

HIGH SCHOOL CAREER EDUCATION: POLICY AND PRACTICE

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A considerable amount of research in a number of different jurisdictions has shown student dissatisfaction with career counselling in secondary schools. This article explores policy and practice by reflecting on two counsellor interviews and 35 student responses to a questionnaire about career education in a single Ontario high school. Students noted a level of certainty about their postsecondary plans, and reported experiential learning being most helpful to career planning. However, demands on counsellors' time are seen as substantial and dissatisfaction with program provisions remains high. High student-counsellor ratios, over-extended counsellor responsibilities and low student initiative suggest a need for different approaches to helping students plan for their postsecondary careers.

A job was considered a life commitment up to the early part of the 20th century (Patton & McMahon, 2006). School counselling focused on career choice as a cognitive problem-solving process to match knowledge of the self with the job market. A good match resulted to a good career choice. However, changes to occupational climates prompted changes to educational policies informing career education in high schools. The plethora of new job types and the revolutionary ways in which careers are now perceived are matched by new curriculum policies that govern how educators help prepare students for high school exit. While more demands are placed on educators, little is known about how effective these policies are.

Recent research has demonstrated concern that students were leaving high school unprepared for their postsecondary plans (Alexitch, Kobussen, & Stookey, 2004; Code, Bernes,

& Gunn, 2006). Alexitch et al. (2004) cited students reporting inadequate preparation for higher education. Magnifico (2007) noted employers believing high schools do not teach relevant information and skills needed by the workplace, and students do not link course work beyond high school. These problems elicited advocacy for career education in high schools because students need to be postsecondary ready (Gullekson, 1995).

High school counsellors have indicated little time to fulfill their responsibilities satisfactorily while balancing administrative duties and traditional counselling roles (Balcombe, 1995; Wintermute, 2004). Studies have also shown high student-to-counsellor ratios in North American schools (Balcombe, 1995; “Counseling Trends Survey”, 2004; Gullekson, 1995; Helwig, 2004; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987). Counsellors involved with the demands of educational policies and managing large student numbers have less time devoted to individual student counselling.

Effective practice needs to be relevant and sustainable. This article surveys the types of career preparation policies and services in place in Ontario high schools, and discusses counsellor and student responses to the system of career education. Three key questions guided this study and subsequent recommendation: What types of career planning services are available in high schools? What do students think about their career development? How do counsellors respond to student feedback? Counsellor and student responses helped identify the effectiveness of policies in practice in the context of a realistic teaching-learning environment.

Literature Review

Career education has undergone adaptations to meet the continuously changing needs of contemporary students. Balcombe (1995) presented a timeline of the development of career

education in the past century. High schools in Boston linked vocational guidance initiatives with the secondary English curriculum in the 1900s. The use of psychological testing and advocacy for self-awareness came into vogue between 1910 and the 1930s as an extension from World War I screening practices. The Great Depression influenced vocational sorting of individuals into the early 1940s. Ontario adopted testing for more structured guidance in the mid 1940s. Personal counselling from a developmental approach emerged in the 1950s, and moved toward group education in the 1970s. The 1980s introduced cross-curricular programming and the beginnings of cooperative education.

Expansion of postsecondary options and multiple entrance alternatives available to students in the 21st century makes career planning and postsecondary choices more complex. “Career counseling can be seen as very much an evolving profession” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 157). As careers change, and the manner in which society perceives careers change, so does Guidance practice. The challenge is to keep pace with emerging student demands and government policies to help direct students along their desired career pathways. This study comments on effective practice when one school works under such pressures.

Integration

Integrating career education into routine teaching practice creates synergy of exposure to the relevance between academics and career planning. Emphasis on career education in high school subject courses may be effective because secondary students are more likely concerned about their career options and may have a better idea of their life direction. Beginning career education at an early stage helps students relate their academic work with future plans and promotes active citizenship. Hiebert (2002) cited two studies which suggested that regular career

education also increased academic success. “Inherent in the [career planning] process should be curriculum to allow [students] to chart a course to their destination” (Balcombe, 1995, p. 20) with specific identifiable learning outcomes (Hiebert, Kemeny, & Kurchak, 1998). Many researchers have suggested for comprehensive career education programs to be infused into regular curriculum (Balcombe, 1995; Bernes & Magnusson, 2004; Borgen & Hiebert, 2006; Chen, 1999; Hiebert et al., 1998; Levi & Ziegler, 1993).

The dawn of comprehensive programs in the latter part of the 20th century was reported by Galassi and Akos (2004). *Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training [OMET], 1999), which informs Grade 1 to Grade 12 curricular inclusion of career awareness and developmental processes in one Canadian province is an example. The policy mandates a Grade 10 *Career Studies* course and the *Teacher’s Advisory Program* (TAP) being imposed at key stages to facilitate transitioning between high school and postsecondary careers. The Choices into Action document was a step toward infusing career education into mainstream curriculum. Examining its influences would confirm its merits and suggest areas requiring amendment.

Student Needs and Effective Practice

Several studies supported guidance beginning with acknowledging and assessing student needs (Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2004; Hiebert, 2002, 2003; Hiebert et al., 1998). Hiebert (2002, 2003) found students reporting career and life planning skills as being important for their successful transition out of high school. Students in Magnusson and Bernes’ (2002) study believed more information and work experience programs would be helpful. Hiebert’s (2003) students wanted more information about job requirements, help with course selection,

more work experience, and help with selecting higher educational programs. Bardick et al. (2004) noted other adolescent concerns including skills training, maintaining grades, access to scholarships, need for role models, support with career planning, and financial assistance. Students rated assistance with academic decisions and the provision of postsecondary information as the most important tasks guidance counsellors could provide (Wintermute, 2004). Interestingly, Alexitch et al. (2004) found senior high school students feeling less prepared for high school exit than their younger peers. This study looks at the relevance of these concerns within the target school.

A survey of over 800 high school students in the U.S. described most teenagers receiving little or no career guidance outside the home (“Survey Shows Lack of Career”, 2002). Fifty-one percent of surveyed students could not identify helpful school personnel. Although Domene, Shapka and Keating (2006) cited three sources which documented effective counselling for students who sought professional counselling, they also noted guidance professionals being underutilised, referencing as low as 8% of students to no more than 40% of students seeking assistance from counsellors. Student initiative is a key partner to effective counselling practice. By identifying student involvement in their career plans, this study suggests feasible outcomes by improving student awareness and initiative.

Student preference to seek advice from sources other than professional counsellors is well documented (Bardick et al., 2004, 2005; Bernes & Magnusson, 2004; Domene et al., 2006; Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan, & Davis, 2006; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Magnusson & Bernes, 2002). Their primary confidantes included parents, friends and teachers. Adolescents with strong peer support tended to explore and commit to career choices (Bardick et al., 2004). Alexitch and Page (1997) noted student perceptions that teachers provided more useful advice compared to

guidance counsellors, and Bardick et al. (2004) noted students reporting counsellor services not being tailored to their needs. Most reports noted parents as students' primary resource (Bardick et al., 2004, 2005; Bernes & Magnusson, 2004; Gibbons et al., 2006; Magnusson & Bernes, 2002). However, besides stressing the importance of education, parents were unsure of how to effectively help their children with career development (Bardick et al., 2005; Gibbons et al., 2006). Parents in Bardick et al.'s (2005) report wanted to expose their children to more career options, but felt inadequate to help them. They felt better rapport with the school and closer communication with guidance staff, as well as a better view of the job market would improve their supportive roles. Although such reports demonstrated small student numbers accessing professional school counsellors, there was little empirical evidence supporting the reasons behind these tendencies. This study adds to current literature by examining student perceptions of their counsellors.

Student-Counsellor Relations

Understanding the dynamics affecting counsellor-student interactions helps to maintain a healthy working relationship between educational personnel and the students they serve. Fitzpatrick and Irannejad (2008) found students who were more prepared for change have better alliances with their counsellors. Counsellor-student relationships were a determinant of the success and outcome of counselling processes (Fitzpatrick, 2008; Schedin, 2005). Working relationships improved when adolescents and counsellors formed goals which were personally meaningful to the student. Whiston and Aricak's (2008) survey, which monitored effectiveness of counselling practices, found that students who did not meet with their counsellors reported fewer career competencies. This study focused on the opinions of senior secondary students with

the assumption that Grade 11 and 12 students would have more invested interest in their postsecondary career plans. This study asks students to identify specific expectations they have of their counsellors.

The Guidance program once defined “as a service to assist students in making course selections and as the maintainer of student records” (Levi & Ziegler, 1993, Conclusion, para. 2) still reverberate in students’ consciousness. Students rarely see Guidance as more than such, even when they themselves voiced the need to receive more career planning services from Guidance. Domene et al. (2006) reflected that students associated counsellors to only deal with school related issues. They also surmised students with low grades felt counsellors were biased for high achievers. This sentiment mirrored Lee and Ekstrom’s (1987) study, where academic students were more likely to receive counsellor input. Another interpretation could be that students with little or no postsecondary aspirations were less motivated to seek counsel.

Despite the relatively poor illustration of counselling services and student access trends, Alexitch et al. (2004) noted that 50% of senior high school students wanted up to three annual visits with counsellors, and 25% of students preferred a minimum monthly visit. Such demands for individual attention factor into a counsellor’s responsibilities. This study compares data collected from one Ontario high school to existing research, and discusses the feasibility of accommodating high school students’ career planning needs.

Universality

Much research has noted student dissatisfaction and staffing shortage, but none has asked counsellors to respond to student feedback or suggested a sustainable solution which may be adopted by more than one school or local area. Although local efforts and projects such as the

Experiential Learning and Instruction for Trades Entry (ELITE) and the *Hospitality-Entertainment, Leisure, and Personal Services (HELP)* programs (Beggs, 1995), which was pioneered in 1988 to target non-academic students, have had successful outcomes, they catered for a specific student type. This study's target was to identify a feasible solution that would accommodate a spectrum of student needs. Educators need to support new educational implementations for them to be successful. Without their cooperation, any suggestion would only be extra text in policy manuals. Building a program around student needs and counsellors' responses to such feedback would be more relatable for the primary stakeholders, thus more appreciated and amenable to counsellors and students. Both parties would be more likely to invest in an approach which draws from their opinions.

Method

Research was conducted in a high school in southern Ontario with over 1300 students. I approached two classes of senior secondary students of mixed genders and ethnicities. Thirty-five student respondents volunteered their time and reported their opinions on student questionnaires. Counsellors were also approached for interviews. Two counsellors volunteered their time.

Student questionnaires comprised of five main sections. The first section gathered information about students' postsecondary goals, including plans for higher education, entering the work force, travel, uncertainty and other. The second section asked students who they approached for advice. Students were then asked to prioritise various guidance services offered at their school in order of its importance to them. The following section gathered student opinions about guidance services and career education based on their agreement or disagreement

with 22 items posed with a 4-point Likert scale. The final section invited students to express their opinions to open-ended questions about their guidance experiences, and identify career development programs they were, or wished to be involved with.

Student responses to the Likert scale questions were quantified by descriptive statistics. Eight items were coded for student preparedness for high school exit. Ten items represented student confidence in various counselling aspects. Four items denoted student access to counsellors. Responses to non-Likert scale questions were ranked based on percentage frequency. Student responses to open-ended questions, including description of their counselling experiences and the type of assistance they wanted from guidance counsellors were qualitatively coded for high frequency words and grouped into positive and negative experiences. Each positive or negative qualitative remark was mapped against the student's responses to the related Likert scale question(s) for consistency.

Counsellors were interviewed before and after the 35 students were surveyed. The first interview provided insight into the counselling profession as a negotiation between effecting educational policies and addressing school-, and student-specific needs. Students' qualitative responses on the questionnaires were related back to counsellors for discussion at our second interview. The second interview discussed student opinions and the feasibility of providing for student-identified needs based on the school's resources.

Interviews with counsellors were audio recorded and transcribed. Interview transcripts were read multiple times over elapsed intervals to ensure appropriate interpretation. Counsellors' descriptions of effective career interventions and programs were highlighted for comparison with students' opinions.

The initial interview, which provided an overview of the career interventions and programs that were in place at the school, prompted a closer look at policy documents to contextualise counsellor availability and responsibility. Information and policies surrounding high school career education was retrieved from the Ministry of Education website. Students' references to low counsellor accessibility prompted questioning the student load at the school, and suggested a consideration of student-to-counsellor ratios in other schools within the same local jurisdiction. Counsellors disclosed their estimated student responsibility at the target school, and data about other schools were gathered from public internet websites, which noted student population and staff statistics. Forty-four schools within two School Boards were canvassed. Average student-counsellor ratios mapped from these schools were used to accent the situation at the target school.

Results

Qualitative results are presented to depict counsellor and student perceptions on the application of counselling services in one Ontario high school. Student opinions are then supported with quantitative statistics describing percentages of the student sample who shared similar views. The three research questions, 'What types of career counselling services are available in high school? What do students think about their career development? How do counsellors respond to student feedback?' are addressed in comparison with, and discussion of these results.

Career Education Programs

Interviews with guidance counsellors prompted a closer review of Ministry documents pertaining to career development mandates on high school curriculum. Counsellors referenced programs such as the half credit Career Studies course and the *Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program* (OYAP), amongst other optional programs including cooperative education, which are all part of the overarching policy document, *Choices into Action* (OMET, 1999).

Choices into Action (OMET, 1999) guides career education and development from Grades 1 to 12 in Ontario. Both the *Teacher Advisor Program* (TAP) and several Guidance courses were offered at the school. Experiential learning procedures such as cooperative education, apprenticeships and volunteer work fed into these programs and connected with other academic courses.

According to the School's website, all Grades 9 and 10 students participated in TAP. Educational and personal goals were set in *Annual Education Plans* (AEPs). Grades 11 and 12 students reviewed their AEPs with the Teacher Advisor. This program appeared to serve as a baseline to guide each student's career development. However, counsellors did not refer to it, and student opinions about the program were not gathered since student surveys were conducted prior to acknowledging TAP's existence. TAP's permanence at the school could have been short-lived since the Ministry of Education revoked the TAP requirement in Ontario schools in 2005 (OMET, 2005).

Amongst the three Guidance courses offered at the school at the time, Career Studies is a compulsory Grade 10 course that helps link academic pathways with career goals. Interviewed counsellors noted a job shadowing component, which furthered the Grade 9 *Take Your Kid to Work Day* (K2W) experience. While K2W provided students with observation of the work

environment of a parent or a close relative, job shadowing allowed students to observe a career of interest.

Other interconnected experiential programs included cooperative education, apprenticeships through OYAP and the *Fast Forward* program. Cooperative education placements emphasised the theory behind the practical component, while apprenticeships emphasised the trade or work experience. *Fast Forward* (FF) is a program aimed at students who may not be engaged at a particular school, but are interested in specific courses or trade work. *Counsellor1* explained that FF allowed students to enrol in courses at other schools within the same School Board. While cooperative education and apprenticeships were directly offered at the school, FF was only available in select schools. They have limited enrolment, and may be difficult to get into.

Counsellor2 observed that students across different postsecondary pathways benefitted from cooperative education programs:

A lot of students that are geared toward the work place [have a] heavy emphasis on co-op. We have students that do co-op that will be university bound also; but they will have a placement that will probably enhance maybe their supplementary application or portfolio for university.

Students pursuing college or work after high school favoured apprenticeships. An OYAP presentation was organised by Career Studies teachers, and mainly targeted Grade 11 students. Counsellors complemented these efforts by organising two events that offered a variety of postsecondary destinations to students. Six colleges were invited to speak with Grade 11 students about the Applied programs. A *Let's Talk* evening for Grades 11 and 12 students and their parents invited guests from universities, colleges, private schools and trades personnel, demonstrating various options to students.

Fourteen out of 35 students reported having attended, or will be enrolling in one or more experiential program. Cooperative education was the most noted. Eleven of the 14 involved students were in Grade 12. The number of students participating in optional career development programs demonstrated high levels of student consciousness and investment for their future plans.

Student Opinions

Student commitment to experiential programs mirrored their confidence in their postsecondary goals. Over 81% of sampled students indicated that they were prepared to transition out of high school. Grade 12 students showed higher confidence (88.4%) than Grade 11 students (60.2%). High levels of student preparedness paralleled high percentages of students seeking advice from high school counsellors (71.4%) and adults (91.4%). Counsellors attributed the high student consultation with adults to the school's *Caring Adults* program:

We've indicated that if a student is in need, or wishes to speak to someone, Guidance is always available. We've also indicated other staff members that [students] may feel more comfortable with, [whom] they can approach. I know [the] Grade 12s ask their Grade 12 teachers; especially if it's in a career area that they are interested in. (Counsellor2, personal communication, April 20, 2009)

Counsellors also noted encouragement from the family for students to double check their options and plans with Guidance.

The high percentage of students seeking professional advice seemed to demonstrate confidence in Guidance, but other data contended with this notion. Table 1 (see Appendix A) summarises student satisfaction with various aspects of Guidance counselling. Quantitative data demonstrated that student confidence in counsellors varied between contentedness in some areas to dissatisfaction in others. Similarly, qualitative responses exhibited variable satisfaction with

guidance services. One student recorded that he or she “really wouldn’t put anything else in the guidance program” when asked about any additional services students may want to add to existing programs. However, the same student noted a lack of confidence in counsellors’ expertise, expressing, “often times they are wrong about things”. There appeared to be satisfaction with the breadth of counselling coverage, but discontent with the quality of advice.

The lack of student satisfaction with sufficient access to counsel corresponded with students’ open responses. Surveys found 52.0% (n=25) of students not approaching counsellors due to counsellor unavailability. Student request for more counselling time was also reflected in responses to additional services they wanted. These services included:

- Allocating more time for individual counselling sessions, especially for Grade 12 students
- Advising postsecondary funding and application procedures, including bursaries, scholarships and student loans
- Including former graduates as guest speakers to relate their experiences
- Providing more classes or programs for various career paths, including alternative non-academic pathways
- Providing preparatory sessions outlining sample career pathways that link to high school courses
- Providing more information about non-traditional or novel courses of study and career pathways
- Providing more apprenticeships and cooperative education opportunities in non-traditional fields and emerging trends
- Providing off-site accessibility to information on the school’s network
- Providing information about institutional specialties
- Providing information for out-of-country opportunities

The most repeated requests (37.5%) were related to immediate needs for transitioning out of high school, including attention to college and university applications, financial assistance, and specialised attention to the Grade 12 class.

Counsellors Respond

The request for more information about financial aid and help with applications baffled both counsellors. Initially, counsellors thought perhaps students experienced difficulty or uncertainty following up on procedures themselves, but soon asserted that this should not be the case because the information was prevalent and have been inducted during their initial counselling sessions at the beginning of the academic year. Packaged information was explained and given to each student. The consensus was a lack of student follow-up. Counsellors expected more responsibility from students.

In response to Grade 12 students' need for individualised attention, counsellors referred to a notion that Guidance takes on different meaning to students in varying Grades:

In Grade 12, Guidance all of a sudden becomes a career counselling centre, which we can never be because we're just divided all over the place. We direct them to websites, or something that they can do, but we're not going to be the career centre that they want us to be. (Counsellor2, personal communication, January 21, 2009)

Counsellors further expressed the need to filter resources which they gather before passing them onto students, and to alter the way in which information is presented to students entering various pathways. For instance, concentration on colleges and universities may not be appropriate in a mixed group session because students who were not academically geared would see little benefit.

Counsellor2 explained,

The process where I talk about universities and colleges, I tune out the kids that are not going to university. [We] try to balance it as best [we] can. . . As a

counsellor, I still try to introduce new avenues, new programs, [but] there's always that hesitation. Sometimes [it's] hard to sell. [They're] going to go with the tried and true. (Personal communication, April 20, 2009)

The dilemma to advise students about varied opportunities was countered by the difficulties of encouraging students to approach novel careers compared to traditionally proven successes.

Counsellors did not think that having one-to-one sessions with every student was a feasible option. The approximate 380:1 student-counsellor ratio was the main determinant. Counsellors explained that most of their student interactions circulated amongst a core group of 20 to 30 students who have more intricate personal issues. Counsellors also commented that most students tended to request sessions at the same time when demand was high and counsellors were busy (i.e., during postsecondary application season).

Separately allocating counselling responsibilities (e.g., separating academic, career and personal counselling) was also deemed a misstep. There was not enough government funding to support the overall needs that arise, and student issues tend to cross between the three aspects.

Counsellor1 expressed,

As counsellors, if we kept the academics, our lives will be much easier, but who would fill the other need? Sometimes keeping [students] emotionally stable affects their academics as well. It would be nice to have more counsellors, and those counsellors had a smaller group to work with. We could do it all. We could have the time for the academics, and the career counselling, and the socio-emotional needs as they arrive. (Personal communication, April 20, 2009)

Approaching counselling matters as separate categories of interest may result to added counselling time because more than one counsellor may need to be acquainted with each student's case from an academic, career, and personal development perspective.

When asked about staffing concerns, *Counsellor1* commented that high student-to-counsellor ratios were not uncommon, and the distribution of personnel in schools likely depended on several factors:

Sometimes schools are looked at for their socio-economic background and all kinds of other demographics. . . . Maybe in a school that is more affluent in nature, there might be more other issues. It doesn't mean that kids are all just sitting at their desks and learning. . . . We have one [Child and Youth Worker] in a school of over 1300 students. Other high schools have say three [CYWs] for a population that is much lower than ours. (Personal communication, April 20, 2009)

The approximate 380 student load per counsellor cited at the school was higher than average in comparison to 44 other high schools in the same educational jurisdiction. Figure 1 (see Appendix B) illustrates each of 44 schools' student-to-counsellor ratios. The lowest student-counsellor ratio was calculated at 186 students per counsellor, while the highest student load observed was 691 students per counsellor. The average student-counsellor ratio was 339:1.

Counsellors believed empowering students to become more self-sufficient was vital as a viable means to cope with limited personnel and government funding:

I think what we need to do is empower students to take the responsibility themselves. As far as career choices, starting with the Grade 10 *Careers* course, - if students took it a bit more seriously; there's the first step. (Counsellor2, personal communication, April 20, 2009)

Counsellor2 noted that students who were most successful were those who took initiative and followed-up on their own accord.

Discussion

Counsellors and students both demonstrated great appreciation and demand for practical experiential learning. Stone (1995) ascertained that "contextualised learning is a more powerful way to enhance academic as well as vocational skills" (p. 329). His research demonstrated school-related, work-based learning helped students improve in academics, behaviour, and work ethics. Stone's conclusion is perhaps the reason why such programs continue to be in vogue, but they are not without limitations.

One limiting aspect of cooperative education programs is time commitment. These courses generally run for a full school term, or for 4 to 8 weeks in the summer. Students who enrol in such programs spend a lot of time experimenting with occupational fields. Students in Whiteley and Porter's (n.d.) sample reported rejecting or reconsidering the career they experimented with, rather than confirming their postsecondary directions after participating in some form of experiential learning. Students were using up valuable time. The amount of time and money invested in experiential opportunities by governments, industries, and sponsors may be deterred by less favourable student outcomes. Unlike Whiteley and Porter's results, students at the target school expressed positive feedback from experiential learning. Interestingly, students' high levels of readiness and positive experiential experiences did not translate into lessened demands from Guidance.

Student Demands

Qualitative responses suggested student demands reflecting dissatisfaction with Guidance services with the exception of experiential learning, where the demand reflected a consciousness of the effective practice. Counsellors also spoke highly of cooperative education and apprenticeship programs. However, these initiatives depend on availability, community sponsorship and government funding; none of which are easily procured.

Student anxiety with funding their postsecondary education was also reported by Gibbons et al. (2006). In their study, the main issue was attributed to inaccurate knowledge about tuition costs. Students in this study were uncertain about the availability and application processes associated with financial aid. This baffled counsellors. Counsellors concluded that there was a lack of student follow-up, which resonate Whiteley and Porter's (n.d.) remarks. Although all

students may be aware of, and/or have access to available literature, only a minority of students actually read them.

Putting aside accessible information and little student initiative, student concern about seeking financial assistance is understandable. Adolescents may not have working knowledge about the processes of loans, interest accumulation, and liability. Students may not be acquainted with credit history if they have never held a job. The prospect of financial assistance could be daunting for those who have no experience procuring funding for themselves. It would be useful to make use of other staff expertise by incorporating financial management and budgeting into the mandatory Career Studies course, for instance.

Students described their lack of confidence in professionals when counsellors could not meet their expectations. Counsellors explained their inability to meet every student's request because of their circa 380 student responsibility. In reality, counsellors focussed on between 30 to 40 students who have been deemed in most of need. The majority of other students are often redirected to alternative sources of information. Students need to share in the responsibility by following-up on their own accord.

Interviewed counsellors acknowledged the use of other teachers as student resources. Cross-curricular connections made in the classroom helps relieve some of the pressure on Guidance counsellors, and creates more available counsel for students seeking various career avenues. However, whether students were accessing these resources and factors affecting their approach to these resources have not been accounted for. Understanding these dynamics would help clarify the network of resources available to students, and help adjust the approach counsellors may take.

Student-Counsellor Ratios

Perhaps, the most difficult student demand to fulfill is for counsellors to provide more individual counselling sessions. Counsellors in this study reported a circa 380 student responsibility per counsellor, which is slightly higher than the average (339:1) calculated from other schools within the same jurisdiction. Comparing these results to the U.S. recommended ratio of 250:1 (“Counselling Trends Survey”, 2004) or the Ontario School Counsellors’ Association’s recommendation of 300:1 (Balcombe, 1995), a counsellor cannot meet each of 380 students’ needs to satisfaction.

To put counselling time-commitment into perspective, we can assume Alexitch et al.’s (2004) reported demand of a minimum monthly visit and use the two recommended student-counsellor ratios as a theoretical baseline. A 10-minute session with each student per month amounts to between 40 to 50 hours of commitment. This would account for approximately 30% to 36% of a counsellor’s time based on a 35-hour work week. Raising the average session to 15 minutes raises counsellor dedication to between 60 to 75 hours per month, or approximately 45% to 54% of their time. If the demand were to be supplied by the target school at 380 students per counsellor, the monthly commitment would be between 60 and 95 hours, or between 45% and 68% of a counsellor’s time.

A counsellor’s responsibility does not allow for such time commitments. Similar to our counsellors’ testaments, Lee and Ekstrom (1987) and Wintermute (2004) illustrated counsellors spending much time with administrative and clerical support. Balcombe (1995) quantified data indicating full-time counsellors spending only 17% of their time on career counselling on average. Factoring in the fact that student-counsellor ratios are far from ideal, students’ desired commitment from counsellors is not a feasible outcome. A more probable target outcome would

be to devise feasible and sustainable teaching-learning opportunities in each subject course. Policy makers need to revisit the idea of integrated career education as initiated by Choices into Action (OMET, 1999). It is not enough to have a half credit course (i.e., Career Studies) dedicated to career planning. Career education needs to be infused into every high school course. Bridging the gap between student demands and counsellor shortages need to manifest as a ministry-wide initiative and be supported by all educators.

Study Scope and Extension

This research project focused on career guidance programs linked with high school counsellors, hence did not account for other programs unless they were noticed by research participants, themselves. Extending evaluation to other career development programs in place may enrich this study's findings, and better inform effective practice by liaising between the multiple facets of high school career education. While the small sample of counsellors and students involved in this study does not allow for generalising quantitative results, counsellors and students provided valuable opinions suggesting a need to involve students more proactively in high school career education.

Conclusion

Counsellor shortages and student demands cannot be remedied without changing attitudes toward career education. As *Counsellor2* noted, students need to take their Career Studies course more seriously. On the same note, career education policies also need to take cross-curricular integration more seriously. Integrating a career planning component into high school subject courses could alleviate the issues raised by counsellors and students in this study.

Four concerns were highlighted in this study: students want more time commitment from counsellors to help with their career plans; we do not know if students are accessing the resources given to them; counsellors suspect a lack of student follow-up; experiential learning opportunities, which counsellors and students highly value, are limited. Including a career planning component into each subject course, where students are asked to explore an occupation linked to the subject area would address these concerns simultaneously. Students could use the resources given to them by Guidance to complete such a course component, thereby practising independent research while expanding their knowledge and improving their skills. Having to research multiple career paths simultaneously would expand the breadth of students' career education, and help narrow areas which students are more interested in. Integrating this initiative into subject courses from early high school years would help pinpoint a compatible experiential learning focus in the senior years, and reduce the probability of a wasted cooperative education and/or apprenticeship opportunity.

Incorporating a career planning unit into subject courses would also address the three main requests students wanted from counsellors: help with academic and career pathways, transitioning out of high school, and individualised attention. The process of researching a career path gives students a better opportunity to answer their queries about academic and career pathways, and their transition process for themselves. Students would receive individual attention through assessment. Students could also enhance their career planning portfolios where schools enforce the Teacher Advisory Program, and receive additional specific support. Recruiting other teaching expertise expands the breadth of advice and career choices for students.

Integrating career education as a component of subject courses forces students to address their career goals earlier, with greater depth. Sharing the load with other courses allows the Career Studies course to hone in on the technical aspects of career education, including financial assistance and budgeting skills. Cross-curricular attention to career education not only alleviates counsellor responsibility, but also empowers student independence in preparation for their transition out of secondary school.

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Appendix A

Student Satisfaction with Aspects of High School Guidance Counselling

Counselling Aspects					
	Academic	Career	Admin.	General	Sufficiency
	Counsel	Counsel	Assistance	Support	of Access
Percentage					
Satisfaction	71.7%	62.8%	73.5%	53.6%	43.8%

Appendix B

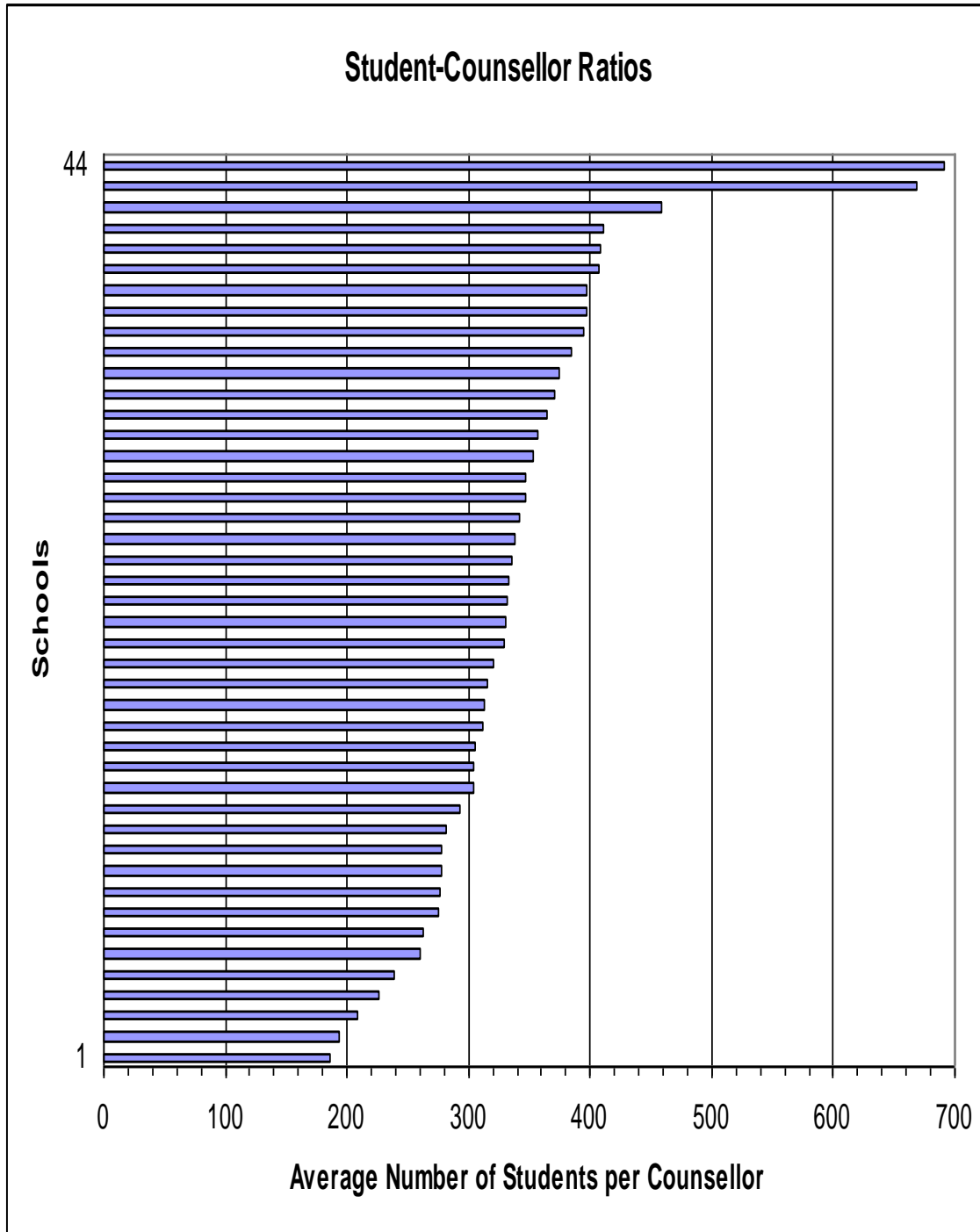


Figure 1. Student-counsellor ratios.