations that include postsecondary education, congruence between the expressed value of education and actions that prioritize school, and pursuing postsecondary education.

The fifth level of involvement is decision-making. With respect to career exploration, parents need to establish the context in which the process of decision-making (as opposed to solely the outcome) is learned and valued. Parents can model how decision-making is a process of gathering information and perspectives, and identifying potential actions directed toward particular goals. The final level of involvement focuses on parent-community connections. Within career exploration, "community" can refer to facilitating parental knowledge of postsecondary options available within communities, the need for specific workers in particular sectors within communities, and options available for their children to explore careers within their communities in the form of voluntary service or cooperative programs.

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