The Impact of Informational Interviewing on an Individual’s Career Development

by

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ABSTRACT

Informational interviewing is a technique that individuals can use to access current labour market information from those employed in the occupational field of interest. This research explores the experience of individuals who conduct informational interviews.

Ten participants who are within 40 credit hours of completing an Arts Degree were selected from a university college. Participants attended a participatory workshop on informational interviewing and were expected to conduct their own informational interviews between workshop sessions. A total of 23 informational interviews were conducted within a four week time period for an average of 2.3 interviews per participant.

The critical incident technique was utilized in a post-workshop interview to assess participants' experience of interviewing. 198 incidents were elicited including 145 positive critical incidents, or facilitating factors, and 53 negative critical incidents, or hindering factors. Twelve categories emerged from the incidents. These included the following eight facilitating factor categories: 1. Information- interviewee's personal experience, 2. Information- occupation, 3. Information- providing options, 4. Encouragement and confirmation, 5. Interviewee's personality, 6. Interview process, 7. Assessing the 'fit', and 8. Providing
contacts or post-interview assistance. The four hindering factor categories included: 1. Negative affect, 2. Interview structure, 3. Perceived destructive factors, and 4. Unanswered questions or discouraging information.

Additional pre-post test data was gathered to assess knowledge gained in the workshop as well as perception of control regarding career aspirations.
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FOREWORD

One of the primary purposes of conducting research in this area of informational interviewing is that I have found the use of this tool beneficial in my own experience. I was introduced to the idea of informational interviewing approximately ten years ago. In attempting to make a career decision, I was advised to meet with ten individuals working in a field of personal interest. Over time, and with great effort, I fulfilled this quota. At some point I learned that this strategy was called "informational interviewing". The interviews became easier as my skill increased and as I discovered that the benefits greatly outweighed the challenges. To date, I have conducted dozens of informational interviews.

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in psychology and understand the difficulties of a 'general' education. However, I am discouraged to hear students say things like, "I couldn't do anything with my B.A. so I went back to school." or "People with B.A.'s end up working in card shops or fast food restaurants." Perhaps liberal arts students need to take a more pro-active approach in refining career goals before they graduate. An excellent way to become more pro-active and therefore establish greater control in career aspirations is through the use of informational interviewing.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In a recent study of Canadian graduates who had held bachelor's degrees in arts for two years, 69.4% were in jobs that did not require their level of education (Redpath, 1994). In another study, 84% of students indicated that they were primarily in higher education to facilitate the likelihood of obtaining challenging, high paying, or interesting work after graduation (Gomme, Hall, & Murphy, 1993). There appears to be a void between the expectations of students and economic reality.

Students may attempt a number of strategies in order to bridge the gap between higher education and the world of employment. One of these is to work while attending school. Participation in the life roles of student and worker has been shown to enhance student development (Niles, Sowa, & Laden, 1994). Although the number of students who also work has been growing, their work is typically for the purpose of financial provision and is often unrelated to the academic field of study (Ford, Bosworth, & Wilson, 1995). Gomme, Hall & Murphy (1993) found that 67% of students who had jobs felt that this income was essential to meeting financial commitments. 62% of the students with jobs felt that work interfered with their academic pursuits.
Another option is for students to take part in a co-operative program (co-op) where they gain work experience within their field of study. A student reflects on the co-op experience (Ford & DeGroote, 1995),

My work term at Sony Music Canada was a unique and invaluable experience. I originally accepted the position because I saw it as an opportunity to gain practical experience at an internationally recognized and respected company. I also thought that the music industry would be dynamic and exciting to work in. My expectations were exceeded- I gained more from this work term than I had ever anticipated. (p. 25)

However, co-op is not offered in all institutions or in all programs. Grade point average requirements, time restraints, family commitments, and other barriers may prevent many students from taking part in co-op.

Volunteer work is yet another option that students may access. It can offer experience related to the field of study. Bolles (1995) encourages individuals to seek volunteer work at organizations that they would like to learn about. However, volunteer work requires a commitment of time that some students are not able to provide.
In a time of financial restraint in higher education, any measures taken to assist students in their dilemma of reconciling expectations with employment reality must be cost-effective. Informational interviewing is one option that students may utilize in addition to the others stated previously. Practical instruction on the use of this skill could be provided through a higher education institution in a cost-effective manner. The recommended time to request for an informational interview is approximately fifteen minutes (Figler, 1988, p. 135). Compared to the options of work, co-op, or volunteer work, informational interviewing is much less time intensive for the student.

Rationale of the Study

There seems to be an assumption that informational interviewing is a well known strategy and widely practiced. Munschauer (1986, p. 118) comments on informational interviewing, "It's time to pick up some other ideas." Richardson (1994, p. 11) cautions the use of the phrase 'informational interviewing', "A few years ago, this was another name for a networking meeting, but the term encourages confused agendas. If the phrase is supposed to suggest an interview where there is nothing at stake, it is an oxymoron." Yet, Beatty (1994) describes informational interviewing as one of many networking strategies. He calls it the "informational meeting" strategy (p. 182). Although informational
interviewing is noted in many career publications, there has not been any formal research conducted on the use of informational interviewing. There seems to be an assumption that informational interviewing is a helpful tool or conversely, that there are more effective methods available. However, empirical evidence is lacking to support either one of these positions.

Bolles (1995) describes informational interviewing as purely information gathering while talking face to face with an individual who is knowledgeable regarding your occupational goal. He emphasizes that it is not done for the primary purpose of securing a job. It appears that there are differing viewpoints regarding the definition of 'informational interviewing'. For this research, Bolles' definition of informational interviewing is employed.

**Research Questions**

The intent of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. What is the individual's experience of conducting informational interviews?
2. How does the use of informational interviewing influence an individual's career development?
Research Assumptions

I hoped that in spending concentrated time learning the skill of informational interviewing in a small group format, students would be empowered to utilize it successfully. I also expected that it would be a helpful tool to aid in their career development in terms of focusing and clarifying career goals.

I anticipated that informational interviewing would assist students in formulating a career decision in part by eliciting consideration of individual goals, interests and talents as well as by providing information regarding the world of work.

I presupposed that informational interviewing can serve as a change strategy which enhances an individuals' sense of competence, effectiveness, and agency.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Career Development

A broad definition of career is utilized in this research and is summarized by Jepsen (1990):

The work career is an individual’s life-long, sequence of work positions observed from both phenomenological and behavioral perspectives and subject to multiple meanings. The developmental career counselor uses career in a very broad sense and resists more restricted meanings such as synonyms for occupation or job.

(p. 121)

There are numerous theories of career development. Krumboltz & Nichols (1990, p. 159) posit, “Although differing in emphasis and vocabulary, the major career theories are not in fundamental disagreement.” This research seeks to incorporate the richness of a variety of perspectives in order to build a holistic foundation of career development. Following, are differing yet complimentary ‘lenses’ with which to view the notion of a students’ career development.
McWhirter (1991) explains the nature of developmental change.

Developmental changes, such as those many student development theories attempt to describe, are typical changes that are assumed to serve an adaptive function: they enable the individual to demonstrate not just different skills, but more adequate skills; they reflect not just a different perspective, but a more mature perspective. Developmental changes are characterized by greater complexity, seen through differentiation (e.g., being able to recognize several components within a problem or perspective) and integration (seeing how those pieces fit back together again in a way that results in greater meaning or a more complete picture).

(p. 415)

King (1994) provides an image of a kaleidoscope to depict the complexity of student development,

It may be helpful to think of a student’s growth and development as a kaleidoscope or mosaic of changing skills, attitudes, beliefs, or understandings, acknowledging that each student represents a slightly different set of shapes colours, and textures that constitute
his or her own personal kaleidoscope, each with its own specific set of developmental attributes. (p. 413)

Schein (1992) describes the foreseen development of 'career anchors',

A person's career anchor is the evolving self-concept of what one is good at, what one's needs and motives are, and what values govern one's work related choice. One does not have a career anchor until one has worked for a number of years and has had relevant feedback from those experiences. But once a career anchor evolves, roughly five to ten years after one has started work, it becomes a stabilizing force in the total personality that guides and constrains future career choices. (p. 207-208)


Erikson's (1963, 1968) eight stages note the struggles of an individual's development throughout the life span. Watkins & Savikas
(1990) focus on the fifth stage of 'identity versus identity confusion' in relation to career development,

Those who have a highly crystallized identity benefit over those who have poorly crystallized identities in the following ways: 1. They will be more apt to have successfully negotiated previous developmental stages, 2. They tend to have more useful information at their disposal with which to make career decisions, 3. They are better able to chose a career that is most suitable to them, 4. They are more decisive in choosing a career, 5. They are more career mature, 6. When being seen by a counselor for career issues, they may benefit most from self-directed activities, career information, and related interventions that capitalize upon their identity development, 7. They tend to be more satisfied with and adjusted to their careers, and 8. They tend to manifest more efficient work behaviour, to be more productive, and to manifest less problematic work behaviour. (pp. 84-86)

Super (1970, p. 136) reviews the phases of career development and notes that from age 15 to 24 one negotiates the exploration stage, "Self-examination, role tryouts, and occupational exploration take place in school, leisure activities, and part-time work." From age 25 to 44, one
wrestles with the establishment stage (p. 136), “Having found an appropriate field, effort is put forth to make a permanent place in it.”

In terms of career decision making, Zagora & Cramer (1994, p. 244) report that “involvement in a career workshop with others of similar vocational identity status, whether high or low, results in greater gains in decidedness.” Krumboltz & Nichols (1990, p. 162) focus on the social learning theory of career decision making, “People acquire their preferences for various activities through a variety of learning experiences.”

Cochran (1991) describes the individuals’ quest for meaning,

Career development is the continual refinement, expansion, revision, and sometimes transcendence of a life story. Career guidance or counselling is concerned with helping people to shape enduring structures of life or a life story in an effort to make that life more meaningful, productive, and fulfilling. Or in brief, guidance helps people to actualize a vision of the good life, in part by cultivating the personal capability for wiser and more effective self-guidance. (p. 6-7)
In summary, all of the preceding views of career development woven together create a rich tapestry highlighting the complexity of a students' experience.

**Transition**

Bachelor of Arts students within 40 credits of graduation were noted to be rapidly approaching the transition of ‘student’ to ‘worker’. Bridges (1980) describes the transition process:

The transition process is really a loop in the life-journey, a going out and away from the main flow for a time and then a coming around and back. The neutral zone is meant to be only a temporary state. It is, as they say, a great place to visit, but you wouldn’t want to live there. (p. 149)

Salomone & Mangicaro (1991) consider young adults who are in the midst of career transition and the role of this neutral zone which they call ‘moratorium’, “The moratorium-type activity can be a healthful choice, a psychological restorative, especially for the adolescent or young adult who is searching, but is not certain for what.” (p. 330)
In a longitudinal study focusing on university graduates' adjustment to work and subsequent change in self-construction, Fournier & Payne (1994) found differing outcomes,

For some graduates, the experience of work had been disappointing, some felt at a loss to define new orientations, others explored new aspects of themselves, work and career became less important elements of self-identity, while being flexible became more important. For others, the first six months had been the discovery that work could be enjoyable and work achievement and competence became more salient dimensions of self construction. (p. 311)

Ward (1992) reviews transitions in terms of graduating college students and confirms that higher education institutions have de-emphasized their role in easing the students' transition to the world of work. However, higher education institutions may be limited in terms of the readiness of students to actively pursue career planning. Crozier & Grassick (1996, p. 25) caution the need "to be aware that B.A. students may not be motivated to participate in career planning activities until closer to graduation or even following graduation." Schlossberg (1989,
p. 154) confirms that “graduation forces a reformulation of goals” as students struggle to reconstruct a new sense of purpose after attaining the goal of a degree.

It appears that students need to prepare themselves for the transition to work whether or not they feel motivated. Redpath (1994, p. 99) stresses the dilemma of a changing labour market, “Ultimately, one has to assess education-job mismatch and the skills shortage scenario in the broader context of changing job skill requirements, increasing levels of educational attainment, and varying hiring standards for occupational entry.” Indeed, Job Futures (1994, p. 6-7), a provincial government publication, confirms one of the shifts in labour market trends as less full-time employment and the growth of “non-standard” jobs which include part-time, short-term, or contract work. Wells (March 11, 1996, p. 12-13), in a recent edition of Maclean’s magazine enforces the grim reminder, “Government cuts and corporate layoffs create a national mood of insecurity” and notes that Canada is in good company of other G-7 countries who are also experiencing job difficulties.

In light of the constantly changing landscape of the labour force, Gelatt (1989) highlights the importance of exercising “positive uncertainty” in regards to making decisions in the 1990’s. Gelatt defines positive uncertainty as “feeling uncertain about the future and feeling positive about the uncertainty.” (p. 255)
Transition and change will likely be a constant for those who are currently anticipating entry to the labour force.

**Informational Interviewing**

Informational interviewing is essentially interviewing someone who is currently working or has worked in an occupational field that you are considering. Bolles (1995, p. 283) candidly describes informational interviewing as "trying on jobs to see if they will fit you". The primary purpose of informational interviewing is to access and obtain current labour market information from those employed in the occupational field of interest.

Walsh (1990) summarizes the use of occupational information in career counselling:

The use of occupational information in career counseling is mentioned by most of the approaches, but rarely emphasized. Generally, the intent in the use of occupational information is to increase the client's knowledge of the world of work, more specifically in the career choice areas that the client is considering. Thus, although most approaches to career counselling view occupational information as an important aspect of the career
counseling process, very few approaches attempt to follow through on this aspect of the counseling process. (P. 280)

Informational interviewing is mentioned in many job search and career development publications. For instance, Bolles (1995), Hecklinger & Black (1991), and Nadler (1994) review practical steps on informational interviewing. Figler (1988, p. 135-139) ventures a step further by depicting five levels or types of informational interviews: 1. Background research on a field of work, 2. Researching a type of organization, 3. Finding out where the jobs might be, 4. Exploring a particular organization, and 5. Talking with decision makers. Individuals who enjoy ‘surfing the internet’ can locate sites focusing on career information which often contain some reference to informational interviewing. For example, Enelow (1996) emphasizes the importance of a pro-active approach in the job search through networking and informational interviewing.

It is beneficial to be aware of the differing terminology alluding to the idea of informational interviewing. For instance, Spokane (1991, p. 190) refers to the individual as a “personal information scientist”. Gelatt (1989, p. 254) advises, “Clients need to learn to be uncertain about what they know and to seek other, even different information or opinions.” Lain-Kennedy (1988) notes the importance of accessing original sources of data which she describes as individuals who are currently working in the
field of interest. Munschauer (1986, p. 146) relates informational interviewing to a “field investigation”. Beatty (1994, p. 182) refers to informational interviewing as an “informational meeting strategy”. He views this strategy as a form of “networking”.

Most higher education counselling centres offer some form of career exploration workshops or seminars. Informational interviewing may or may not be included among the many items on the agenda.

**Competence, Control, and Agency**

Bergeron & Romano (1994, p. 24) encourage counsellors to be aware of the “potential contributions of a client’s perceived competence to career behaviours.” Although content on informational interviewing is often provided to students in career exploration workshops, the practical application requires a high level of perceived competence. Therefore, students may have difficulty translating content into practical application.

There seems to be a link between obtaining work information and the crystallization of goals. Long, Sowa, & Niles (1995) have found that college seniors who had not made a career decision were less informed about the world of work as well as uncertain about their own goals, interests, and talents.

control appear to be substantially more powerful predictors of college students' career maturity than is age." He suggests that self-efficacy change strategies will aid students in career decision-making. Bergeron & Romano (1994, p. 23) reiterate the relationship between self-efficacy and vocational indecision, "Students who are less confident in their ability to complete the tasks and behaviours required for effective decision-making are more likely to report being vocationally undecided."

McWhirter (1991, p. 226) reviews the goal of empowerment in counseling and states the obvious value of "decision making, assertiveness, and social skills training" as increasing the client's perception of control. She adds, "Less obvious but equally valuable skills include the ability to make realistic self-appraisals, to network within the community, to brainstorm for alternatives, and to reframe problem situations." Informational interviewing provides a vehicle for empowering students. Although the challenge of informational interviewing requires some level of perceived confidence, as well as agency, taking on the venture within one's level of comfort may enhance a sense of competence and control over future career direction.

The Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) was utilized in this research. This methodology was chosen for its ability to provide
descriptive data regarding the experience of informational interviewing. Woolsey (1986, p. 252) states, "Critical incident studies are particularly useful in the early stages of research because they generate both exploratory information and theory or model-building."

Flanagan (1954) formulated the critical incident technique while in the Aviation Psychology Program during World War II. Flanagan (1954, p. 327) describes an incident as, "Any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act." Flanagan adds, "To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects." The critical incident technique has been utilized in hundreds of studies within a diversity of domains such as industry, education, health, and community service (Fivars, 1973).

Some examples of studies where the critical incident technique has been employed are: exploring healing among first nations people (McCormick, 1994), supervision of student research (Goodyear, Crego, & Johnston, 1992), decision-making within divorce (Proulx, 1991), job analysis of psychology internships (Ross & Altmaier, 1990), high school counselling trends (Neely & Iburg, 1989), success and failure in university students (Schmelzer, Schmelzer, Figler, & Brozo, 1987), evaluation of nursing
practicum settings (Dachelet, Wemett, Garling, Craig-Kuhn, Kent, & Kitzman, 1981), treatment of rehabilitation patients (Rimon, 1979), improving quality of life (Flanagan, 1978), and studying psychopathology (Flanagan & Schmid, 1959). In her review of the critical incident technique, Woolsey (1986, p. 242) states, "The critical incident technique should contribute significantly to the development of a unique methodology for the discipline of counselling."
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants were students selected from a University College in a town with a population of approximately 100,000. The criteria for selection included enrollment in a Bachelor of Arts degree program with at least 80 credits completed towards the degree. The arts degree at this particular institution is in its infancy and the 1996 spring graduation will witness the third group of arts degree graduates.

This population was selected for several reasons. First of all, as stated in the introduction, 69.4% of arts students are not using their degree two years after graduation (Redpath, 1994). In Redpath’s study, the number of arts students who were mismatched was considerably higher than those in the faculties of business, science, education, and engineering. Crozier & Grassick (1996, p. 20) reiterate, “Effective job seeking behaviour is of particular importance to Bachelor of Arts graduates, who unlike their counterparts in the more career oriented programs such as engineering, business or science, do not enter a ‘waiting and defined’ marketplace.” An arts degree prepares an individual for a variety of occupational fields. However, finding a job may not be as concrete and straightforward compared with becoming a ‘teacher’ and searching for a teaching job or becoming an ‘engineer’
and obtaining employment in engineering. Students must take on greater responsibility in deciding the occupation and work setting in which they will use their degree.

It was expected that students who have obtained at least 80 credits and are therefore closer to graduation would be considering career possibilities more than students beginning the degree program. It was also anticipated that students in this phase of their education would maintain greater clarity regarding a desired career path as well as the motivation level needed in order to pursue informational interviews. Indeed, Crozier & Grassick (1996, p. 25) caution, “The counsellor needs to be aware that B.A. students may not be motivated to participate in career planning activities until closer to graduation or even following graduation.”

A letter was sent to each of the 116 students who met the preceding criteria. They were invited to participate in a three session workshop on the topic of ‘informational interviewing’. A letter of consent was also included in the mailing. The students were asked to return signed informed consent forms if they were interested in participating.

Two sets of workshops were offered. Initially, 13 students made the commitment to attend workshops and conduct informational interviews. Additional students expressed interest in participating but were either not
able to commit to the time required or they experienced scheduling conflicts with workshop dates.

Each of the 13 participants was contacted by the researcher for a pre-seminar interview. The interview was conducted by telephone and ranged from fifteen to thirty minutes in length. The mean length of pre-workshop interviews was twenty minutes. Interview questions were posed in a semi-structured format. The interview focused on exploring the participants' career goals and expectations for the future. All of the participants were interviewed individually before the workshop. Three of the 13 participants who were interviewed were unable to attend workshops due to illness or extenuating circumstances.

There were five students in each of the two workshops. The workshops were designed to be highly participatory and therefore kept small in size.

**Participant Demographics**

A brief demographics questionnaire was distributed at the first session of the workshop. Participants were asked to note their date of birth, major/minor/extended minor, anticipated date of graduation, and occupational goals.

Ten students took part in the research including seven females and three males. The average age of the participants was 25 years.
The participants' course concentrations included 1. fine arts, 2. psychology major/sociology minor, 3. psychology major, 4. history major, 5. geography major/history minor, and extended minors in the following: 6. english/history, 7 & 8. english/psychology, 9 & 10. psychology/sociology.

Five of the ten participants anticipate a spring 1996 graduation, three are planning a December 1996 graduation date, one participant will graduate in spring 1997 due to the extension of his degree to incorporate a one year co-op work term, and one participant is considering graduation in 1998 or 1999 due to a recent change in program from Bachelor of Arts to Fine Arts.

The participants' occupational goals included Fine Arts Instructor, Seminar Presenter-working within the school system, Elementary School Teacher, School Teacher, Lawyer, Urban Planner, Electronic Media, Career Counsellor, Counsellor or Lawyer, and Undecided-leaning towards Teaching.

**Description of Assessment Scale**

A brief assessment scale was administered at the beginning of the first workshop session. The assessment scale is composed of 22 items and was utilized to assess knowledge gained in the workshop as well as levels of control and confidence. A likert scale was used for all of the 22 items.
Sixteen of the questions were adapted from the Career Development Inventory (Thompson, Lindeman, Super, Jordan, & Myers, 1984). The items were drawn from the two scales of career planning and career exploration. The Career Development Inventory contains three additional scales: decision-making, world-of-work information, and knowledge of preferred occupational group. The items adapted from the CDI are intended to assess the participants' perceived knowledge regarding his or her chosen occupation and perceived sources of career information. The additional six items were designed to measure the participants' perception of personal control and level of confidence.

**Purpose and Description of Workshops**

The purpose of the informational interviewing workshops was twofold. The primary purpose was to assure that each of the participants employed the same definition of informational interviewing. Secondly, practical exercises and role-plays were utilized to build interviewing skills and confidence in preparation for conducting informational interviews.

A behavioural approach was utilized in workshop design as outlined by Azrin & Besalel (1980). A model of group employment counselling was also employed as delineated by Amundson, Borgen, Westwood, & Pollard (1989).
The informational interviewing workshops were conducted by the researcher and held weekly for three consecutive weeks. Each session was two hours in length. The format was highly participatory with a concentration on building informational interviewing skills. Students were expected to conduct informational interviews on their own between sessions. One of the goals of the workshop was to enable participants to translate knowledge of informational interviewing to the activity of informational interviewing.

In the first session, participants learned the technique of informational interviewing through social modeling, role-plays, and small group activities. The next two sessions concentrated on sharing experiences of informational interviewing with group members and additional practice with interviewing skills.

**Participant Interviews**

A post-workshop interview was conducted with participants individually to review their experience of informational interviewing. The assessment scale was administered a second time preceding the interview.

The ten interviews were all conducted within a thirty day time period to weaken the effects of memory distortion due to time lapse. In the workshop, participants had been encouraged to record information
obtained from interviews for their own future review and also to facilitate memory retention and recall. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 75 minutes with an average length of 60 minutes each.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on each one of their informational interviews separately. They were asked to describe the critical incidents that took place and to report both positive critical incidents, or facilitating factors, and negative critical incidents, or hindering factors. Participants were also asked about any changes in their career goals and expectations which had previously been stated in the pre-workshop interview.

Participants were provided with information regarding counselling services at the university college. These services could be accessed in the event of personal issues arising during the course of participation in this research.

**Information Obtained for Analysis**

The interviews were analyzed using the critical incident technique in order to gain an understanding of participants' experiences of informational interviewing. Information was also provided regarding changes in participants' career expectations and career goals.

The assessment scale provided data regarding knowledge gained during the workshop and during interviews. It also provided information
about potential changes in participants' sense of control regarding occupational choices.

**Analysis of the Incidents**

Each of the ten interviews was audio-recorded. The audio tapes were reviewed for the purpose of extracting critical incidents. Care was taken to record the critical incidents in the participants' own words. These incidents were coded in order of occurrence and also according to participant. There were 145 positive critical incidents, or facilitating factors, and 53 negative critical incidents, or hindering factors for a total of 198 critical incidents. This translates to an average of 19.8 incidents per participant.

The participants interviewed from one to six individuals for a total of 23 informational interviews. Each participant conducted an average of 2.3 interviews. The length of interviews varied. Participants were not required to record the length of time spent interviewing but most of the informational interviews were assessed to be in the range of 15 minutes to 45 minutes.

The critical incidents were sorted and placed in categories which emerged from a process of sorting and re-sorting incidents as themes became clear. There were eight categories for the facilitating factors, or
positive critical incidents, and four categories for the hindering factors, or negative critical incidents.

**Reliability**

Andersson & Nilsson (1964), express the issue of subjectivity inherent in the formulation of categories,

It is clear that different people may systematize incidents in different ways. But one can always refer to the source material. The essential thing seems therefore to be that the category system chosen is an obvious one, and with as small a degree of arbitrariness and chance as possible." (p. 400)

Andersson & Nilsson suggest the use of independent raters in assessing reliability.

In this research, two independent raters, who are not involved with this study, were asked to sort a sub-group of critical incidents. They were provided with categories along with definitions of the categories. The raters were asked individually to sort the sub-group of 52 critical incidents into their respective categories. These incidents were representative of all the categories including facilitating factors and hindering factors.
Flanagan (1954) and Andersson & Nilsson (1964) suggest that agreement between researcher and independent rater should be at least 75%.

Each of the participants was contacted individually after categories had been formed, defined, and reliability confirmed. The purpose of this contact was to confirm agreement of the researcher's categories and the participants' view of his or her own experience. The participants individually confirmed that the representation of their incidents was accurate.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

There were a total of 198 critical incidents described including 145 positive incidents or facilitating factors and 53 negative incidents or hindering factors. Eight categories were formulated from the positive incidents and four categories from the negative incidents.

Pre-Workshop Interviews

Most of the summer and part-time work experience gained was not perceived as relating to participants' occupational goals. However, all the participants had work experience and often a combination of work experience and volunteer experience. These jobs included working at an ice cream store, restaurant, manual labour, sales, teaching children dance and drama, coaching, tutoring, parks department, search and rescue, administration, marketing, public relations, theatre, crisis line, business, secretarial, and horticulture.

The reasons for pursuing a degree at this particular university college included close proximity to home, cost-effective compared to university, enjoyable atmosphere, small class size, potential for greater interaction with instructors compared to university, and informal atmosphere.
In regard to participants' expectations for the workshop, the following objectives were vocalized: need for direction in anticipation of graduation, gaining ability to approach individuals assessed as having authority, obtaining focus and clarifying career direction, receiving instruction on how to conduct informational interviews, obtaining knowledge regarding occupational choices requiring a B.A. other than teaching, and improving interviewing skills.

One of the workshop participants described her reaction to the letter of invitation, "It hit a spot because of the situation I'm in (lack of career direction). I thought, oh, it's a student doing the workshop. It sounds interesting and maybe I'll learn something." Another student commented, "It came at a good time because I've been thinking about what I want to do a lot."

Participants were asked about their comfort level in approaching individuals to interview them about their occupation. The students were asked to rate their comfort level on a scale of 1-10 with 1 denoting 'very uncomfortable' and 10 denoting 'very comfortable'. The comfort level ranged from 3 to 10 with a mean of 7.1.

Post-Workshop Interviews

Participants were interviewed individually after they had conducted their informational interviews. Seven of the ten participants
had not heard of informational interviewing previous to the letter of invitation to attend the workshop. Of the three, one of the students had been informed about the technique through *What Color is Your Parachute* several years previous and had actively pursued informational interviews. The second student had heard about it recently and had not conducted any informational interviews. The third student was familiar with the term through a friend who allegedly obtained a job through an informational interview. A fourth student had never heard the term but stated that he had done informational interviewing informally in the past. A fifth participant, when asked if she had ever heard the term stated, "No, I had been stewing about it for a few months but I thought it was my own idea. I thought, sure other people do it, but I didn't know that it had an official title and that other people actually care about it. Knowing that there is such a thing as informational interviewing helped me to get out there more."

After conducting their own informational interviews, all of the participants felt that it had been beneficial and that they would continue to use the technique. Some of the students said that they "should" be using it but expressed difficulty in gaining the necessary motivation. One student admitted that it was helpful to have a "push" to actually go out and try it.
A student who had conducted six informational interviews reflected on his experience, "It has focused me towards my career goal. If I ever decide on another career goal I have a means by which I can go and explore it. I have more defined questions that I can ask. I have more contacts now."

DESCRIPTION OF THE CATEGORIES

Following is a description of the categories along with examples for each category. Note that 'interviewer' describes the participant conducting the informational interview and 'interviewee' describes the individual being interviewed.
### POSITIVE CRITICAL INCIDENTS

#### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th># of Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information- Interviewee’s</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information- Occupation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information- Providing Options</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement &amp; Confirmation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee’s Personality</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Process</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing the ‘Fit’</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Contacts or Post-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interview Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>145</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **# of Critical Incidents** describes the total number of incidents provided within the specified category.

**Representation** describes the percentage of participants who vocalized one or more critical incidents in the specified category.
Information- Interviewee's Personal Experience

Includes interviewee's educational and career path, career choices and personal opinion based on his/ her experience.

Examples

"She said that while she was teaching, she also got some extra ESL training and that helped her a lot because she has ESL students. She said that would be a really good thing to take."

"She said that grad. school wasn't that bad. She felt very young. There were a lot of people that were older than her.

"He also gave me a good idea of what he did after university and the path that took him to where he is today.

"Basically he said, 'I can't believe they pay me to do this.' It was really fun to listen to because you could tell that he just loved what he was doing."
Information- Occupation

New information relevant to the interviewer's career goals.

Information and advice on employment and graduate or professional school.

Examples

"I asked about the stress level and he said that it was about a six on a scale of one to ten. That gives me kind of an idea."

"She said that there are a few big companies in Vancouver, and a lot of them will hire people right from grad school. You might not be working full-time but maybe on a part-time basis."

"She was telling me about some of the work that she had done at graduate school. You read the curriculum but you don't know exactly what it's like. Hearing it from her, you sort of get an idea of what is involved."

"He defined some terms of the legal profession."
"He told me about the kinds of things that they look for when they are hiring teachers. He has hired about 35 teachers so that was really kind of good to hear."

"She told me about the various paths into the profession."

**Information- Providing Options**

Reflection on additional career paths available. Re-considering past options and assessing new possibilities.

**Examples**

"Doing what he does is a definite option."

"It made me feel better about the chance of getting work. I had never thought of working up north. I had always envisioned myself working around here."

"In December, when I was set up with the work study, I didn't want to do public work. I had these pre-determined ideas of what it would be like, and to some extent, it was right. But there is a lot of other work that goes on. Now I see more options I guess for the future. Before I just focused on the negative side."
“She exposed me to an other career, another position that’s an option.”

“It was helpful in that it made me think about other possibilities.”

Encouragement & Confirmation
Gaining encouragement, inspiration, hope, reassurance, or confirmation.

Examples
“I told her that I was totally freaked out about the parents and she said, ‘Don’t worry about it too much. It’s just a small part of what you are doing.’ That made me feel a little better.”

“It was one of those reassuring kinds of things. You know, keep doing what you’re doing. Keep going with your interests and something will come up.”

“I asked her which schools she would suggest. Two of the schools I had already applied to which is a good sign.”
"She was very supportive of the educational route that I chose even though it wasn't in media communications. It was in arts. She thinks that I have the skills that it takes to work well."

"It was encouraging because I've sort of been thinking, 'Oh, a degree, what's that? That's nothing.' And here's an example of someone who loves their job and can't go on."

"It makes it more appealing that actually both people said that they enjoyed what they were doing. If they had said that it was stressful and not very rewarding, then I would have put the brakes on. Maybe I would have ended up doing something else."

**Interviewee's Personality**

The interviewee is assessed as being open, friendly, outgoing, helpful, kind, likable, candid, or engaging.

**Examples**

"I think maybe I'll go and ask him again. He's a pretty friendly guy. He's helpful."

"I liked her personality. She is very outgoing and upbeat."
"He was very candid."

"She has lots of information and she's the kind of person who would share anything she's got."

"I would feel comfortable going to see him again. He's a likable guy. He's pretty casual."

**Interview Process**

Thoughts and feelings before, during, or after the interview.

Reflection on the process of the interview.

**Examples**

"She almost seemed to take over and was providing what she felt was most important for me to know rather than what I had come in there to ask. That's perhaps why the interview exceeded my expectations."

"I feel pretty confident about the whole thing which I think is good. I'm kind of shy to go and talk to people who I outrightly don't know. I just feel confident and for me that's important."

"This last interview was more helpful to me than anything."
"I guess I went from being a little apprehensive as to whether they would be responsive or not to a confidence in thinking that people love to talk about what they are doing."

**Assessing the 'Fit'**

Considering new information as compared to interviewer's own personality, preferences, interests, or values.

**Examples**

"I asked him if the principal was watching over him and he said, 'No, not at all.' I was surprised. I was glad. I feel uncomfortable being watched over."

"He said that most people have part-time jobs rather than full-time. I see myself doing that because I'm doing that already. Just talking to him about it made me feel better. I'm not the only one who's doing this crazy stuff, having several part-time jobs."

"She was saying that people in private practice see nine or ten people a day and that's just not something that I would want to do."
"I was always trying to fit myself in. All the time you are listening to what they are saying, to the information they are giving you, and how you fit into that- Could I do that? and What would I be like if I was doing that?"

"One thing that concerns me about being a lawyer is maintaining one's integrity and honesty and kindness. Whether one has to lose that, or whether one can maintain that. Those are important parts of my personality. It concerned me that I wouldn't be able to maintain them but she has managed to, and her values seem very similar to mine."

"Being in a contract position gives her a certain amount of flexibility and I like that. Working for a contract is a different kind of mind set, but that doesn't bother me."

**Providing Contacts or Post-interview Assistance**

Gaining additional contacts and offers of post-interview assistance.

**Examples**

"He told me, 'You can send your resume with a cover letter and I will send it out to all the ministries and we'll try to find you a job up here.' He's so willing to hand out my resume to all these people and he has no clue who I am."
"I felt good when she said, 'If you ever need to talk, just give me a call.' It's hard to find out this stuff when you don't know people. She left the door open for me so I felt good about that."

"He is making all these phone calls for me. It's really nice that someone's willing to go out of their way for me."

"She said that I could use her as a contact, as an 'in' to a potential job. She has worked there previously and she has acquaintances and friends there. She went so far as to get me the switchboard number."

"He gave me three other names of really inspirational teacher type people that I could talk to. He said that he knew a zillion others and that they would be happy to talk to me."
NEGATIVE CRITICAL INCIDENTS

TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th># of Critical Incidents</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Structure</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Destructive Factors</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered Questions or Discouraging Information</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: # of Critical Incidents describes the total number of incidents provided within the specified category.

Representation describes the percentage of participants who vocalized one or more critical incidents in the specified category.

**Negative Affect**

Including discomfort, anxiety, and worry before, during, or after the interview.
Examples

“If it’s someone I don’t know, I worry about what they are thinking. I don’t want to ask them questions that I probably should. I feel that I should know more, but I don’t.”

“She really divulged a lot of personal information so it was a little bit uncomfortable. She doesn’t even know me.”

“The second interview was kind of a question-answer, question-answer interview. It was kind of uncomfortable because I expected it to be more of a conversation. I wish it had been more of a conversation.”

“I was nervous.”

“I was hoping that I wouldn’t be wasting her time and that she wouldn’t be too busy for me even though we had already set up the interview. I thought, what if she’s a busy person that has a million things to do in a day and I just want to take up her time and talk.”

Interview Structure

Related to the interviewer’s sense of control during the interview. The interviewer experienced difficulty in gaining a balance between too
much control (i.e. asking too many questions) or a lack of control (i.e. rambling, losing focus).

**Examples**

“I stuck to the questions too much rather than just letting him talk.”

“I had felt I had lost control in the interview even though it was going very, very well. It wasn’t of my doing. Basically, I was on the receiving end. After sort of winding down I had a list of names and advice on different things that I had jotted down on my paper. I looked back at my questions and I thought, well, I’d better get some of the general information I came for. Then I asked sort of an awkward question that sort of seemed disjointed to the rest of the conversation. It seemed to fight the flow, it seemed that I was too obviously trying to interview now. I sort of felt that it was unnecessary. It was too sharp a contrast with the previous discussion. It almost seemed like I was taking a step back.”

“I found that in my first interview I had too many questions down on my paper. I was thinking in my head, okay, I’ve got to get all this information out of her.”

“Maybe it was too casual, sometimes you want to get more to the point.”
"It took so long, she spent so much time when I had asked her for only 15 minutes. There was nothing that I could really do about it because the last 15 or 20 minutes she really got into a story and it would have been inappropriate for me to have stopped it. The nitty gritty details of the sexual harassment case just weren't that relevant."

**Perceived Destructive Factors**

Factors that were perceived as negative influences on the process of the interview. These included a lack of preparation, time restraints, differences in interviewer's and interviewee's expectations, and the interviewee's personality.

**Examples**

"She was kind of nasty."

"I caught her a little off guard so I would have preferred making an appointment so she would know what to expect."

"I would have liked him to open up a bit more and tell me a few more stories of what it was like going through law school."
“I should have been more prepared when I was getting into something like this. If I had been ready to go when I got this infusion of inspiration, I could have followed through with it. I still intend to and I am moving slowly towards that but I feel as though my jets have cooled. I would have been much more prepared.”

“I think that he would have been quite happy to go on longer if he had not had another appointment.”

**Unanswered Questions or Discouraging Information**

Experiencing a desire for more detailed, specific information during or after the interview. Learning of discouraging information related to career goals.

**Examples**

“The ministry of education said, ‘Yes, we only have 450 school teachers but even if we roll over 10% that means only 45 jobs.’ They made it sound like it’s not really the greatest pursuit to be running and jumping into. That was a little bit depressing in a sense.”
"I was surprised that he said that one of his major sources of conflict was colleagues. I was really surprised about that. I wish I could have asked him more about it but I didn't really feel that I should."

"I think I would have liked to ask him even more specific questions like how he got his stuff into galleries and if he had any suggestions of who I could talk to."

"It was discouraging in many ways: in that I couldn't get into it and do it all the time, not that way anyways, and also because I'm surprised that there aren't more people doing more of this and also that there isn't more of it out there." (information on conducting seminars in schools)

"I was thinking about going into her office and talking to her again because I would like to know the detail of what she actually, physically does. How much time she spends on paper work, how much time she spends talking to people, and the level of each there is."
VALIDATION OF THE CATEGORIES

TABLE 3: RELIABILITY OF CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judges</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rater #1</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater #2</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Inter-rater reliability</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also contacted individually after the formation of categories. Nine of the ten students were contacted. One of the individuals could not be reached. Each participant was given a description of categories and informed of his or her participation in each one. They were asked to verify this representation in their own experience. All participants attested that the results provided an accurate representation.

SURVEY DATA

A survey was administered before the workshop and after all participants had conducted their informational interviews. Eight of the items were adapted from the Career Development Inventory to assess
participants' knowledge of his or her chosen occupation. Examples of these items include the abilities and education required, working conditions, job outlook and potential for advancement. A five point likert scale was provided with the following designations:

1. Hardly any knowledge.
2. A little knowledge.
3. An average amount of knowledge.
4. A good deal of knowledge.
5. A great deal of knowledge.

The mean total of all the items for the first and second administrations was 3.14 and 3.76 respectively.

The following six items in the survey were also adapted from the Career Development Inventory to assess whether or not the following individuals would be considered in assisting with career plans: friends, instructors, counsellors, educational advisors, people currently working in the occupation and family members. A four point likert scale was provided with the following designations:

1. Definitely not.
2. Probably not.
3. Probably.
4. Definitely.
The mean total of all the items for the first and second administrations was 3.20 and 3.47 respectively.

The remaining six items measured the participants' perception of control over career plans. A likert scale was utilized with the following designations: 1. False 2. Mostly false 3. Mostly true 4. True

Table 4 notes the specific items along with participation rate.
TABLE 4
PERCEPTION OF PERSONAL CONTROL IN CAREER GOALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>#1</th>
<th>#2</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel in control of my job search.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel confident about my skills in interviewing someone about their occupation.</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The kind of job that I get after graduation depends on me and my efforts.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>30%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The kind of job that I get after graduation depends on outside circumstances.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>30%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel optimistic about my future job prospects.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My education will be a great asset in my job prospects.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: #1 designates first administration. (mean for responses is provided)
#2 designates second administration. (mean for responses is provided)

Frequency notes percentage of participants who changed responses from first administration to second administration.

* notes some changes in opposite direction than expected.
Anecdotal Findings

The participants provided several unexpected benefits that they had derived from conducting informational interviews. One of the participants who had planned to pursue further study in electronic journalism learned that it was possible for him to bypass further education and enter directly into the field. He found this surprising and called it "an infusion of inspiration" but paradoxically he found it almost troublesome:

"I guess there's a part of me that's almost scared it could happen. What would I do? Then I've got this job and that changes my path. I'd rather wander along this safe path than take potentially exciting diversions (pause) which could be good for me but I don't know."

Another participant reflected on what the experience of the interviewee may have been:

"Perhaps I am even helping them (interviewee) in a way to because it gives them some realization. Later they might go home and think, 'Someone is interested in what I do. How do I feel about what I told them and how I reacted?' They might get something
positive from it to. I am sure they would go home and think about what they talked about."

During the post-workshop interview, one student stated that she suspected informational interviewing had been beneficial to another workshop participant by generalizing to enhanced skills for job interviewing, "For someone like him who was quite nervous, I think it was quite good and I think he'll do better the next time he walks into an interview." Job interviews were not discussed in the workshop. Oddly, when this individual was asked about his experience of informational interviewing he stated,

"I think that being interviewed myself in a job interview somewhere I would have more confidence just because I have been in that situation, and I've been on the other side. I think I would feel more comfortable being interviewed."

This theme of ‘confidence building’ was a factor reiterated by another participant:
"I feel pretty confident about the whole thing which I think is good. I'm kind of shy to go and talk to people who I don't outrightly know. I just feel confident and for me that's important."

Conducting interviews was perceived as enhancing a sense of agency:

"It was a real eye opener. I didn't know that people actually went out there for the purpose of getting information like that. I didn't know where people did get information. I assumed that they either knew somebody that did it, or you read a book about it, or you read some information on it. But then again I think it's so obvious. If you want to know something about the field you just ask somebody. It's a really good way of getting the information you need so I would do it again."

One student reflected on the process,

"It was really neat and I'm glad I did it. I'm glad you made us go out there and do it. After that one interview I almost started doing it just to people I knew and just started asking them questions that I"
had written down for that interview. I asked my friends and my mom's friends."

She obtained two formal informational interviews but also conducted approximately six informal interviews which are not included in this research.

**Participants' Advice**

Each of the participants was asked about advice that they would give to someone who is contemplating conducting informational interviews. Advice derived from participants' experience follows:

* It's a really useful tool so go into it with a positive attitude.
* Don't have too many questions and don't be too focused on getting through all the questions.
* Afterwards, write down all they said. It helps you to remember.
* I would tell them that this is really useful.
* Stick to the time period.
* Do what you say. Don't ask for a job. Do what you promised.
* Make the appointment ahead of time. Don't just hit somebody up at the last minute unless it's a really perfect situation. Don't expect someone to do it on the phone right then and there. That's as bad as a telemarketing call.
* Do a lot of it because it's really good practice. It is really good communication practice.

* Send thank you cards thanking the person for their time.

* Make sure that you have an idea of what they do in their job.

* Have specific things that you want to get through but don't have too many things. Just let them talk and don't be worried that they won't talk.

* Don't narrow the people that you are interviewing. For instance, I found out that what I thought initially about municipality work wasn't true or wasn't entirely true.

* You might think, "I don't want to interview anybody there because I don't want to do what they do." You might be surprised about what they do. Unless you talk to them, you don't really get a true picture of the job description. It can open up a lot of options for your future.

* In the second one, I didn't feel as nervous, because even if you have done one, you know what to expect and I think now it would be easier to do another one.

* Be confident.

* Take advantage of opportunities that come your way.

* Let the water roll off you a bit.

* Enjoy what you get out of it. Even if you get a nasty response that is information in itself.

* Remember that a lot of people do it. It's not just weird.
* People are willing to talk about their life experience. They like it.

* Think about some questions. Things that you really want to know and write them down.

* Keep in mind questions that you don't already know and get something new out of each interview.

* Ask open ended questions.

* Be focused.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

A total of 198 critical incidents were elicited including 145 positive critical incidents, or facilitating factors, and 53 negative critical incidents, or hindering factors. Twelve categories emerged from the incidents. These include eight categories of facilitating factors: 1. Information-interviewee's personal experience, 2. Information-occupation, 3. Information-providing options, 4. Encouragement and confirmation, 5. Interviewee's personality, 6. Interview process, 7. Assessing the 'fit', and 8. Providing contacts or post-interview assistance. There were four categories for the hindering factors and these include: 1. Negative affect, 2. Interview structure, 3. Perceived destructive factors, and 4. Unanswered questions or discouraging information.

Significance of the study

This research has provided a framework of the benefits of informational interviewing as well as some of the difficulties one might face in conducting informational interviews.

Bolles (1995) reiterates the importance of the category 'Information-Providing Options' through his statement, "Never put all your eggs in one
basket. The secret of surviving out there in the jungle is having alternatives." (p. 285)

60% of the participants were fortunate to be granted additional contacts or offers of post-interview assistance. Beatty (1994, p. 182) provides an explanation for this apparent altruism. "The chemistry and personal rapport developed between the networker and the networking contact during such meetings appears to create a stronger bond between the two and increased commitment, on the part of the contact, toward helping the networker."

Perhaps most important was the category of assessing the 'fit'. Bolles (1995) describes informational interviewing as, "trying on jobs to see if they will fit you" (p. 283). Bolles likens the experience to buying new clothes, "What you're looking for, of course, is a career that looks terrific in the window and on you." (p. 284) Richardson (1994) also emphasizes the significance of 'fit', "In one's work life, finding a fit is more important than merely landing a job, and the informal aspects of interpersonal relationships frequently decide whether there is a fit." (p. 4) The students' task of 'assessing the fit' requires the developmental changes of differentiation and integration as described by McWhirter (1991). 'Assessing the fit' is also beneficial in negotiating both Super's (1970) stage of 'exploration' as well as Erikson's (1963, 1968) stage of 'identity versus identity confusion'. Schein's (1992) description of the development of
career anchors requires a continual assessment of 'fit'. Considering King's (1994) colourful image of a kaleidoscope, the student is able to integrate new information gained with his or her own personal mosaic of preferences, values, interests, abilities, and aspirations.

Informational interviewing may be particularly beneficial to Bachelor of Arts students. These students enjoy the benefit of breadth at the expense of 'market ready' training. Therefore, it is essential for Bachelor of Arts students to take a pro-active stance in focusing career goals.

In a focus group study by Crozier & Grassick (1996) participants provided reasons for deriving value from their Bachelor of Arts degree,

Various transferable skills were highlighted, such as the ability to learn, organizational skills, analytical or critical thinking skills, problem solving, oral and written communication skills, research skills, interpersonal/ human relations skills, the ability to 'grasp the big picture', and the ability to integrate new information. Self-management skills were also mentioned, skills such as flexibility, self-discipline, objectivity and tolerance. (p. 24)

Figler (1988) expands on the value of a liberal arts education but he also cautions of the perils one may avoid. Among these are vague goals,
unrealistic expectations, and snobbery or ambivalence. Through the use of informational interviewing, career goals are clarified, idealistic expectations and realistic expectations can be reconciled, and perhaps one can avoid snobbery or ambivalence regarding suitable jobs by becoming familiar with what is feasible to expect of a first job after graduation.

Crozier & Grassick (1996) discuss B.A. students' increased motivation towards career planning as they approach graduation. Timing was confirmed to be an important factor by several workshop participants. For example, one of the participants stated, "I've been thinking a lot about who I know and who I can make connections with. This has been good timing for me because I am completing my degree and I've been thinking about career." Another student echoed, "It was helpful because basically it was the right timing."

Overall, participants found informational interviewing to be beneficial in terms of providing current, local labour market information. This resulted in either confirmation of career direction or provided greater uncertainty regarding current career goals. Both of these are instrumental in bridging the gap between a students' expectations of a particular occupation and the reality of that occupation.

A group workshop such as this is cost-effective. It is feasible for a higher education counselling centre to offer several workshops each year
to aid students in bridging the gap between expectations and reality. The individual interviews are included for the purpose of this research and would not be necessary in subsequent workshops.

The technique of informational interviewing could likely be utilized by all students in all higher education programs. Informational interviewing could also be used across many population groups including secondary school students, employed individuals desiring to make a career transition, income assistance recipients, and unemployed individuals. Others, such as senior citizens, may find informational interviewing helpful in obtaining information regarding meaningful volunteer opportunities.

**Implications for Counselling**

Redpath (1994, p. 106) cautions, "Unless students chose a professional degree such as Education or Engineering, the chances of making a match are not much better than 50% (at least in the first few years of graduation)." However, 79% of students felt that "having a degree is essential in getting a good job in today's world" and only 41% of students were interested in "learning purely for its own sake" (Gomme, Hall, & Murphy, 1993, p. 24).

If students want to increase their chances of gaining meaningful employment after graduation, it seems that they will need to take more
initiative. 80% of the workshop participants were in the age category of 'generation X'. There is some evidence that individuals who have been branded 'generation X' are taking a pro-active approach, "In reality, lots of Xers are finding ways to successfully break into the economy. Today's twentysomethings may turn out to be the most entrepreneurial generation yet." (Barlow, 1996, p. 70)

Counselors can assist in empowering those who feel ineffective and lacking in agency. McWhirter (1991, p. 222) highlights empowerment as one of the underlying goals in counseling. She states, "Clearly counsellors attempt to assist clients in making changes that will lead to greater life satisfaction and adjustment, and to establish an increased sense of control over their lives." Survey information noted in Table 4 showed a significant change in item #2 'I feel confident about my skills in interviewing someone about their occupation.' 70% of the workshop participants felt that their confidence had increased. All of the participants conducted informational interviews after practicing role-plays in workshop sessions. It is difficult to ascertain whether the increased confidence is due to participation in role-play, experience in conducting the interviews, or a combination of both. Although many of the students were apprehensive about contacting someone for an informational interview, they proceeded within their own level of comfort. Some participants chose a past instructor or acquaintance who was assessed
to be less threatening than approaching someone unknown. The students' sense of agency was enhanced as they succeeded in conquering the challenges.

Manuele-Adkins (1992, p. 319) emphasizes, "Essential to a process that integrates career and personal counselling is the ability to assess client's differing psychological needs and to understand how specific occupations and roles fulfill or frustrate various needs." Cochran (1991) highlights the individuals' quest for meaning and the counsellor's role of cultivating a sense of agency.

In a recent discussion on the internet, a request for information was posted by a Ph.D. candidate. It reads as follows:

I plan to graduate soon and just like everyone else I know I planned to send out blind resumes to every company I could find in my field. I know some friends who have already done this and after sending out 100 or more resumes, they were lucky to get one interview..... I recently was talking with a Ph.D. in my field (Biotech) who followed a similar path with little success. She suggested that I begin to develop a network of contacts. I've heard of this catchy phrase "Networking" before but I had no idea what it meant...Any suggestions on how to start networking? (personal communication, March 25, 1996, at http://www.careermag.com)
This is an individual who has spent numerous years in higher education and has apparently not received practical instruction on how to effectively pursue career opportunities. He is not alone but explains that everyone he knows is utilizing the same, ineffective job search method. If he had known to be conducting informational interviews for instance, he would likely feel a greater sense of control over career aspirations and over his personal future.

One of the participants, after conducting informational interviews, made the comment, "I've gained more confidence in myself to do this sort of thing." Another participant reflects,

"Looking back, I now know what to expect and how to do one. I think it helps you for your future. It had never really occurred to me. Looking back, I don't know why it never occurred to me to talk to people specifically, but I guess sometimes the obvious things are the hardest to see."

Some of the students commented regarding their enjoyment of participating in the workshop as part of a group. During the post-workshop interview, they were each asked about their perception of how informational interviewing affected others in the group. Participants displayed a strong recollection of individuals in the group and their
respective interviews. One student expressed her view of the group, "Well, I think that's really exciting. Just being in a group where others are doing this to and where they're in your same position where they are also searching for information on other things. That's exciting." Indeed, Zagora & Cramer (1994) found that being part of a group with vocational commonalities assisted individuals with career decisions. Another participant from the second group echoed a similar sentiment, "It was helpful for me to have the group because I thought, look at all the neat stuff they found out, even though a lot of it doesn't apply to me. I sort of felt like I had similar experiences. It was helpful to talk about all the different experiences you could have and it helps you to get prepared for any reaction you might have."

A third participant reiterated that she preferred to learn in a group rather than individually "because of all the ideas". These statements confirm Krumboltz & Nichols (1990) claim of the importance of the social learning aspect of career decision making.

**Limitations**

This study measures one segment of the student population and therefore, it is limited in terms of generalizability. The participants had a
high level of motivation due to the anticipation of graduating and having to make a career decision. Secondly, these participants also showed a high comfort level, an average of 7.1 on a scale of 1-10, in pursuing informational interviews. Thirdly, all of the participants had already gained some level of work experience.

It is expected that all three of these factors contributed to the successful outcome of informational interviews whether through willingness to take a risk, anticipation of imminent graduation and consequent transition, or moderate to high level of perceived competence. Luzzo (1995) confirms the benefit of self-efficacy and locus of control on career maturity. Many of the students appeared to reflect self-efficacy and internal locus of control as noted in the following statement, "I've always counted myself responsible for anything I do. Things don't just happen to you. You have to make things happen in life. I think that this sort of reinforced the fact that that is true."

In the case of individuals displaying low motivation, low comfort level, and no work experience, the concept of informational interviewing may appear intimidating and even paralyzing. Many of the participants of the study were apprehensive to contact individuals for informational interviews even though they perceived themselves as competent and capable. Counsellors can assist students in gaining confidence and enhancing agency through social modeling and role-plays. One of the
participants praised the group for strengthening her initiative, "Hearing that other people in our group called people up who they didn't know made me think that I could do it."

**Recommendations for further research**

Recommendations for further research include an evaluation study of an informational interviewing workshop, secondary school students' use of informational interviewing, longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of this technique, and the effect of informational interviewing on self-efficacy or locus of control. Further research may also include assessing the interviewee's experience of the interview. It may also be worthwhile to explore whether or not the skill of informational interviewing generalizes to greater competence in job interviews.
REFERENCES


(Eds.), Career Counseling: Contemporary Topics in Vocational Psychology (pp. 159-192). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.


Pre-Workshop Questions:

1. What are your career goals?
2. Why did you decide to obtain a degree in Arts at University College of the Fraser Valley?
3. What is your major/ minor?
4. Has your work experience up to this point related to your field of study?
5. What are you hoping to gain from this workshop?
6. How comfortable are you with the idea of approaching people to ask them about their job/ career? (on a scale of one to ten, one= very uncomfortable, ten= very comfortable)

Length of pre- workshop telephone interviews:
- 15 minutes
- 15 minutes
- 25 minutes
- 20 minutes
- 30 minutes
- 20 minutes
- 15 minutes
- 15 minutes
- 30 minutes
- 15 minutes

mean length of pre- workshop interviews: 20 minutes

answer to Question #6 (above):
- 5
- 5
- 7
- 8.5
- 9
- 9
- 7
- 3
- 10
- 7.5

mean comfort level: 7.1 on a scale of 1-10
1= very uncomfortable, 10= very comfortable
Demographics

date of birth (m/d/y):
12/01/72
05/18/71
07/25/71
02/12/71
08/08/70
07/27/72
11/06/70
06/21/44
10/20/61
10/17/71

major/minor/extended minor:

- fine arts- ceramics
- psychology major/ sociology minor
- psychology major
- history major
- extended minor- english/history
- geography major/ history minor
- extended minor- english/ psychology
- extended minor- psychology/ sociology
- extended minor- sociology/ psychology
- extended minor- english/ psychology

anticipated date of graduation:

- 1998- 1999
- April 1996
- December 1996
- June 1997 (reason- one year of co-op)
- April 1996
- April 1996
- April 1996
- December 1996
- December 1996
- May 1996

occupational goal(s):

- Fine Arts Instructor
- Seminar Presenter- working in school system
- Elementary School Teacher
- School Teacher
- Law
- Urban Planner
- Electronic Media
- Career Counsellor
- Counselling Psychology/ Law
- Undecided/ perhaps Teaching
Interview Questions:
Introduction: We will be placing your informational interviews "under a microscope". There are no right or wrong answers. We will focus on your experience of informational interviewing.

For each informational interview:
* Describe the interview.
  - How long was it?
  - How did you contact the interviewee?
* What were the high points of the interview? (positive critical incidents/facilitating factors/things that went well/ that you did well)
* What were the low points of the interview? (negative critical incidents/hindering factors/ things that you would do differently if you were to do it again)
* How has the experience of informational interviewing affected you?
  - Have there been changes in your career direction?
* Had you heard about informational interviewing before the workshop?
  - Have you used informational interviewing previous to the workshop?
* Do you see yourself using informational interviewing from this point on?
  - In what context?
* What is your perception of how the use of informational interviewing has affected others in the group?
* What advice do you have for those thinking about going out on an informational interview?
* Do you have anything else to add?
* Do you have any questions for me?