

IMPROVING THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CAREER PREPARATION  
PROGRAM THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

By

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## Abstract

The initial research question was formulated to address the problem of students not completing the Career Preparation Program (CPP). As a Career Preparation Program Facilitator, I wanted to determine what I could do to increase the number of students who complete the program. I chose action research to address the question because it is a tool to analyze and investigate the researcher's own practice.

Other research questions formulated include: Is the CPP worth having more students complete it?; Is it a failure if a student who begins the program does not complete it if she still gains some benefit?; Is the CPP the best Career Program for our students?; Does the stigma attached to vocational education affect the participation of students and others in the CPP? However, the most important question to me was: What constitutes a successful CPP experience for individual students?

Three research methods were used to achieve triangulation. Using questionnaires, I surveyed students in grades eleven and twelve about barriers to completion of the CPP. A student focus group and journals, as well as my own journal, were used to address both the initial research question and the subsequent research questions. The main barriers to completion of the program by students were: some did not qualify for the program; uncertainty about which career area to prepare for; some did not know what the CPP is; and some were unable to fit the courses required in their program into their timetables.

The findings from the research showed that the CPP is a worthwhile program that benefits most students to varying degrees. However, there is a need for a variety of Career Programs to meet the needs of students who may not qualify for the CPP, have different career exploration needs, or are too young to participate in it. Students in the CPP achieve varying degrees of personal success through the individual experiences

that they have in the program. The ongoing debate between a liberal arts or a vocational education impacts the CPP and may affect the attitudes of the people who are involved in the program.

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## Dedication

To my parents, who are the role models for my career path and my inspiration for pursuing higher education.

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Career Programs (CPs) are optional in the British Columbia (BC) school system. Students can choose to participate in the programs during their high school years. CPs have their roots in vocational education. However, CPs differ from vocational education because students can still take the courses needed to pursue an academic education that can lead, if chosen, to post-secondary education. Although vocational education in various formats has been a part of the Canadian school system for well over a century, it is still an area in education that fosters debate and controversy. As a facilitator of a CP called the Career Preparation Program (CPP), my research has prompted me to take a deeper look at CPs and the controversies and philosophies in education surrounding them.

In the introduction, I examine the broader issue of a liberal arts versus a vocational education in which my research question is situated. I explain my journey of formulating the initial research question and the subsequent questions that arose as I researched the initial question. I differentiate the Career Preparation Program from other CPs offered in the British Columbia high school system. Finally, I define the terms relevant to my research, and conclude with an overview of my thesis.

#### The Ongoing Debate: A Liberal Arts versus a Vocational Education

Historically, vocational education is shrouded in controversy. The controversy is the debate over the purpose and philosophy of education. Are we educating students for general knowledge (liberal arts), or are we educating students for specific skills and training (vocational education)? Currently, there is pressure from corporate interests for schools to produce students with technical skills for the “high performance” workplace. Increasingly controversial studies predict a shortage of

skilled workers and an increase in the level of skill required by workers for the “high tech” workplace. The need for human capital that is generated by these predictions has encouraged corporate leaders to take an active role in influencing school reform. The corporate goal is to create a school system that will provide a reliable supply of trainable workers with the required skills for the 21st century (Noble, 1994).

Several trends have occurred in the economy that are affecting the renewed push for CPs both in the United States (US) and Canada. One of these trends is the decline in global competitiveness. The decline can be traced to the education system failing to adequately prepare most students to enter the workplace, which increasingly demands adaptable and flexible workers with high levels of academic and technical skills (Brustein and Mahler, 1994, cited in Ryan and Imel, 1998). (Keep in mind that this is only one side of the argument; is the education system to blame, or are there other forces at work?) Another trend is that the economy of the 1950’s was more able to absorb dropouts and less skilled students into the manufacturing sector. These jobs are no longer as plentiful, and people are staying in the workforce longer. As well, more women are in the workforce. Many more students pursue post-secondary education, but the reality is that only about half of these students ever finish a baccalaureate program. Therefore, the educational system continues to turn out people with the type of general, non-technical skills that most employers have traditionally needed; however, these skills do not match what is needed in our new economy (Ryan and Imel, 1998).

There is a struggle that exists between the pressure imposed by forces outside of the education system to educate students for the workforce, versus the educational philosophy that students should receive a liberal arts education that provides them general knowledge and skills. One might argue that both types of education are

necessary for students in a democratic society. The argument is clearly defended in the following quote:

Vocationalism should mean education for work in its broadest and most humanistic sense. The distinction between vocational and liberal studies is based on dichotomies that are philosophically inadequate and socially pernicious. The attempt to divorce academic education from any practical concerns is just as destructive to academic education as the divorce of practical education from academic concerns has been. It separates knowledge from experience, theory from practice, and thought from action. But experience informs knowledge, theory informs practice, thought informs action and action informs thought. A curriculum that recognizes this and incorporates both intelligence and execution, mind and body, is what we want for all our young people...Challenging this division inscribed in knowledge offers the possibility of structurally interrupting the reproduction in the school of the class and gender distinctions that permeate the work-place. (Gaskell, 1992, p. 142)

Gaskell's quote strikes at one of the core problems associated with vocational education of the past. Students streamed into vocational education at school automatically were pre-destined to reproduce their social class and structure. Historically, members of the ruling class, who had the greatest influence over the educational system, were all too supportive of keeping the working class in their place in society.

The CPP, which was first piloted in BC high schools in the late 1970's, was initially piloted in the trades. The initial focus of the CPP in the trades area served to perpetuate the belief that any form of vocational education leads to a non-academic career. In the past decade, the CPP has been expanded to include an extensive choice of programs designed to fit the needs of students and the communities where they attend high school. Changes were made to allow districts the authorization to develop local CPPs (Ministry of Education, 1998). The ability for districts to authorize and develop their own programs led to an expansion in the types of CPPs available. As a result, programs exist in areas such as forestry, science, humanities, hospitality and tourism, and visual arts to name only a few. As shown by the variety of programs now

available, CPPs no longer have the vocational emphasis that they did when initially piloted in the late 1970's.

This change in emphasis from vocational to a broad range of programs, including a number of academic areas, is changing how students, parents, teachers, and the community view Career Programs. Vocational education, once the domain of students who were considered unable to pursue an academic route and possibly at risk to drop out of school, has expanded via the new Career Programs to include students with a variety of interests and abilities. Although the stigma still exists within the school system and society that links Career Programs to the traditional perception of vocational education, the perception is slowly changing. Society is beginning to recognize the benefits of having students engage in applied skills in conjunction with academic learning. The demands of our changing economy require that people have practical skills in addition to academic knowledge when they enter the workforce.

Joe Kincheloe (1995) has concerns that echo Gaskell's (1992) about the danger of social reproduction in school-to-work programs. He questions whether curricula should be tied to the economic needs of society. He explores what isn't being taught, such as wage disparities, work ethics, and gender biases. He also reminds us that most curricula in North America are taught from a middle-class white male perspective, and that we must be critical of how we represent our views to students. His concerns are an important reminder to career practitioners that we must be careful to recognize our own biases and beliefs when working with students in CPs. As career practitioners we must be careful not to blindly follow the influence of the corporate world. We should not churn out students trained to fit corporate needs without first looking at the needs, interests, and desires of individual students.

One way to ensure a critical look at our teaching practices is through action research. Kincheloe (1995) extols the value of critical action research as a tool for changing and improving our teaching practices. His endorsement of action research supports my decision to use action research as the tool to examine and improve my teaching practices as a Career Preparation Facilitator. Using action research, I formulated my initial research question and then re-formulated the question to include a number of questions as my research evolved and expanded.

#### Formulating the Initial Question

In September of 1996, I began a new chapter in my teaching career. In June of 1996, the Career Preparation Facilitator at Seaquam Secondary School in North Delta, BC retired. I became the new Career Preparation Facilitator along with my colleague and fellow business education teacher, Carla Rizzardo. Having worked closely with our predecessor on the Career Preparation Program for the previous ten years at the school while teaching business education courses, I was enthusiastic and eager to begin my new role as a facilitator.

As with any new program or course, the first year with the CPP was very busy and stressful. I like to add my personal signature to the work that I do and I set about creating all new handouts and forms for the students and employers. My goal was to make the paperwork that students and employers are required to do easy to follow, understand, and complete. I also made new contacts with the business community in order to increase the number of opportunities for student work placements. One of the aspects of my new position that I continue to enjoy is the ability to interact with students who I would not normally work with as a business education teacher. The majority of our students in the CPP are in science careers, an academic area. Normally,

as a teacher of business education, I would not have the opportunity to work with many of the academic students at our school.

We divided the 22 different programs that we offer in the CPP at our school so that I work with students in the career areas of: hospitality and tourism, law, modern languages, music, science, sports and recreation, theatre, visual arts. Carla works with students in the remaining program areas (See Table 1). In contrast to my previous experience as a classroom teacher, working as a CPP facilitator increased my contact not only with the students and teachers in my school, but also with other people in the community. I now have more contact, and work more closely, with parents, employers, and school district personnel. The expanded group of people that I now work with makes my job more challenging and stimulating. I not only require and receive support from these groups of people, but I also must rely on their support. Therefore, I must be accountable to these people and ensure that not only I, but also the students I work with, conduct ourselves in a professional and reliable manner.

As the 1996-1997 school year progressed, Carla and I identified a major problem with the program. Although we had made improvements to the program and were putting a lot of time and energy into working with students, not all of the students who qualified for the CPP were actually participating in it; even fewer were completing the program. Students in grades eleven and twelve are required to register for the CPP at Seaquam by the deadline of September 30. This allows us to send a list of the students who qualify for the program to the Delta School Board personnel who must also meet a deadline. The Delta School Board must submit a list of all of the students who qualify for the program in the district to the BC Ministry of Education (Ministry). This list is used by the Ministry to determine funding for the CPP in

Table 1. Career Preparation Programs Offered at Seaquam Secondary School

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Accounting	General Mechanics (Auto)
Business Management	Graphics
Computer Assisted Drafting	Hospitality/Tourism
Carpentry/Joinery	Humanities
Child Services	Law
Computer Science	Modern Languages
Culinary Arts	Music
Design and Communication	Science Careers
Desktop Publishing	Sports/Recreation
Fashion	Theatre
Film and Video	Visual Arts

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individual school districts for the following school year. Funding for Career Programs is separate from the regular funding that districts receive for education from the Ministry. Therefore, it is important that the registration of students is accurate and done within the given deadlines.

During the 1996-1997 school year, a large percentage of our grades eleven and twelve students registered for the CPP. However, the number of students who finally completed it was only about 27% of those who qualified in grade twelve. As well, students who qualified for the program did not always choose to actually start it. Of those students who started the program, many chose to drop the program as the school year progressed, citing different reasons for choosing not to finish the program. These reasons included pressures from increased school work or part-time jobs.



Although we identified the percentage of students who completed the program as a problem, the number of students who completed the program was not much different from previous years (See Table 2).

Table 2. CPP Registration and Completion at Seaquam Secondary School

1992-1999

Year	Grade 11 Registration (September 30th)	Grade 12 Registration (September 30th)	Completion (June 30th)
1992-1993	120	97	unavailable
1993-1994	88	61	unavailable
1994-1995	131	67	32
1995-1996	140	110	49
1996-1997	139	116	44
1997-1998	136	125	35
1998-1999	221	155	40

It should be noted here that a number of factors affect the results shown in Table 2. For example, the number of students who enroll in grades eleven and twelve varies each school year. Also, courses required for various CPPs may not be offered in a given school year. Thus, some students may not qualify for a program if the courses required are not available. As well, actively registering students who qualify for the program may raise the number of students, but only those students who are truly interested in doing the program will commit the time and effort to complete it.

The small percentage of students who actually completed the program puzzled us for many reasons. First, students seemed genuinely interested in doing the program.

Most began the program with a lot of enthusiasm and interest in their chosen career area. Second, the business community and parents were usually very supportive of the program. In fact, some employers actually contacted us to let us know that they were keen to provide work experience. Many employers stated that they had good experiences working with our students in the past and looked forward to working with our students again. Most of the parents who we spoke with throughout the school year were pleased that their son or daughter was getting the opportunity to do work experience with a local employer. Third, we invested a lot of time and energy working with students and communicating the program to them. We were careful to follow through and check on students as they progressed through the program. Given all of the factors that were working in favour of the program, why was such a low percentage of students actually finishing it?

As we began the 1997-1998 school year, Carla and I were determined to try to increase the number of students who participated in the program and completed it. As we visited classes in September of 1997 to register students for the program, we encouraged students to start the program right away in order to give them more time to complete it. We made sure that we communicated the benefits of the program to students which include: an extra course credit upon completion; work experience in an area of career interest; a certificate of completion that they could include in their resumes. We were also more rigorous about communicating and connecting with students. This allowed us to periodically check on their progress in the program and ensure they were following through with their work experience.

In January of 1998, both Carla and I began working towards our masters degrees. Carla enrolled at City University, and I enrolled at the University of British Columbia (UBC). During the same month of January, I received a notice in my school

mailbox regarding the Teacher Research Inquiry Project (TRIP) that would be taking place at the Delta School District Resource Centre. The project was for high school teachers who had an interest in exploring best practices for meeting the needs of students in a collaborative environment. The best practices would be accomplished through action research. The first meeting was held on February 25, 1998, with subsequent monthly meetings for the remainder of the school year and throughout the 1998-1999 school year.

While attending the first meeting, it became apparent to me that I should ask Carla to join the group. Carla and I were both frustrated with the number of students who qualified for but did not complete the CPP. Participation in the TRIP group would enable us to discuss and receive objective feedback about our problem. Carla joined the group at the next monthly meeting. At this second meeting we formulated the initial question for our research. Our initial question was: How can we increase the number of students who complete the CPP at Seaquam Secondary School?

The question put the onus on us to investigate our practice as CPP Facilitators. This is important to note because action research is meant to investigate and change the researcher's own practice. I have more control over my own practice than I do over other people and what they choose to do. Therefore, investigating what I can do to increase the number of students who complete the program is a logical question. I can make changes to my own practice based on the research findings. After formulating the initial question, my research and continued work with high school students in the CPP, and as a graduate student at UBC, has led me to re-formulate the initial question to include more questions about my practice in this program.

### Re-Formulating the Initial Question

Before beginning the master's program and TRIP, I was not familiar with action research. However, it soon became evident to me that I have actually been doing something similar to action research throughout my teaching career. I have always been critical of my work and encouraged student and colleague feedback when I wanted to improve my practice. Action research is a method for practitioners to identify a problem that they then investigate with the purpose of eventually improving their own practice. My introduction to action research has given me a tool and a name for what I have done informally in the past in my teaching practice.

The introspective approach of action research has helped me to take a deeper look into my own motivation for doing the CPP and what my personal biases and agenda are. Also, by reading and critiquing the literature on CPs, I have become familiar with the issues and different philosophies surrounding these programs. The work that I have done from January 1998 to June 1999, both at work and at university, has helped to broaden my knowledge base and expand my consciousness about Career Programs. The evolution that has taken place within my self has developed a stronger commitment to Career Programs and a new way of executing my teaching practice.

The initial research question was to determine what I could do within my own teaching practice to increase the number of students who complete the CPP. The initial question was re-formulated as I realized that there are more important issues than students simply completing the program. For example, is the CPP worth having more students complete it? Perhaps there are some very good reasons why a number of students choose not to complete the CPP. One reason is the structure and demands of the program may not be suitable for all students. Another is some of the students who

choose not to complete the program may already have a clear career goal and may already be working in an area of career interest. Also, is it a failure if a student who begins the program does not complete it if she still gains some benefits from participating in the program? These benefits could include clarifying her career goals or getting some hands on work experience that she can quote in a resume. Perhaps the problem with students completing the program stems from the program being too structured and restrictive. The CPP requires students to complete six required courses as well as the additional courses and credits needed for high school graduation. Five of the six required courses are in a specific career and the sixth course consists of 100 hours of volunteer work experience. Often and for a variety of reasons, it is difficult for students to take the five courses in a specific career area and to fit 100 hours of volunteer work experience into their already demanding schedules. In which case, another research question is whether or not the CPP is the best program for our students, and whether or not there should be a number of different Career Programs available to students at Seaquam Secondary to fit their needs and interests.

Another question that warrants research is whether or not the stigma attached to vocational education affects the participation of students, as well as others, in the program. I find that I take for granted that I am working in a program that must occasionally be explained and justified to students, school staff, parents, employers, and the school district. Changes in the program to include academic areas and the corporate push to educate students to have skills for the workplace have helped to change peoples' attitudes towards Career Programs. Also, post-secondary institutions offering CPs such as Co-operative Programs (where students do work experience in conjunction with academic course work) have helped to give CPs credibility as

academically viable programs. However, there is still a stigma attached to any program that appears to be vocational in nature.

I believe that part of the reason I take the defense of the program for granted is that I teach in an elective area, business education. I also was educated with a Bachelor of Education with concentrations in home economics and physical education. There is always an ongoing feud between teachers in academic areas and those in elective areas. Funding is often an issue. Another issue is which area has priority when school issues emerge such as timetabling and student recognition. Therefore, having to defend what I do in the CPP is second nature to me. I think that this issue is at the core of the debate between vocational and academic education. Which one is more important? What should we be preparing students for? Who has the power to control the program? (e.g., who controls the funding?)

Finally, I believe the most important question for students is: what constitutes a successful experience for individual students who participate in the CPP? In other words, when a student participates in the CPP, whether she completes the program or not, what does an individual student need to experience in the program to make the program a success for that particular student?

As a result, I am interested not only in ensuring that more students are able to complete the CPP, but also in what successful participation in the program means for individual students. I hope that this change in focus will lead to a more enriching and fulfilling experience for both myself and the students that I work with in the program.

#### Differentiating The Career Preparation Program From Other Career Programs

It is important to differentiate the Career Preparation Program from other Career Programs offered in BC high schools. The criteria for completing each program and the purpose behind each program creates a different experience for students who

participate in them. An understanding of how the CPP differs from the other CPs offered to BC high school students will enable the reader to understand the nature of the CPP and the research that I have done.

Career Programs in the BC school system "...are educational programs that combine related subjects with a work experience component." (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1995b) The Career Preparation Program is one of three CPs that falls under the umbrella of Career Programs. The two other CPs are the Co-operative Education Program (Co-op), and Secondary School Apprenticeship (SSA). Students participate in CPs in grades eleven and twelve. Schools may offer all three CPs depending on the needs of the students and the community. Also, schools must have staff that are qualified for particular programs, most notably for apprenticeship programs which require highly specialized training and skills. In order for students to get credit for any of the Career Programs, they must graduate from grade twelve. This is an important feature of Career Programs because historically, vocational programs were introduced as a means to encourage students to graduate from school.

Secondary School Apprenticeship was first introduced to BC high schools in 1994. Prior to 1994, apprenticeship existed in a different form. SSA requires students to complete 480 hours of paid workplace training. Students must work with approved employers or a joint board who is qualified to indenture them. The 480 hours of work experience provides students with 16 credits towards high school graduation and towards credit in the apprenticeship system. SSA provides opportunities for students to earn dual credit for workplace based training when they are registered as an apprentice. Students are also eligible for a \$1,000 scholarship intended to encourage SSA students to complete high school and consider employment in the trades. This Career Program is very specific to the trades area and requires qualified instructors

and intensive training. Therefore, there is only a small number of students who enroll in SSA; only 397 students were registered in the program in BC in 1997-1998 (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Co-operative Education Programs originally began as federal initiatives to allow students to explore one or more careers. In 1995-1996, Co-op was integrated into the provincial CPs structure (Ministry of Education, 1998). Since Co-op began as a federally funded program, only those schools in BC who initially took advantage of the funding opportunity are currently offering Co-op to their students. Therefore, Co-op is only offered in some high schools and districts. Co-op includes two work experience courses, experiential learning, and opportunities to explore potential career paths. Usually students attend classes for a certain time period and then go to a work site where they get volunteer work experience for a pre-determined time period.

The purpose of the Career Preparation Program is to prepare students for entry into work, continued studies, or post-secondary education in a specific career sector. It consists of 24 credits of study in grades eleven and twelve, with six of the courses related to a specific career sector. One of the six courses is a four-credit work experience course. Students must complete 100 hours of volunteer work experience at a work-site(s) related to the specific career sector that they have chosen by the time they complete grade twelve (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1996). The CPP is the most popular of the CPs, enrolling 45,159 students in BC in 1997-1998. The reason for its popularity is that it is provincially funded, and schools and districts can offer a wide range of programs in a variety of career sectors.

Another program that warrants mentioning is Career and Personal Planning (CAPP). Although CAPP is not considered a Career Program, it is a program that provides course work about career topics, and it also requires a thirty hour work



experience component. CAPP is a requirement in the curriculum from grades kindergarten to twelve. Students must complete the thirty hours of work experience in order to graduate from high school. CAPP is a graduation requirement that involves student planning, personal development, and career development. Although there are provincially prescribed learning outcomes for CAPP, how CAPP is delivered in individual schools varies considerably throughout BC. CAPP was first implemented into the BC high school curriculum in September of 1995 (Ministry of Education, 1995a).

CAPP impacts the CPP in various ways. First, due to the similarities in the name and abbreviation of the CPP, it is often confused with CAPP. However, one distinct difference between CAPP and the CPP is that the CPP is an optional program, whereas CAPP is required for graduation. Second, now that all students are required to complete thirty hours of volunteer work experience, there is a larger demand on employers. This demand creates problems for finding work placements for students in any of the CPs, especially in rural communities who do not have the resources to offer such a large number of job opportunities. One of the early problems that I experienced in facilitating the CPP was that students often mistook the CPP for CAPP.

As indicated above, there are a number of optional Career Programs that students can choose to do during their high school years. However, students are required to complete the CAPP course and thirty hour work experience for graduation. Understanding the choices and requirements of Career Programs for high school students in BC should help to give a clearer picture of the environment in which the CPP is offered to students at Seaquam Secondary School.

## Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms that may require clarification while reading this thesis.

### Action Research

A standard definition of action research is "...a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out ... The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988a, cited in Webb, 1996, p. 146).

### Career Awareness

Career awareness can be defined as a way "to develop students' understanding and appreciation of personal characteristics and how these relate to potential careers" (Ministry of Education, 1995a, p.7).

### Career Exploration

Career exploration differs from career awareness because it involves work experience. It is defined as a way "to help students take advantage of community resources in order to relate their learning and skills to education, career, and personal roles in a changing world" (Ministry of Education, 1995a, p. 7).

### Career Programs (CPs)

Career Programs in BC schools are defined as "... educational programs which combine related subjects with a work experience component within a particular career sector. They are designed to address the goal of 'seamless transition' and to further

challenge traditional education structures to respond to changing economic needs” (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 1).

### School-to-Work

School-to-work is a term that became part of the US national vocabulary when President Clinton signed the School To Work Opportunities Act in 1995 (Steinberg, 1998). School-to-work programs in the US are the counterpart of Career Programs in British Columbia. The programs are designed to ease the transition for students from high school to the workforce.

### Vocational Education

Vocational education encompasses programs that are designed to prepare students for direct entry into the trades or the workforce. Vocational education has taken many different forms in the history of the Canadian education system. However, the common goals of any type of vocational education is to encourage students to stay in school and to give them the skills to enter into an occupation upon graduation. Vocational education has traditionally been in the trades area.

### Overview of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, the literature review begins with a discussion of the importance of humanitarian issues in Career Programs. The discussion is followed by a historical look at the issue of vocational education in Canada. The century old debate of vocational versus academic education in the Canadian school system is examined. The next section chronicles the historic influences on the Career Preparation Program in British Columbia. The chronology gives an overview of how the program began and investigates recent developments that may change how the program is delivered in BC schools. A fourth section on school and community relations explores the stakeholders of Career Programs and how they influence and benefit from these programs. An

examination of how vocational maturity affects students in Career Programs ends the chapter.

In Chapter Three, the methodology of the research is explained beginning with a revisitation of the research question, followed by an explanation of the action research done. Action research is explained in detail and the methods of collecting data are outlined. Ethical considerations and a timeline are also included. A number of limitations of the research are suggested.

Chapter Four is a presentation of the data. The results of the data collection are given for the student questionnaires, student focus group, and my journal. Chapter Five completes the thesis, with conclusions and recommendations formulated by the research.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The literature review begins with a look at the humanitarian issues of Career Programs. Often students are more affected by how they feel about work than the actual work itself. Also, students who are not motivated in a regular high school classroom may find a renewed sense of purpose through work experience. Work experience enables students to see the connection between what they are learning in school and what is actually done in the real world. The next section of the literature review follows the history of vocational education in Canada from its beginnings in the 1800's to how it has evolved throughout the 20th century. The issues and debate between a liberal arts and a vocational education are also discussed.

The third section of the literature review chronicles the history of the Career Preparation Program in British Columbia. The rapid growth of the program in the last decade is explained. Recent developments in Career Programs at the Ministry level are analyzed, and the probability of changes to the CPP in the future is discussed. The fourth section of the literature review looks at Career Programs as a school and community issue. Various stakeholders are identified. The stakeholders' interest in CPs and the benefits each may receive from the program are outlined. Finally, the vocational maturity of students to participate in Career Programs is examined and the suggestion is made for beginning career awareness at kindergarten through grade twelve.

#### The Humanitarian Issues of Career Programs

Rob Riordon (1998) addresses the humanitarian issues of school-to-work experience. His case study of Hector, a high school student intern in a hospital, shows an area of work experience that career practitioners often overlook. In this case

example, Hector is questioned by a group of educators and business leaders visiting the large urban medical centre in the US where he interns. The visitors are there to view a high school health work experience program first hand. Hector answers their questions about academics such as math, science, and business. However, Hector has more important questions that it does not even occur to the visitors to ask. The questions that are important to Hector are: "How do individuals face death? How do families, hospital personnel, and the institution deal with the impending loss of loved ones, patients, clients?" (Riordan, 1998, p. 129-130).

Hector's questions raise the point that there are emotional and social ramifications in the careers that people choose. It is important that career practitioners address the emotional and social impact of careers while working with students in Career Programs. Riordan (1998) suggests the need for students to articulate their self, acknowledge differences in others, and find common ground. He provides guidelines for supporting writing and reflection through journals, biographies of co-workers, and autobiographies. Most Career Programs in BC involve journal writing by students. However, as Steinberg (1998) cautions, career educators need to be careful not to turn work experience into a worksheet, school type experience, thus turning off students who participate in Career Programs. If used properly, journals are an important tool for students to explore their feelings and perceptions during their work experience.

Riordan found that as students progressed in their journal writing, they were addressing more complex issues. "What is quality work? What am I learning? What is the connection between this work and my life? What is real? Where am I going?" (Riordan, 1998, p. 132). These questions are echoed by Kincheloe (1995), a postmodern writer who questions what constitutes good work and smart workers.

According to Kincheloe, when an individual's purposes and meaning are engaged in the work place, it constitutes good work. When workers are empowered, they are smart workers. Kincheloe envisions a time when all workers, regardless of the type of employment, are considered professional and capable of working in a democratic workplace.

Kincheloe (1995) addresses many issues. He is critical of the media and corporations who blame schools for turning out incompetent workers. He feels that it is society who has failed and that students and workers are not engaged. This failure of motivation is a common theme throughout vocational literature. The lack of motivation is echoed by Steinberg who gives the example of a student she observed during a lesson in school biology who turned to her and stated "As if I care..." (Steinberg, 1998, p. xii). It is not unusual for students to question their teachers about the practicality of what they are learning. Olson (1997) agrees that many students do not see the connections between what they learn in school and how it applies to the work place.

Another humanitarian issue of Career Programs is that of gender inequality. Various researchers of gender issues in education have found that at the end of the high school years, many classrooms are no longer coeducational. The segregation becomes even more distinctive at the level of post-secondary education and job training. Young men and women choose occupational paths that put them in programs with same sex participants. The word choose is used lightly, since there are a number of forces that must be influencing the choices that the young men and women make. As a result of the choices made, young men and women perpetuate sex stereotyped occupations when they enter the labour force. The choice of sex stereotyped occupations, in turn, affects the way that young men and women are

treated in the workforce (Gaskell, 1992). This is an important issue, and one that is often taken for granted because of the sexual stereotypes of the people who are already working in these occupations. Therefore, it is important that people who work with students in high school are cognizant of their own stereotypes and try not to perpetuate them in their practice.

Finally, the humanitarian issue of social reproduction through vocational education needs to be addressed. Gaskell (1992) cites a number of researchers who have found that vocational education reproduces the social and skill attributes of the workplace. She concurs with the researchers and states:

Vocational classrooms reproduce the class and sex segregation of the work-place, separating the males from the females and the more privileged students from the less privileged as they prepare for different kinds of jobs in different sectors of the labour market (Gaskell, 1992, p. 91).

Gaskell suggests a common core curriculum that would lead to common requirements for high school graduation. Reducing the variety of choices could prevent students from choosing pathways that lead to a reproduction of sex and class segregation. If students had similar educational experiences, perhaps they would make less segregating choices in occupations, future training, and post-secondary education. This argument is a good introduction to the core criticisms of vocational education throughout its history in Canada.

#### A Historical Look at the Issue of Vocational Education

Before chronicling the history of vocational education in Canada, it is important to explain the environment in which vocational education has been debated. Historically, the influence of American educational reform has and continues to affect the Canadian education system. Vocational education is no exception to American influence. Probably the most quoted American educational philosopher in vocational



literature is John Dewey. Amongst many other observations he made about vocational education, Dewey points out "...that the distinction between academic and vocational education had its root in social inequality" (Dewey, 1966, cited in Gaskell, 1992, p. 143). As far back as 1897, Dewey advocated the need to incorporate practical experiences in education as a means to replicate the social community in which a child lives. He believed that children should be made conscious of their social heritage by engaging in the types of activity that constitute civilization. Therefore, activities such as sewing, cooking, and manual training should be a part of the school curriculum (Dewey, 1897, cited in Miller and Seller, 1990, p. 72).

Perhaps the most important observation made by Dewey is what could happen if vocational education is applied in a way that segregates people by class. The result of the segregation could enable vocational education to be an efficient tool for the reproduction of an undemocratic society. Dewey stresses the importance of vocational education as a force for creating and maintaining a democratic society if done properly. His belief is expressed in the following quote:

Its [vocational education's] right development will do more to make public education truly democratic than any other agency now under consideration. Its wrong treatment will as surely accentuate all undemocratic tendencies in our present situation, by fostering and strengthening class divisions in school and out...Those who believe in the continued existence of what they are pleased to call the "lower classes" or the "laboring classes" would naturally rejoice to have schools in which these "classes" would be segregated. And some employers of labor would doubtless rejoice to have schools, supported by public taxation, supply them with additional food for their mills...[Everyone else] should be united against every proposition, in whatever form advanced, to separate training of employees from training for citizenship, training of intelligence and character from training for narrow, industrial efficiency. (Dewey, cited in Rosenstock and Steinberg, 1995, p. 42)

As an advocate for vocational education, Dewey expresses the dangers that could arise if vocational education is used to segregate society by class. In fact, throughout its history in Canada, vocational education often did just that.

In 1859, the English social philosopher Herbert Spencer posed the question: "What knowledge is of the most worth?" (Spencer, cited in Tomkins, 1986, p. 37). His question has plagued curriculum policy-makers for decades. In fact, the question is central to most decisions that are made regarding curriculum choices. Spencer argued that the liberal arts curriculum made up of classical learning consisted of knowledge that almost entirely left out anything that had to do with the business of life. Matthew Arnold, a famous poet and elementary school inspector, argued against Spencer and believed that the curriculum should include the classics. By the early 1900's, the writings of these two men eventually found its way into normal school reading lists (Tomkins, 1986). Thus, the vocational versus a liberal arts education debate became a part of mainstream Canadian teacher education.

Between 1867 and 1892, the jump in the Gross National Product at a rate of 60 percent echoed the growing modernization in technology in Canada. A lot of the growth can be attributed to the coming of the railroad. Public expenditure on education increased and there was pressure for a more practical curriculum to meet the needs of an increasingly more skilled labour force. In the late 1800's, following American examples, the argument for practical education was being seriously considered in Canada. By 1890, manual training as a term gradually began replacing industrial or practical education. Manual training as a part of Canadian curriculum was widely debated. Various provinces offered different curriculum for manual training. The issue continued: should the goals of education be cultural or vocational? (Tomkins, 1986).

Manual training grew modestly until the 1930's. Domestic science and commercial education were offered alongside manual training. By the 1930's, manual training was replaced by two distinct subjects: industrial arts and household science (later known as home economics). During the 1930's, changes to the curriculum throughout Canada brought on a renewed interest in industrial arts and home economics (Tomkins, 1986). It is interesting to note the segregation of the two curricular areas. Home economics was, and unfortunately still is to a large extent, the domain of female students. The decades old distinction between the two curricula encourages the perpetuation of sex stereotyping in the workplace. Although educators are more cognizant of stereotyping and many educators try innovative ways to encourage all sexes into their programs, the distinction still remains, to some extent, intact.

During the Depression, as funding for education dwindled, vocational education was seen as expendable. Therefore, some schools, especially those in rural areas, chose not to offer vocational education (Tomkins, 1986). This pattern still exists in vocational education and Career Programs today. When budgets are tight, these areas are often considered superfluous and are one of the first to be cutback.

In 1940, L. C. Marsh conducted a study entitled "Canadians In and Out of Work". He concluded that there were deficiencies in vocational planning and that vocational education should play a major role in a more diversified curriculum. He also advocated vocational education as a means for creating a more democratic society. He saw a need for post-secondary education other than university for those students who wanted to go on to higher education.

This need was the realization for community colleges which would not appear until a generation later (Tomkins, 1986). The need for a variety of educational

alternatives for students remains important today. Students do have a choice of a number of different post-secondary and training institutions. However, many students still enter high school expecting to go on to university. The fact is only a small percentage of students actually attend university. This is an issue that needs to be addressed in the education system. Often, it is the attitudes of not only the students, but also teachers, parents, counsellors, and the community, that prevent students from having realistic expectations about post-secondary education.

In 1943, the Canadian National Education Association (CNEA) conducted a survey that encouraged initiatives in a number of curricular areas including vocational education. Between 1945 and 1957, federal agreements with the provinces such as the Vocational Schools Assistance Agreement supported vocational training through funding. An investigation launched by the CNEA in 1948, looked at the transition from school-to-work. They investigated approximately 26,000 school leavers, whether they had graduated from high school or chose to drop out. The CNEA enlisted a number of partners including provincial departments of business and industry (Tomkins, 1986).

The CNEA committee produced four reports between 1949 and 1951. One of the main areas of questioning was the effectiveness of training in basic skills as preparation for the workforce. The study found three distinct types of streams: the academic; the academic with practical electives (e.g. home economics); and non-college preparatory vocational. The conclusion was that students chose a stream according to their socio-economic backgrounds. This study confirmed the need for economic goals in the curriculum. Students were replicating their socio-economic class by the type of courses and programs that they took in school (Tomkins, 1986).

The reproduction of socio-economic class in education warrants continued research even today. Why are students choosing to replicate their socio-economic class? Are students making the choice on their own or is someone else making the choice for them? Who or what is influencing them? Do today's students have a greater opportunity not to replicate their socio-economic class through the choices they make in school? How can educators help to ensure students make better economic choices?

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's, Talcott Parsons was an influential sociologist in academic literature. Through his work in functional theory, Parsons drew a link between the organization of schools and the organization of society. According to Parsons, a main function of school was to allocate students into occupational roles based on their abilities and skills. Therefore, as the economy became more complex and skills more technical, society required more highly educated workers (Gaskell, 1992).

In the 1960's and 1970's, John Porter used Parsons' framework in Canada to provide an influential analysis of Canadian education. He advocated the role that education played in preparing students for work. This functional framework was used by empirical researchers to show how education affects the transition from school to work. "Status attainment research" grew out of functional theory. Status attainment research linked factors that affect achievement in school and in the workforce. From status attainment research grew "human capital theory". Human capital theory was based on the belief that if one person can achieve high economic status through education, then an entire economy can as well. This theory had a major impact on economic policy in Canada in the 1960's and 1970's. As a result, funding for

education was increased dramatically in hopes of creating a more prosperous economy (Gaskell, 1992).

By the late 1970's, inflation, unemployment, and an economic recession spurred more criticism of vocational education. Canada appeared to be lagging behind other industrialized countries. Canadian educators were not educating highly skilled workers for a workforce that was requiring ever more proficient workers. Researchers such as Hall and Carlton, found that school was not preparing students for the real world. At this time the term Career Education replaced vocational education as a cosmetic solution to the negative connotations that vocational education induced. School was seen as a panacea to solve economic woes (Tomkins, 1986). Unfortunately, the issue was much more complex. Changing the name of the program and expecting schools to solve society's ills was not a solution to the problem. However, this example illustrates the pressure that is historically placed on the education system during times of economic crisis.

The 1980's and 1990's saw the growth of Career Programs in the BC school system. I will end the history of vocational education in Canada here to concentrate on these programs, and more specifically, the Career Preparation Program. The history that I have given on vocational education is by no means complete. However, it does give a sense of the debate and controversy that has plagued vocational education in Canada throughout the years.

Before beginning the section on the CFP, it is important to reflect on the influence of vocational education on Career Programs. The research and debate over vocational education versus a liberal arts curriculum still continues. Pratt, who focused on the needs that were being neglected in the Canadian curriculum, researched the needs that should be developed by children through education. He

stressed the need for intrinsic motivation which can be achieved through the mastery of skills. He stated that a person's occupation is one of the main means of achieving our social needs. Therefore, he concluded that an occupational focus should be a part of the school curriculum (Tomkins, 1986).

Finally, reflecting back on Dewey's concerns from a century ago shows that the issues of vocational education still remain with us today. Dewey's beliefs in the context of the debate between vocational and a liberal arts education are echoed in the following quote:

... the fundamental conundrum of vocational education remains insufficiently resolved: many still want from vocational education the "no-frills" schooling that they view as suitable for lower income students, while others of us agree with Dewey that it is a vehicle for transforming secondary education and creating schools where all students can be "smart". (Rosenstock and Steinberg, 1995, p.56)

There will always be differing views on the function of vocational education in the school system. However, various research has shown that students who do not receive any form of practical education are not sufficiently prepared to enter the workforce. So the debate continues: what are we preparing students for in school?

#### Historical Influences on the Career Preparation Program

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, the CPP was first piloted in 1979 in the trades (Ministry of Education, 1998). In September of 1980, the CPP was officially established in participating BC high schools. The purpose of the program was to provide students with core skills related to a specific career sector through a block of six closely related courses. In a Ministry Policy Circular for April, 1988, the Ministry states the objective of the CPP was to provide "...increased awareness of career and employment needs without sacrificing the general education function of the schools" (Ministry of Education, 1988, p. 1). This is important to note, because unlike

vocational education of the past, the intention of the CPP was to ensure that students who participated in the program still had the ability to graduate and go on to post-secondary studies. The same Ministry Circular states that "the goals of the CPP are to: 1. foster career development in concert with the goals and attributes of the education system; 2. articulate the programs between secondary schools and post secondary institutions; 3. ensure the continued status, quality and credibility of the program; 4. provide marketable skills and thereby increase the employment possibilities of the student" (p. 1). It is clear from these goals that the CPP was intended to ease the transition of students from school to work.

Not much is documented about the CPP during the 1980's. Districts were restricted by the criteria set out by the Ministry for the types of CPPs that could be offered. As mentioned previously in the Chapter I, the Ministry eventually made changes to allow districts to authorize and develop local CPPs according to community economic and educational interests (Ministry of Education, 1998). The flexibility given to districts to develop their own CPPs, along with political interests in Career Programs, helped to facilitate growth in the CPP in the 1990's.

In 1992, a Premier's Summit on Trade and Economic Opportunity revealed a discrepancy between the supply and demand of labour. The Summit associated the slow economic development in the province with a lack of skills and training. The government turned to a restructuring of the post-secondary system as a means to solve the problem. Skills Now! was the name given to a range of programs developed to address the solution to the problem of slow economic growth (Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, 1994-1995, p. 1). In May of the same year, the Conference Board of Canada released its Employability Skills Profile (Simard, 1996). This profile,



is often quoted by business and educational interests, who support the role of the education system to prepare students for the labour market.

The Employability Skills Profile includes three main skill areas that Canadian employers look for in new recruits. These three skill areas include: academic skills; personal management skills; and teamwork skills. The skills listed under each of the three areas are generic. Examples of some of the personal management skills are self-esteem and confidence, as well as, honesty, integrity and personal ethics (British Columbia Chamber of Commerce, 1995). As shown in these examples, the skills are not specific, but rather are generalizable to most workplace situations. Many of the skills listed in the profile could be learned through the regular school curriculum and would not necessarily require a specialized Career Programs curriculum.

In 1995, the Employability Skills Profile was published in the Classroom to Career Work Experience Program Guide for Employers. The guide was a joint project between the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce and the Ministry. The purpose of the guide was to “foster successful partnerships between businesses and schools” (Education Minister Art Charbonneau, cited in Ministry of Education, 1995b). The impetus for the guide was the new Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) curriculum which required all students to do thirty hours of work experience as a requirement for high school graduation. In order to accommodate student demand for employment experience, the cooperation of the business community with the education system was essential. The Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey in 1994 that found “...fifty-one percent of business representatives did not feel they had good interactive relationships with the education system. Eighty-one percent expressed a willingness to participate in career programs with schools” (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1994-1995, p. 25). The requirement of the CAPP program for graduation

influenced Career Programs by forcing the Ministry to secure partnerships with the business community in order to accommodate the work experience component. This was a double edged sword for the CPP. On one hand, the business community was more aware of work experience and the need to support students. On the other hand, the increased demand for work experience placements for CAPP was in direct competition for placements for the CPP.

Other business partnerships initiatives with the Ministry were formed during the 1994-1995 school year. These partnerships included the Business Council of British Columbia and the British Columbia Federation of Labour. Activities of these partnerships included the development of the *Making Work Experience Work* handbook, science fairs, scholarship grants and the Computers for Schools Program (Ministry of Education, 1994-1995). It is evident by the number of partnerships and initiatives between the Ministry and various business related organizations, that preparation of students for the workforce was a priority in the BC school system.

In his annual report to the Lieutenant Governor for 1995-96, Paul Ramsey, Minister of Education, Skills and Training, addressed the needs and concerns regarding career development in the BC school system. He stated that:

The primary purposes of career development are to prepare students to attain their career and occupational objectives and to assist in the development of effective work habits and the flexibility necessary to deal with change in the workplace. (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1996, p.2)

Throughout the section of the document pertaining to evaluation and accountability of career development, Ramsey expressed the importance of all Career Programs in the BC school system. He cited various surveys done that show what employers' and students' attitudes are regarding student preparedness for the work place. He quoted a 1996 government survey of employers that shows employers believe high school

students are adequately prepared for the job market. However, students with only high school education are not as prepared as students with post-secondary education (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1996).

A 1995 Student Follow-up Survey by the Ministry found over three-quarters of students surveyed thought the teaching of job-finding skills should be a priority for schools. However, only 30 percent felt schools helped them develop these skills. As well, teaching career-planning skills in school was identified as a priority of 68 percent of the students. However, only 41 percent of students were satisfied with how well they were learning those skills (Ministry of Education, Skills And Training, 1996). Ramsey suggests that more information is needed regarding employment outcomes for students who take career development programs in high school in order to determine the effectiveness of the programs.

According to government statistics quoted by Ramsey, the number of CPPs has increased dramatically since 1986-1987. In a ten year period, the number of programs increased from 29 in 1985-1986, to 202 in 1995-1996. Also, the number of schools offering the programs in BC, increased from 99 to 227 in the same time period. The enrollment for the CPP has increased from 6,456 in 1985-1986, to 25,731 in 1994-1995 (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1995a). In 1997-1998, the number of students enrolled in the CPP increased to 45,159 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1998). Ramsey surmised that objectives for career development were being met in some areas but not in others. For example, CPPs were increasing in BC schools, however, it was still not known how effective these programs were.

The most recent development in Career Programs in BC, is the Ministry survey of Career Programs. In December of 1998, the Policy, Evaluation and Analysis Branch

of the Ministry of Education, published the Career Programs Evaluation (Summary Report). The report is based on research that was carried out from May to October of 1998. The research included twenty-four site visits and surveys of 3,400 current and former students, teachers administrators, employers, superintendents, and others (who were not specifically identified in the document). It was determined that during the 1997-1998 school year, 46.5 percent of all grade eleven and twelve students were in the CPP and that the growth in the last three years averaged 22.5 percent. Also, ninety-five percent of students in Career Programs are in the CPP (Ministry of Education, 1998).

The research identified "high intensity" and "low intensity" programs. High intensity programs include Co-op, which has an application process for enrollment, high levels of teacher involvement, and work site monitoring. SSA is also identified as a high intensity program. CPP registered much lower and a wide range of programs and quality exists throughout BC high schools. Although benefits to students in the CPP are identified such as; reductions of early leaver rates; more students graduating; positive impact on aboriginal learners; some transition to post-secondary or the workplace; it was found that not all districts or schools have what the Ministry considers quality programs (Ministry of Education, 1998).

The Summary Report also identified several issues regarding CPPs. These issues include: the lack of systematic measures to evaluate effectiveness; the programs appear to have diverged from original intentions; there is more direction needed; the satisfaction of students in the program appears to be inversely correlated with the participation level at school. The employers who were surveyed support the CPP, and many feel that the program is valuable and have hired students from the program (Ministry of Education, 1998).

The Ministry planned to follow up the research by consulting with practitioners in the field. The goal is to eventually put in place an accountability framework for Career Programs which will include program standards and the recognition of a continuum of career development that includes transition programs (e.g., apprenticeship, industry credentialled programs, and post-secondary transition programs). In the Spring of 1999, the Ministry published a follow-up paper to the Summary Report entitled Career Programs Evaluation: A Revised Framework. The Revised Framework outlines a three year plan for implementing Career Programs that are restructured in both funding and delivery. The current emphasis of the Ministry for Career Programs is to increase transition rates. The changes proposed in the Revised Framework give more financial support to programs such as SSA and Dual Credit. Dual Credit are programs that encourage high school students to go on to post-secondary by giving students post-secondary credits while completing their high school program. The increased emphasis on transition programs by the Ministry can be partly credited to the concern over youth unemployment. Also, employers expressed only a moderate level of satisfaction over students' preparedness for the workforce. In 1997, BC had a youth unemployment rate of 15.9 per cent and in 1998, the rate had increased to 19.2 per cent (Ministry of Education, 1997-1998).

The current Ministry emphasis on Career Programs as a vehicle for student transition from school to work is cause for some concern. Is it necessary that every student continues on to post-secondary school or work immediately following his or her participation in a Career Program? In other words, what is the underlying philosophy regarding student participation in Career Programs? Are we trying to provide career exploration so that students can make informed choices about their

career paths, or are we streaming students into a particular field immediately following high school graduation?

Career programs in BC will be going through some significant and historical changes in the next few years. What these changes will be and what impact they will have on the Career Preparation Program remains to be seen. The variation in the quality of the CPP throughout BC school districts has hurt the credibility of the CPP. The new Ministry emphasis on Dual Credit and SSA may weaken the CPP even further if funding is channeled away from the CPP into these programs. Practitioners working in the CPP may want to evaluate their programs to ensure that they are delivering a high quality program. It may be important for career practitioners to deliver a high quality program in their schools in order to justify the continuation of the program in the future.

#### School and Community Relations: Who are the Stakeholders in Career Programs?

The mission statement of the Ministry is: "The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy" (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, 1998, p.1 ). The same source states that one of the goals shared amongst schools, family and the community, is: "Career Development... to prepare students to attain their career and occupational objectives; to assist in the development of effective work habits and the flexibility to deal with change in the workplace" (p.1). It is evident by the mission statement and the goal of career development, that career awareness and exploration are important aspects of the BC school curriculum.

In order to meet the mission statement and goals, Career Programs cannot operate without the cooperation of a number of stakeholders. Thus, Career Programs operate in an environment where there must be cooperation and support between the school and the community. The main stakeholders of CPs include: government; employers; school boards; teachers; parents; students. My work as a CPP Facilitator has increased the necessity for me to interact with the community on a more regular basis than I did as a classroom teacher. Each of the stakeholders have varying degrees of involvement with Career Programs, but all have an agenda and a chance to benefit from their involvement in CPs. By investigating who benefits from Career Programs, I can analyze my own agenda as a career practitioner and more fully understand what influences are affecting students who are in the CPP.

The stakeholders can influence curriculum through their own agendas. Groups with the most influence based on expertise and money have the most impact. The curriculum that results through the interaction and competition between these groups represents compromises. Within each of the groups of stakeholders, there is controversy and conflict over the support of Career Programs in high schools. Not all of the people within each group are supportive of CPs. Therefore, conflict exists not only between the various stakeholders, but also within each of the individual groups. An understanding of each of the group's motives for being involved in Career Programs may help to encourage a smoother relationship between the school and the community. It will also help career practitioners have a better comprehension of the milieu in which they participate in Career Programs.

#### Government

Government is a major player in Career Programs as shown previously in the history of CPs. Olson (1997) states that educators and employers are the pivotal

partners in a school-to-work system, but for such initiatives to succeed, government must provide the glue. The glue that she refers to is the funding that is provided by government in order for reform initiatives to be implemented in the school system. Without funding, Career Programs would neither continue to be implemented, nor to be offered.

Government can perform a number of different roles in support of Career Programs. An important role government can play is providing ongoing funding for connecting activities, curriculum development and staff training. Government should also be responsible for setting learning outcomes that clarify what students should know and be able to do upon graduation. Government can also work with employers, educators and employee organizations to develop voluntary skill standards. Government can also ensure that laws and regulations such as child-labour laws, workmen's compensations policies and insurance laws do not discourage work-based learning. Finally, government can use the bully pulpit to make Career Programs an ongoing part of the school reform agenda (Olson, 1997). Government therefore is responsible for enabling all other stakeholders to be involved in Career Programs without passing legislation that is prohibitive to running these programs.

So what are the agenda and benefit to government? The government is concerned with public perception. If business and industry require a skilled workforce and are blaming the education system for economic problems, then government is likely to respond to their demands. Also, if parents and students are complaining that school is not preparing students for the workforce and youth unemployment continues to rise, the government will give Career Program their priority. Currently, the funding and support of Career Programs are important objectives of the Ministry. But, as we have seen in the history of these programs, government funding changes. So the



future support and funding of Career Programs will vary depending on government priorities.

### Employers

Employers do not trust schools to teach students what they need to know. A 1995 US survey of business leaders showed that only 4 percent felt that public schools do a good job preparing students for the world of work. Therefore, many business people tend not to use high school transcripts or other measures of school performance to make hiring decisions. They also do not reward young people who take more challenging courses or earn higher grades. Companies with good jobs, career ladders, and fringe benefits do not even like to hire young people. Instead, they let most 20-somethings cycle through dead-end jobs, schooling, and periods of unemployment, before hiring a few fortunate students (Olson, 1997). If employers do not feel the public school system is adequately preparing students for the world of work, then the agenda of employers involved in Career Programs is a very significant one. The future of the workforce lies in students who go through the education system. Employer's influence over what occurs in schools gives them the advantage to prepare students for future employment.

However, many employers are not very interested in participating in Career Programs. Employers lack confidence that their involvement in CPs will be cost effective, reaping them rewards in reduced hiring costs and greater productivity. They are discouraged by: the costs of bringing students into the organization and allocating time for skilled workers to work with them; laws regarding child labour and safety; insurance costs for general liability and workers' compensation; and management and employee resistance to work-based learning (Brown, 1998). As with government, money is an issue with employers. When profit is the bottom line, partnership in CPs

must be cost effective. On the other hand, employers cannot afford not to get involved in Career Programs. "It is estimated that American business spends nearly \$30 billion training and retraining its work force" (National School-to-Work Center 1996a, cited in Brown, 1998, p. 2).

In order to get employers involved in Career Programs, they must perceive a benefit. Employers need evidence that shows the mutual benefits of school-business partnerships (Brown, 1998). An example of the benefits to employers involves a case study related by Bob Couch, South Carolina's Director of Occupational Education. Couch highlights an internship program in Greenwood County, South Carolina, that solicited \$1,000 donations from participating businesses to help pay student stipends. The program proved successful, expanding from engineering and manufacturing to include other areas such as health care and financial employers. Couch stated that businesses are involved in Career Programs because they have a particular need. In this case, employers wanted to give students a broad look at their industries and educate them about job expectations. Employers also saw an opportunity to sell their business as a community partner (Bob Couch, cited in Hettinger, 1998, p. 8).

Many times the employer's need is attached to demand in particular industries. Employers will even help to fund Career Programs if they see an advantage for their industry. However, the funding provided by employers usually has strings attached. For example, businesses face a shortage of high-tech workers so they want their investment to go toward technology training (Kruegler, cited in Hettinger, 1998). The problem is finding public schools that have the staff and the resources to teach the technology, and also finding students who have an interest in the areas where jobs will be available in the future. Unfortunately for some students, but to the benefit of those

students who are truly interested, some businesses use Career Programs as a screening and recruitment device to grow their own workforce (Olson, 1997).

Some businesses are altruistic about hiring students for work experience and are happy to take student placements. Unfortunately, some employers are very busy or do not know what kind of an experience to provide students to make the placement worthwhile. It takes organization and time on the employer's part to create a good work experience placement for students. While companies are forging ahead to create student internships, many don't provide a real learning experience and the placement often amounts to busywork. The problem of mediocre learning experiences at a work site is not news to cooperative education coordinators, who have been struggling with the issue for years (Dembicki, 1998).

There are a number of benefits to employers who provide work experience to students. Work experience provides an arena for identifying, screening, and training prospective candidates, thus reducing costs to employers. Employers also benefit by the increase of qualified applicants and are able to fill labour shortages in high demand fields. Employer involvement with schools on education and training can help to ensure that future applicants meet their needs. Employers can also directly teach students the work ethics and employability skills that they want in their industry. Finally, employers benefit from participating in work experience placements by enhancing the skills and the morale of their existing workforce (Olson, 1997).

In an ideal situation, employers have a lot to gain by providing work experience opportunities. One problem that companies often discover is that the capacity and interest of individual schools to work with employers differ (Olson, 1997). This also applies to school-business partnerships at the school board level. It takes the right

people, with the right skills and commitment, to create successful school-business partnerships.

### School Boards

In a 1995 US survey of public schools, 68 percent of school superintendents said that they felt that schools do a good job preparing students for the work force (Olson, 1997). According to this survey, the perception of administration is that schools are doing a good job of preparing students for the work force. School boards must feel some sort of outside pressure from other stakeholders before they will evaluate and make changes to Career Programs. Local school boards tend to be supportive of Career Programs but they face difficult choices. There are national movements pushing for higher academic standards and more student assessment, yet local school boards have limited funds. Should more money be put into one program or another? That's the dilemma (Poole, cited in Hettinger, 1998, p. 6). The BC school system is experiencing the same problem. How can teachers and students put in the time and effort to improve scores for provincial exams, and find a balance in order to participate in Career Programs?

School boards will only be supportive of Career Programs if they fit their agenda. A Philadelphia school district survey showed that students who participated in Career Programs had higher academic achievement, better attendance and graduation rates, and lower dropout rates than students who did not (Dembicki, 1998). Therefore, school-to-work initiatives can meet the goals that school boards want to see achieved by students in their districts.

The need to prepare students for the new economy is also a reason why school districts feel pressure to fund Career Programs at the high school level. For example, in July of 1993, a Task Force for Career Education was established in Escambia County

Florida. The Task Force was comprised of representatives from schools, districts, and members of the community. The representatives wanted to develop a comprehensive career education plan. The impetus for this task force was the realization that nine out of ten workers in the year 2000, will not have the skills to work the jobs that will be in existence. In order to acquire these skills students must plan and continue to learn (Gamble, 1997).

The Task Force, using models from other states (e.g., California and Oregon, amongst others), set goals to: create curricular paths; develop powerful teaching and learning; establish a comprehensive accountability/assessment system; restructure the schools; and establish relationships between school, business and community. In order to meet these goals, comprehensive curriculum was developed by the Task Force. Today, the program named Career Visions is in the process of becoming fully operational. The task force plans to continue to analyze and revise the program as job conditions change, focusing on future trends in career programs (Gamble, 1997).

School boards need to work with other institutions to provide effective school-to-work transitions for students. School representatives can work with the business community, technical and vocational schools, community colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, and government, in order to develop, implement, and assess transitions for their students (Brown, 1998). One of the outcomes of the Ministry's Revised Framework is to increase articulation between high school and post-secondary institutions. School boards will need to be an integral part of the articulation process in order for it to succeed.

### Teachers

In a 1995 US survey of public schools, 44 percent of high school teachers felt that schools do a good job of preparing students for the world of work (Olson, 1997).

It is not surprising that teachers feel this way, since there is an ongoing debate by educators about the purpose of education. Do we provide a liberal arts education or one that is streamlined for a specific economic purpose? Some educators view business with suspicion, distrust, and envy and resent being blamed for economic problems that they have no control over. They are suspicious of allowing business values to permeate the curriculum in schools. They question the motivation and commitment of corporate leaders who chastise public schools on one hand, while fighting for tax breaks and private-school vouchers on the other (Olson, 1997). Therefore, it is not unexpected that teachers are leery of curriculum based on career goals.

Teachers play a very important and influential role in students' career choices. There are a number of things that teachers can do to help the transition from school-to-work. Teachers can benefit Career Programs by integrating academic skills with skills required for successful employment. They can work with counsellors to provide information about careers and work experience opportunities to help students make decisions based on their own interests and aptitudes. They can form partnerships with the business community to provide resources and enhance classroom experiences. They can broaden their own experience and knowledge of various vocations through job shadows and professional development activities. They can assess students' knowledge and skills in ways to ensure they meet industry standards (Brown, 1998).

Nonetheless, it is not so easy to convince all teachers that Career Programs are important to student learning. Teacher's attitudes have a great effect on the successful implementation of CPs. Some teachers may be fearful of change and reluctant to devote the time and effort required to learn and incorporate new ways of teaching and learning into their instruction, curriculum, and classroom management (Brown, 1998). The unwillingness of teachers to change the status quo is not new. Therefore,

it takes time and effort on the part of those teachers who believe in the benefits of Career Programs to convince their colleagues that CPs warrant their support.

In order to increase teachers' support of Career Programs, a few things must be provided to them. Teachers need time, resources, and the support required to connect school-based and work-based learning. They need training and staff development time and opportunities to gain experience with employers. They need opportunities to exchange knowledge with all the stakeholders (Brown, 1998). By providing teachers with the tools they need, Career Programs and the students involved should be better supported by teachers.

However, there are other pressures on teachers. These pressures are imposed on teachers by the Ministry, school boards, and administrators. For example, teachers may be reluctant to let students out of class for work experience when they are being increasingly pressured to meet new curricula standards and to improve academic proficiency (Dembicki, 1998). Another problem is that teachers have preconceived ideas about the abilities of students. The problem is highlighted in the following example:

One of the most impressive things about many internship projects is the level of proficiency students demonstrate in using the tools and technologies of the workplace. Nevertheless, it remains very hard for teachers to accept that skills can be acquired in the process of applying them...No matter how hard high schools try to keep up with advancing technologies, students are more likely to encounter and master sophisticated hardware, software, and other new tools in the workplace. (Steinberg, 1998, p.85)

Teachers make comments about how students could not possibly be successful on work experience because they have not yet finished their academic studies or developed the skills at school. It is important to educate teachers about Career Programs and the benefits to students in order to help change the negative attitudes that some teachers have towards school-to-work initiatives.

### Parents

Parents worry about their children's futures and many parents spend their days worrying about saving for their child's education. Even after their child graduates from high school or chooses to attend a post-secondary institution and graduates, parents worry that their children will be unable to get, let alone keep, a job (Olson, 1998). The concern of youth employment is an issue in BC. The unemployment rate continues to rise coupled with the phenomenon of more and more children in their twenties and thirties living at home because they are otherwise unable to support themselves.

Even with these concerns, not all parents are receptive to Career Programs. They see one drawback as the need to remove their sons and daughters from the school setting, which is familiar to most parents, and introduce them to the adult workplace. Additionally, many parents perceive that CPs are a threat to academic learning and will draw their children away from college preparation and attendance. In order to counteract this perception, parents need to be informed about the objectives of Career Programs. They need to be provided with evidence of program effectiveness to counter any erroneous perceptions and assumptions (Brown, 1998).

Parents have a significant influence on the career development of their children. However, most parents in North America do not want to have influence over the specific occupational choice of their children, seeing this choice as an individual right of the child (Young, 1994). Parents do believe that they can lay suitable groundwork for career development of their children by influencing them in a more broad sense to become responsible and capable individuals (Young and Friesen, 1991, cited in Young, 1994). During the adolescent years, parent-child relationships change to become more instrumental and less emotional and expressive, particularly with



fathers (Youniss and Smollar, 1985, cited in Young, 1994). Frequently, there are conflicts between parents and adolescents regarding long and short term goals, with parents focusing on the implications of the actions of the adolescents. For example, what jobs will be available if the child chooses not to attend a post-secondary institution after high school? Some parents experience inner conflict over wanting to influence their children's lives without imposing their own values or beliefs that the child is not internally motivated regarding career decisions (Young, 1994).

Parents play an important role in facilitating their children's success in Career Programs. There are a number of things that parents can do to support and encourage their child. Parents can take responsibility for ensuring that children limit the number of hours that they work during the school year. Parents can insist that their high school aged children have an individualized plan to help them choose their courses and think through career and college decisions. Parents should actively ensure that their child is taking the courses necessary to succeed in work or college. Parental support of internships, job shadowing, work-based projects, and other experiences that help children see the relevance of their schoolwork is also important. Encouraging children to pursue education and training beyond high school and being willing to entertain other career paths besides a bachelor's degree for children who are not interested or not capable of performing college-level work, are important parental roles. Finally, parents can support Career Programs by opening up their own businesses to students and teachers and volunteering to become mentors for young people (Olson, 1997). By supporting Career Programs and being realistic about their own children's abilities and aspirations, parents can play an integral role as a community partner in successful school-to-work transitions.

### Students

The majority of high school students today have very unrealistic expectations about their future careers. Most students expect that they will have a high paid job with one in three expecting to have a professional career. Ten percent think they will be doctors and another ten percent anticipate jobs in the sport or entertainment industries. Most students do not even have a specific career in mind and vacillate between a diverse range of career options. Their unrealistic expectations are coupled with a lack of knowledge about what particular careers entail or what the educational requirements are for entering a particular field. When researchers in a massive nationwide US study of adolescents asked students for precise information about the careers they hoped to enter such as the average income, the education required, or the prospects for jobs, few could provide it (Olson, 1997). The theme of unrealistic expectations and lack of knowledge is often repeated in vocational literature.

For example, in their Pennsylvania survey, Ferrero and McKenna (1991), address ninth-grade student's attitudes toward vocational education, non-traditional occupations, and sources of information on careers. The authors were interested in this area of research because, over the course of their careers, they had discovered various trends about students' career awareness. One worrisome trend they discovered is students tend to have little information about the work force that they will eventually be in for a significant portion of their lives. The second trend is students seem to have unrealistic expectations and a sense of fantasy about the information they do have about the workplace. The third concern is that students who do not plan to attend post-secondary institutions are not aware of vocational opportunities at the secondary level. Ferrero and McKenna's conclusions are two-fold. They state that more students need to be aware of the opportunities available in the area of vocational

education at the secondary level. As well, more information on the problem of occupational stereotyping and the advantages of non-traditional careers needs to be provided. The authors advise that teachers, parents, counsellors, and school administrators use sex-fair language when speaking about careers.

This final advice by Ferrero and McKenna, raises the point of hegemony, the dominant values, assumptions and expectations of the environment in which a child is raised and influenced. As career practitioners, we may be unaware of our personal biases, values and beliefs, and how we shape and influence our students through our everyday contact. In our own reality, we may be unaware of our personal stereotyping of male and female occupations, interests, and abilities. We need to raise our own consciousness about our perceptions and be aware of and proactive about our stereotypes when we interact with students in Career Programs.

If students have such unrealistic expectations about their career paths, how can they make realistic decisions about post-secondary education or employment? It seems that students are not receiving enough information and guidance when it comes to career decisions. Teenagers seem to have little knowledge about the careers that interest them. The problem is they have almost no opportunity to talk seriously with adults, or one another, about how the present and future can connect, about how present interests can provide clues to possible careers or life-styles, or how choices made in high school might affect future options (Steinberg, 1998).

Many students see no connection between what they are learning in school and their future career goals. This is reflected in comments that can be heard throughout schools such as "Why are we learning this?" and "Who cares?". After conducting a survey of more than twenty thousand high school students, Laurence Steinberg of the University of California concluded: "Across the country, whether surrounded by

suburban affluence or urban poverty, students' commitment to school is at an all-time low." Four in ten of the teenagers surveyed by Steinberg indicated that they are just "going through the motions" (Steinberg, cited in Steinberg, 1998, p.1).

Some students are not engaged in their classwork and drift through classes without doing too much work or being very challenged. They have little focus in their high school program and their teachers hardly know them. Whether or not these students decide to work hard or be serious about their studies is their own choice. For many, mediocrity, passivity, and anti-intellectualism prevail (Olson, 1997). Considering children spend the majority of their early lives in school, it is very disturbing to know that many feel their education is a waste of time. Career programs can benefit students in their attitudes toward school.

Evidence from around the country documents that school-to-work programs help students find their way into higher education as they develop more ambitious career goals (Steinberg, 1998). By participating in Career Programs, students develop a sense of purpose in their education and many students who normally might not choose to go to a post-secondary institution, will see a purpose for further education in order to fulfill their career goals. Work experience increases students' knowledge and abilities. Working alongside adults, students acquire the skills necessary to become more productive and valued employees. Through work experience, students also gain a better understanding of real world expectations and what is involved in accomplished performance (Steinberg, 1998).

A typical example of how students are able to benefit is shown in the following case study. Susan Doran, now in college, interned for an architectural firm during her final year of high school. She thought the internship would help her discover the career she wanted to pursue. Her interests include advertising, interior design, and

most of all, architecture. Since she began her work with the company, she has both narrowed and broadened her mind-set. She found everyone open to letting her experiment with different kinds of things and through the experimentation, she recently became interested in spending more time in the interior design department. She hopes her work during a second summer experience she is doing at the same firm will further narrow down her area of interest (Piasecki, 1998). When students see a link between what they are learning in school and how they can apply it in the workplace, they become more interested and motivated at school. Statistics released last spring on the Summer of Work and Learning Program in Worcester, Massachusetts, show an increase in class attendance and improved math and English grades by students who participated in the program (Dembicki, 1998).

Students receive many benefits from involvement in Career Programs. CPs help students clarify their personal goals and determine their reasons for attending post-secondary education. Students also gain a more broad knowledge of choices available for careers and jobs. Career Programs link students with the broader community outside of school and the responsibilities involved in work experience help students to develop their self-confidence. The skills learned in Career Programs boost students' earning power. Finally, Career Programs help students link academic instruction with the application of knowledge in the real world of work, thus complementing and justifying their educational experiences (Baily and Merritt, 1997, cited in Brown, 1998).

One area where students can benefit from Career Programs is in behavioural skills. We need to foster the vocational maturity of high school students and ensure that students are prepared to assume work-based learning activities in the workplace (Brown, 1998). Employers agree that one of the most important skill sets that students

need in order to be hired is interpersonal skills. Students who do not have any other interests or do not do any work experience during their school years are at a disadvantage when they apply for their first job. Students who have only concentrated on school work have interpersonal skills, but they have not had the opportunity to demonstrate and improve these skills in a work setting.

#### Some Final Reflections on School and Community Relations

Various stakeholders have their own interests and rationales for their involvement in Career Programs. Conservative groups such as the Eagle Forum in the US, deride school-to-work as a conspiracy by big business and big government to shape children's futures, charging that it will further vocationalize education and dilute academics (Olson, 1997). It is important that the misconceptions, negative attitudes, and drawbacks of Career Programs be addressed for these programs to be successful and supported by the community.

In order for school-to-work initiatives to be effective they must: be guided by a comprehensive strategic vision that sets forth the linkages expected at each level of the system; involve employers in partnership with schools; require commitment and support at all levels and from all stakeholders (schools, businesses, post-secondary institutions, community partners, and parents); provide adequate financial support, which often means that a variety of different sources have been developed; provide students with a strong foundation of career information and a planned sequence of learning experiences throughout their school years that will help them develop an awareness of their own interests, goals, and abilities; achieve and support the integration of academic and vocational learning (Lewis, 1997, cited in Brown, 1998). If these guidelines are followed, Career Programs have an improved chance of surviving and flourishing in BC schools.

Finally, there is a moral argument to be made. Perhaps the following observation best sums up the dilemma. Improving the knowledge and skills of young people certainly does not guarantee that they will be employed. But no educator or parent wants to consciously prepare a young person for a low-wage, low-skill occupation (Olson, 1997). Career Programs need the support of the school and the community. An awareness of the perception and agendas of the stakeholders in CPs, may help career practitioners in our work with students in these programs.

### The Vocational Maturity of Students in Career Programs

In the last section about school and community involvement in Career Programs, many issues are raised. These issues centre on who benefits from the programs and how each of the stakeholders profits from their involvement. Another issue that needs addressing is the readiness of students for Career Programs. Not every student who is in grades eleven or twelve is ready to make a career decision. Therefore, there must be different levels of CPs that address the vocational maturity of all of the students in high school.

Children go through different stages of maturity that affect their readiness for career information. One definition of career exploration is "...the process of clarifying the self-concept and translating it into occupational terms, of acquiring the understanding of occupations necessary for this transition, and of trying out this vocational self-concept in vocationally relevant activities" (Blustein, 1990, cited in Levi and Ziegler, 1993, p. 9). Career exploration is critical to career education programming in the transition years. In kindergarten to grade eight, the focus of career education is to avoid premature foreclosure to future career options. In the intermediate grades, career choices are not as important as continuing the process of evolving maturity which fits within a developmental continuum of learning and

experience. For adolescents, integration of subject matter with career information is considered very effective when delivered in an active, experiential curriculum based on student's awareness of their own talents and preferences (Levi and Ziegler, 1993).

Young children tend to prefer occupations with easily defined activities such as a ballet dancer or a fire fighter. Adolescents consider career choices which involve thinking, service or other abstract activities, depending on their vocational maturity. "Vocational maturity is the level of readiness of a youngster to understand and work with various career-related processes and concepts" (Levi and Ziegler, 1993, p. 9). A good program explores sexually stereotyped perceptions of work roles and similar socially based perceptions. Integrating career education with general educational development improves vocational maturity in adolescents. Students who have a strong background in career exploration and education, are likely to have vocational maturity by grades eleven and twelve, when they have the option of enrolling in a Career Program in BC schools. Therefore, it is important to have career awareness as part of the regular school curricula beginning in kindergarten through grade twelve.

Realizing the variation in the vocational maturity of students is important. An understanding of the problem of different levels of vocational maturity should assist career practitioners in their work with students in Career Programs. The difference in vocational maturity of students is also a good argument for having a variety of Career Programs to fit the needs of individual students in the high school system.



## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The information from the previous chapter helps to give a better understanding of the larger issues surrounding Career Programs. The issues include: humanitarian considerations; liberal arts versus vocational education; influences on the Career Preparation Program; school and community stakeholders; and the vocational maturity of students. All of the issues have a significant influence on the CPP at Seaquam Secondary School. Understanding the issues that the CPP is situated in gives a clearer perspective of the problems associated with doing the CPP at Seaquam and assists in the understanding of the methodology used for the research.

In this chapter on the methodology used for the research, I reflect back on the research questions and the significance of the study. I clarify my reasons for choosing action research and the various people who played a role in the research process. I explain the three types of research methods I used to achieve triangulation. I comment on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research. I outline the procedures used to ensure the research was ethical. Also, I present a timeline of the research. I explain the cycles of the research beginning with the first cycle that I finished in the summer of 1999 and finishing with the second cycle that I will begin in September 1999. Finally, a number of limitations of the research are suggested.

#### Revisiting the Research Questions and the Significance of the Study

Initially, my research question was to determine what I could do in my own teaching practice to increase the number of students who complete the Career Preparation Program. As I have progressed in my research, a number of other questions have been formulated. These questions are: Is the CPP worth having more students complete it?; Is it a failure if a student doesn't complete the CPP but gains

some benefit by her participation in the program?; Is the CPP the best program for our students at Seaquam Secondary or should there be a number of different Career Programs available to students?; Does the stigma attached to vocational education affect the participation of students and others in the CPP? The final and most important question to me is: What constitutes a successful experience for individual students who participate in the CPP?

Although a large number of students in grades eleven and twelve qualify and register for the program, by the end of their grade twelve year, only about 30 percent of those who qualify actually complete the program. The information gleaned from this study will be used to remove completion barriers and increase the number of students who finish the program. The research results will also help to identify what I can do in my practice as a Career Preparation Facilitator to ensure as much as possible that individual students have a personally successful experience in the program. What constitutes a successful experience will vary for each of the students, depending on what their goals are for completing the program and the type of experience they ultimately have while participating in the program.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, the requirements for completion of the CPP include: completing six courses in a specific career area; completing 100 hours of related volunteer work experience; graduating with requirements set out by the Ministry. The CPP is an optional program for students, therefore it must be communicated to students by the time they make their course selections in grade ten for the following school year. The courses that students select in grade ten determine whether or not they will qualify for the CPP in grade eleven. One of the initial barriers to completion of the program is when students do not select the courses needed to

qualify for the CPP in grade eleven when completing their course selection sheets during the spring in grade ten.

The initial research question of increasing CPP completion and the subsequent research questions which include ensuring a successful experience in the program for students, have significance for a number of reasons. First, from reviewing the literature it is apparent that students benefit from career exploration in high school. Career exploration increases their motivation in school, creates links between academic work and real world experience, and increases the likelihood that they will continue in some form of post-secondary training or education. Second, there are no studies that have been done in British Columbia on the CPP that identify barriers to students completing the program or what successful completion of the program means for individual students. Third, the CPP is a valuable program for many of our students at Seaquam Secondary. The value of the program to students is clearly identified in the journals that students complete as a requirement of the CPP. In their journals, students reflect on the benefits they have received by participating in the CPP. These benefits include confirming their future career path or realizing that they are not suited to particular careers. It is an advantage for students to realize these insights at an early point in their lives so that they can make informed choices regarding their post-secondary education or career paths. For the reasons explained above, I believe the research questions have significance for students, the Career Preparation Facilitators, and all of the people directly involved in the CPP at Seaquam Secondary School.

### Action Research

#### My Reasons for Choosing to Use Action Research

Previously, I explained that by joining the Teacher Research Inquiry Project (TRIP), I became aware of action research and realized that the formal use of action

research would enhance the critical approach that I already use in my teaching practice. By taking an education action research course at UBC in the Summer of 1998, I confirmed that action research was the type of research that I would use to explore my question.

There are many reasons why I chose to use action research. The most significant reason is that the main purpose of action research is to improve the researcher's own practice (McNiff et al., 1996). My goal in doing the research is to improve my own practice as a Career Preparation Facilitator. I want to ensure that I am using the best teaching strategies and pedagogy that I can with the students in the program. By investigating the research questions I hope to improve my practice in the CPP.

Bassey identifies three different categories of research. The first category is theoretical research. Theoretical research is used to describe, interpret, and explain events without making any criticisms or judgments about them. The second category is evaluative research. Evaluative research is the same as theoretical research, except it is done so others can make evaluative criticism and judgments about events. The third category is action research. Action research is also used to describe, interpret, and explain events, but the difference between theoretical and evaluative research is that action researchers do this in order to change events for the better (Bassey, 1995, cited in McNiff et al., 1996). My goal of improving students' completion and experience in the CPP by improving my practice fits with the third category, action research.

It is important to differentiate action research from other forms of research in order to understand this form of research more clearly. Like other forms of research, action research leads to knowledge and provides evidence to support the knowledge. As well, action research makes explicit the process of enquiry through which

knowledge emerges and links new knowledge with existing knowledge. Where action research differs from other types of research is that it requires action as an integral part of the research process. Action research also differs because it is focused by the researcher's professional values rather than methodological consideration. Finally, action research distinguishes itself from other forms of research because it is insider research, in the sense of practitioners researching their own professional actions (McNiff et al., 1996). The "action" in action research refers to what the practitioner does, based on what is discovered in the research, to change her practice. Therefore, choosing to use action research will enable me to make changes to my teaching practice in order to address the solutions to my research questions.

#### My Critical Friend

Also referred to as a critical colleague or a critical companion, the critical friend in action research is one or more people that the researcher is working with. The role of the critical friend is to act as an ally, someone who supports the research and in turn, expects to be supported. The critical friend provides, as well as receives, advice (McNiff et al., 1996). The role of the critical friend described above, makes it evident that the researcher should choose a critical friend that she can trust, is willing to share openly with, and is open to receiving constructive criticism from. My critical friend is Carla Rizzardo who is the other Career Preparation Facilitator at Seaquam Secondary School.

Carla and I have a collaborative relationship established through thirteen years of working together. We are both committed to the research questions and want to investigate our practice to improve the program for our students. Carla is also someone who I can share ideas with and with whom I have established trust. I can accept constructive criticism from her which makes her an ideal critical friend.

Although we investigated the research question together, she is doing her degree at City University and therefore is required to do different follow-up work to the research than I am. Carla is in a position to give me feedback and suggestions for my research.

### The Validating Group

The validating group consists of people who are sympathetic to the researcher and yet will comment fairly but critically on the research. The role of the validating group is to assess the researcher with the goal of seeing her succeed while still being accountable for what she is doing. The validating group will ensure the research is valid, authentic, and supported by clear evidence (McNiff et al., 1996). My validating group is the people who are involved in the TRIP in my district. The people in the TRIP include various teachers from different high schools in the Delta School District, the Director of Educational Programs for Delta, and an action research consultant.

The action research consultant facilitated the TRIP meetings. She guided us through the research from identifying the initial question to analyzing the data. The monthly meetings from February 1998 to May 1999, were used as a forum for the researchers to explain what they were doing and to receive feedback and suggestions from the group. At each meeting, the research groups recapped what they had accomplished since the previous meeting. The groups were all at various stages of their research depending on when they had joined TRIP and what their research entailed. Therefore, the needs of each of the research groups varied at each of the meetings. For example, some groups might need help formulating their research question. Other groups might bring a copy of a questionnaire that they planned to use in their research and would request that we read the questionnaire to give our feedback. The meetings were a good arena for getting objective suggestions and constructive criticism from people who had various viewpoints and ideas.

Carla and I benefited from our participation in the group in a number of different ways. We were able to formulate our questions and receive advice about the methodology that we planned to use. Our participation at the monthly meetings helped to keep our research moving forward. At each meeting, the groups would present what they had done since the last meeting and what they planned to do before the next one. Therefore, Carla and I had an incentive to make sure that we were accomplishing parts of our research on a monthly basis.

In April of 1999, four of the TRIP research groups including Carla and I, presented our research at the monthly Delta School Board meeting. Our participation in this meeting enabled us to share our research with the school trustees, school board members, parents, administrators, and other members of the public who attended the meeting. The positive feedback that we received from a number of the people at the meeting helped to confirm that we were doing research that was important and worthwhile to our students and the community. Carla and I were very fortunate that the TRIP in our district coincided with our own research. Therefore, we were able to support our research through the help and guidance we received from the members of the TRIP.

#### My Tutor

The tutor can be an advisor, mentor, or supervisor. An action researcher may have more than one tutor who supports the researcher. The tutor's role is to challenge the researcher in order to encourage her to move her thinking forward (McNiff et al., 1996). The tutor should be someone who is able to facilitate the work of the researcher. Therefore, the tutor must be knowledgeable about action research.

My tutor is my UBC advisor, Linda Peterat. She uses and teaches action research in her own practice. Linda's role is to guide me in my research and to

challenge me to be critical of what I am doing. I feel that I am fortunate to have an advisor who practices action research not only because of her expertise, but also because she is supportive of my choice to do action research for my thesis. The two other members of my thesis committee from UBC are Adriana Zylmans and Stephen Petrina. They have also provided feedback and support during the research process and the writing of my thesis.

### The Participants

The participants in an action research study are the people with whom the researcher works. The participants are part of the research project. They are the people who are involved in acquiring the data for the research. The researcher should make the effort to keep the participants informed about what is happening with the research. The researcher must also ensure that the participants feel valued by making sure that she invites their feedback and thanks them frequently (McNiff et al., 1996). The participants in action research also play an integral role in reflecting the researcher's practice back to her.

The participants in this study are the students in grades eleven and twelve at Seaquam Secondary School who completed the questionnaire in 1997-1998 or 1998-1999. The participants also include the fifteen grade twelve students who were involved in the student focus group from January to June of 1999. There were also other people who did not directly provide data but were necessary for the research to occur. These people include the teachers at Seaquam who distributed the questionnaires or teach courses in the CPP areas, the parents of the CPP students, and the employers who provide work experience for the students. The CPP requires a team effort and therefore all of these people were necessary in order for the research to take place.



### Methods of Triangulation

One definition of triangulation is the following:

...a process by which, when a situation is investigated using a number of different methods, each method partly transcends its limitations, by functioning as a point of comparison with the others. Several different methods may thus seem to converge on one interpretation, thereby giving grounds for preferring it to other interpretations which are suggested by only one method of investigation. Normally at least three methods are needed for comparison, and to allow conclusions to be made, because this avoids simple, polarized, oppositions. (Winter, 1996, p. 16)

A researcher must use at least three methods of investigation in order to achieve triangulation. The three methods of investigation that I used in the research are: a survey of students through the use of questionnaires; interviews of students utilizing a focus group and journals; autobiographical reflections in a journal. Using three methods of investigation gives me three ways to check that my deductions are well founded. Triangulation also helps to identify any discrepancies and contradictions in research.

By using a variety of methods for action research, a researcher also has the advantage of getting different points of view and perspectives. A range of views and perspectives may be integral to what the action researcher is pursuing in her research. For example, the students in the focus group provided a variety of perspectives on the various questions that they discussed. If I had relied solely on my own journal, I would not have attained first hand experiences, feelings and suggestions from the students. Hence, triangulation provides a more rounded investigation of the research questions.

### The Student Questionnaires

In May 1998 and May 1999, student questionnaires were administered to students in grades eleven and twelve. The purpose of the questionnaires was to identify barriers to completing the program, as well as to find out why students do not

qualify for the CFP. (Refer to Appendix A for an example of the student questionnaires.) The other research questions were not asked in the student questionnaires because the initial questionnaires were produced and distributed at an early stage in the research. Therefore, the other questions had not yet been formulated. Also, the other questions could be addressed through the student focus group and my own journal. We chose to keep the purpose of the second round of student questionnaires in 1999 the same as the 1998 questionnaires in order to see if there was a difference in the results. As well, student responses to the open ended questions on the questionnaires provided information for some of the other research questions.

The questionnaires were distributed to students in their CAPP classes by their CAPP teachers. Prior to their distribution, the procedures and time period for the distribution of the questionnaires were explained to teachers at May staff meetings. At the staff meetings, Carla and I explained the purpose of the questionnaire (to identify barriers to completion of the CFP) and explained the instruction sheet that was given to teachers with the student questionnaires.

Teachers administered the questionnaires to their classes during a one week period and identified students who were absent when the questionnaires were given. The absentee sheet and all completed questionnaires were then returned to Carla's and my mailboxes. This is a normal procedure in the school which made it easy for staff to administer the questionnaires and return them when finished. Although we had the list of students who were absent, Carla and I did not attempt to find and get responses from students who had not done the questionnaire. We did not worry about absent students because the response rate was high and provided a good representation of the grades eleven and twelve student populations at Seaquam.

The questionnaires included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The first question asked students if they qualified for the CPP. Those that answered yes went on to the next page and were asked in a second question if they had completed the program (grade twelve students) or if they chose the courses needed for CPP for the following school year (grade eleven students). If students again answered yes, they went to a final question where they were asked an open ended question encouraging them to make suggestions to the facilitators for making completion of the CPP easier for students.

Students who answered no to the first question, and therefore, did not qualify for the CPP, were then asked to select from a list of reasons why they did not qualify. A section was also included where students could list their own reasons for not qualifying for the CPP if they did not appear on the questionnaire. Finally, they were asked an open ended question which encouraged them to make suggestions for making completion of the CPP easier for students. Students who qualified for the program in grade eleven and then did not sign up for the necessary courses for grade twelve, were asked to select from a list why they did not take the courses needed. They also could list their own reasons if they did not appear on the questionnaire.

Grade twelve students had a similar questionnaire, however, the second question asked whether they completed the required courses for the CPP in grade twelve, as well as, completed the 100 hours of work experience needed for the program. Care was taken to make the instructions on the questionnaires as clear as possible. Also, the choices given for the closed-ended questions were worded carefully to ensure that they did not include two reasons, which would skew the results and confuse the participants when filling in the questionnaire.

As suggested by Palys (1997), if Carla and I had administered the questionnaires to students ourselves, we would have achieved high response rates and the chance to clarify ambiguities or misunderstandings, and to monitor the conditions of completion. However, it was less disruptive to the regular routine of the school to administer the questionnaires during the CAPP class where students are regularly asked to give feedback through surveys and informal discussions.

#### The Student Focus Group and Journals

A focus group is a representative group, led by a facilitator, focusing on key issues or questions in a structured or open discussion. Focus groups are used to discuss attitudes, beliefs, opinions, ideas, experiences, needs, and intentions (Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights, 1992). We chose to have a student focus group consisting of grade twelve students who represent a cross section of the CPPs and who personally represent a variety of our target population. The target population for our research was students in grades eleven and twelve at Seaquam Secondary School. The students are both male and female and represent various ethnic backgrounds. Although many of the students are Caucasian, there is representation from Indo-Canadian, Korean, Taiwanese, and other ethnic backgrounds. The socio-economic status of students ranges from middle-class to upper-middle class. The majority of the students' parents are in business and professional occupations.

We chose to target grade twelve students for participation in the focus group because they would be completing the program during the 1998-1999 school year. In order to get a representative group of students, we asked for volunteers to indicate their interest on the grade twelve CPP registration form. The registration form is filled out by all students in grades eleven and twelve who qualify for the CPP in September

of each school year. During September, Carla and I speak to all grades eleven and twelve English classes to remind students about the program, answer their questions, and register students who qualify for the program. We are required to register the names and programs of all students who qualify, to the Ministry of Education early in the fall. Carla and I submit the names of the students who qualify for the program to the Delta School Board by a September 30 deadline. The student names are then submitted to the Ministry by the Delta School Board.

In the registration form for the CPP that students filled out in September 1998, we had added a section where students could volunteer to be a part of the focus group. We explained to students that we were doing research to improve the CPP and that the focus group would meet at lunch, once a month, from January to June of 1999. As an incentive to students to participate in the focus group, we allowed twenty hours of work experience credit that students could use towards the 100 hours needed to complete the work experience component of the program. Incentives are suggested as a way to encourage participation in focus groups, which are a time-consuming activity for participants. Monetary compensation is a commonly used method (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). We chose to compensate the student participants with the twenty hour credit because time is a scarce commodity for students during their grade twelve year. Feedback from the focus group students indicated that they appreciated being compensated with the twenty hour work experience credit.

In order to facilitate discussion, we allowed a maximum of only fifteen students in the focus group. Although more than fifteen students initially indicated an interest in volunteering for the focus group in September, by the time of the first meeting in January of 1999, only fifteen of the students were available to attend. This number worked out very well for us. The literature suggests that six to twelve people

participate in a focus group in order to generate discussion but still allow all members to participate actively. It is also suggested that more participants are recruited than are needed to allow for those who choose to drop out of the group (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Therefore, using a group of fifteen participants allowed for students who did not attend the meetings and still kept the number of participants in the suggested range to facilitate participation and discussion.

Three male students and twelve female students formed the focus group. Nine students were Asian, one Filipino, one Spanish, and four were Caucasian. The students were from a variety of CPP programs which included: three computer science; five science; three film and video; two accounting; one theatre; and one sports and recreation. Even though there are 22 different CPPs at Seaquam the number of students in each program varies from year to year. In any given year, many of the programs have only a few students in them or sometimes none at all. Although not all of the 22 different CPP areas were represented, Carla and I were pleased with the variety of students who participated in the focus group. The large number of students from the Science Careers CPP reflects the registration numbers for our largest program which is Science Careers. The higher ratio of female students to male students, parallels the higher number of female students who participate in and complete the CPP. Also, the large number of Asian students reflects the change over the past few years at our school. At Seaquam, there is an increasing enrollment of Asian students and these students represent a large number of the students who participate in and complete the CPP.

As part of the focus group experience, students were asked to keep a journal. This journal replaced the brief journal that students are normally required to complete as part of the CPP course credit. At each of the meetings, students were given a list of

key questions which they were asked to answer for the following meeting. (See Appendix B for a list of the journal questions from the monthly focus group meetings.) The questions progressed chronologically and began with questions that inquired into how students heard about the CPP and why they decided to participate in the CPP. Other questions included: information about the CPP courses they took; which people helped them during the program; what they did at the work placement; suggestions for improving the program. There were forty-three questions in total.

At each meeting, students were asked to share their answers to each of the questions. We tried to create an informal and non-threatening environment so that students would feel comfortable expressing their viewpoints. An official ethics approval form was used prior to participation in the focus group to get both parent and student permission. Students were assured that the comments they expressed in the meetings would be kept confidential, and that student names would not be used in the thesis. Student journals would be returned directly to students at the completion of the research.

The focus group meetings took place in a business education classroom beside the CPP office in the school. We provided beverages and snacks and encouraged students to bring their lunches. Morgan (1998) suggests that supplying food is an important way to ensure that focus group participants feel welcome and comfortable. Carla and I sat with the students at a large rectangular table so that we all had equal status as a group. Morgan (1998) also recommends using a rectangular table for facilitating focus group discussions because the shape makes members feel they are an equal part of the group. Choosing a convenient and safe site is also suggested to encourage the focus group members to attend without being inconvenienced. In order to make ourselves more approachable and to put the focus group participants at ease,

Carla and I gave personal examples and expressed our own experiences in our respective career paths.

The advantage to using a focus group for research is that focus groups are relatively easy to conduct. Also, the environment and one-on-one contact allows the researcher to collect data on topics of interest and to control the discussion if it is off topic. Using focus groups with surveys allows the researcher to get better clarification of the questions asked in the survey (Morgan, 1998). The student focus group allowed Carla and I to probe more deeply into the research questions.

At each of the focus group meetings, my role was the moderator, and Carla recorded the meeting minutes. As the moderator, I facilitated discussion of each of the questions that were given to the students at the previous meeting. Students had one month between meetings to answer the questions in their journals and to be prepared to discuss their answers with the group at the following meeting. In the literature, a single moderator is considered preferable for purposes of comparability. Also, various levels of moderator involvement are examined with low levels of involvement considered to be detrimental. Low levels of moderator involvement can lead to relatively disorganized focus groups. High levels of moderator involvement keeps the group on task and limits the amount of unproductive discussion (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). I acted as the moderator for all of our focus group meetings in order to keep a consistent format to the meetings and to allow greater comparability between the questions. Also, I maintained a high level of involvement in order to keep our discussions focused and to ensure that all students participated as equally as possible in the meetings.

There are a number of personal traits of good moderators. These personal traits include: genuine interest in hearing other people's thoughts and feelings; being able



to express feelings and be flexible; being animated and spontaneous with a sense of humour; a sense of empathy and the ability to admit personal biases; having insight about people; being able to express thoughts clearly (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). I believe that I incorporated a lot of the traits into my role as the focus group moderator. It was imperative that I made the students feel comfortable and created an open environment for discussion. I made sure that all group members listened when individual students were speaking. I also incorporated active listening skills to ensure that I understood what each student said and to show each student that I was truly listening to them and valued what they were saying.

There was some attrition in the number of students who participated in the focus group. One male student signed up but did not attend any of the meetings. The reason that he did not attend is that he was unsure if he would be able to complete the CPP. The same athletic commitments and time restraints that prevented him from doing his work experience hours also restricted his ability to attend the meetings. He did eventually complete his work experience hours when I found a more flexible placement for him. In fact, he ended up being hired by the employer for a paid part-time job. Two other female students stopped attending meetings towards the end of the school year. One of the female students was in a car accident and could only attend school sporadically due to her physical injuries. The other student changed her mind about the career area that she was doing her program in and therefore chose to drop the program and stop attending the focus group meetings.

Although some of the students dropped out of the focus group when they decided not to finish the CPP, most of the students stayed with the focus group and appeared to enjoy participating in the monthly meetings. The students participated enthusiastically and seemed to welcome the opportunity to give us feedback. Most

students attended every meeting. When I began reading the students' journals after they were handed in at the June 1999 meeting, I found that the journals more or less reflected what students had shared during the meetings. The journals did contain more details and descriptions than students were able to share in a lunch time meeting. However, the content of the journals showed that students had been open and honest while participating in the group situation. However, I can only make this conclusion if the students were open and honest about what they wrote in their journals.

A positive aspect about the dynamics of the student focus group was that students were not afraid to disagree with one another. For example, if most of the students were positive about a question being discussed and only one or two were negative, those that disagreed were eager to let us know their point of view. I have found in my teaching practice that if students feel they are in a safe and supportive environment, they are willing and enthusiastic to share their ideas and opinions. I believe that students really appreciate being heard and often do not get the opportunity to express themselves. We did remind students that what we discussed as a group was private and that they had no obligation to share anything that they did not feel comfortable about.

The students in the group were quite mature and self-confident. I do not think that their opinions were swayed by the other students in the group. Sometimes as a facilitator I needed to probe students further before I got their full answer. Overall, I was very pleased with the participation of the group of students who volunteered to be in the focus group.

#### My Journal

The final part of the triangulation of the research is my own journal. I began to write a journal through my participation in the TRIP. Journals are self-reports that

include personal writing on topics of interest, records, and reflections of experiences. They are used to express ideas, opinions, impressions, attitudes, understanding, self-knowledge, intentions, and needs (Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights, 1992). From January 1998 to June 1999, I used my journal to keep a record of the activities related to the CPP that I participated in. I also wrote my reflections on interventions that I used with students in the CPP and my philosophy about student participation in Career Programs.

The journal helps me to take a more critical look at my practice in Career Programs. The journal also helps me to question and reflect on the purposes of Career Programs for high school students. Keeping a journal is useful because it helps me to organize my thoughts. The journal also gives me an opportunity to look back at how my questions have changed and evolved throughout the research period. The journal is a useful tool for organizing the chronology of the research in preparation for publication of the research and the results.

#### Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Qualitative methods of research usually take the form of narratives, descriptions, interpretations or logical constructions. The data is collected through methods such as interviews, observations, journals, or case studies (Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights, 1992). Quantitative approaches emphasize numerical precision and use a variety of methods such as tests and surveys (Palys, 1997).

The research used was both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative aspect of the research was the student focus group, including their journals, and my own journal. The quantitative aspects of the research were the grades eleven and twelve questionnaires. The quantitative part of the research pinpointed the barriers to

completion. The qualitative aspect of the research established some themes and personal experience regarding students and their participation in the Career Preparation Program. These themes can be used to improve completion of the program, as well as, to identify ways to meet the needs of individual students who participate in the program.

Quantitative research can be both valid and reliable. Validity refers to whether the researcher feels that the research measures what she thinks is being measured. Reliability refers to the degree that the observed phenomenon would yield similar results if observed at different times or by different observers (Palys, 1997). There was a degree of validity and reliability in the research that I did, however the research was not sophisticated enough for me to claim that I achieved either to any great extent.

The student questionnaires specifically asked questions about barriers to completion of the CPP. The questionnaires also allowed students to list any other barriers they encountered for completing the program. The questionnaires were an attempt to measure the reasons why students did not complete the CPP and therefore could be considered somewhat valid. The questionnaires were also somewhat reliable because a large number of students in both grades eleven and twelve over a two year period responded. The sample size was all students in grades eleven and twelve except those who were absent the day of the questionnaires or were not enrolled in the classes surveyed. Therefore, I believe that the sample was representative of the student population in grades eleven and twelve. However, a high degree of validity and reliability were not necessary for the purpose of my study. I do however feel confident that the questionnaires were a sound method for collecting the data that I set out to acquire. The focus of the qualitative aspect of the research was on the lived experience of the students. It was an examination of personal experience that adds depth to the quantitative component of the research.

### Ethical Procedures

In order to conduct the research, I received permission from the principal of Seaquam Secondary School, the Delta School Board, UBC, the focus group students, and their parents. I accomplished this by submitting an ethical review to UBC that required permission from the Delta School District as well as informed consent forms from the focus group students and their parents. Permission from the principal at Seaquam Secondary School and the Delta School District was received by completing a district permission form that included information about my proposed research, a signature of approval from my principal, and proof of UBC approval.

The procedure that I followed to obtain ethical approval is similar to guidelines suggested in the literature. McNiff et al. (1996) suggest a checklist that includes: negotiating access and promising confidentiality; ensuring participants rights to withdraw from the research; keeping others informed; maintaining your own intellectual property rights. By communicating the purpose of my research to all parties involved, allowing students to withdraw from the research at their discretion, and obtaining written permission from the parties involved, I believe that I followed the suggested guidelines to ensure an ethical process in my research.

Although the questionnaires were anonymous, students in grades eleven and twelve were instructed that the questionnaires were optional and they could choose whether or not to complete the questionnaire. Also, students in the focus group were told they could discontinue their participation in the group at any time. A small number of students did choose to discontinue their participation in the focus group for individual reasons.

### Timeline of the Research

The research began with the formulation of the initial question in March of 1998. The collection of data ended in June of 1999 with the completion of the last student focus group meeting. Finally, the first cycle of the research is complete with the defense of the thesis in September of 1999. (See Table 3.)

### The Action Research Cycle

Action research follows a cyclical pattern. This pattern is called the action research cycle. Although different researchers use various models for the cycle, a common model follows the cycle of: plan; act; observe; reflect. Often, the research continues into a spiral of cycles. In the second cycle, the researcher revises the plan, then acts, observes, and reflects (Zuber-Skerrit, 1996). Planning is the result of discovering that there is a problem or a question that needs to be investigated. The researcher plans how she will investigate her question. Acting is the action that the researcher takes to alleviate the problem or investigate the question. What the researcher chooses to do may not solve the problem. Observing is the process of the researcher overseeing her actions. Reflecting is the final phase of the cycle where the researcher looks back on her actions to see if they successfully addressed her question. The second cycle begins with a new plan of action based on what needs to be improved from the first cycle of research. The cycles have the potential to continue indefinitely (McNiff et al., 1996). The reason the cycles can continue is the project focus can change and the area of enquiry can expand.

McNiff et al. (1996) list nine points that describe the basic action research cycle. The action research cycle usually proceeds in the following series of stages. First, the researcher reviews her current practice and identifies an aspect of her

Table 3. Timeline of the Research from March 1998 to September 1999

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<u>TASK:</u>	<u>TIMING:</u>
<u>Preparation</u>	
Identification of research question	March 25, 1998
Research proposal	August-September 1998
Ethics (UBC and Delta School District)	September-October 1998
<u>Resourcing</u>	
Budget drawn up and request funding	September-October 1998
<u>Working with other people</u>	
Validating group	February 1998-June 1999
Critical friend	February 1998-June 1999
Advisor	July 1998-August 1999
Participants	May 1998-June 1999
Discussions with principal and school district	September-October 1998
<u>Doing the project</u>	
Identification of concern	March 1998
Production of statement	August-September 1998
Gathering of evidence (questionnaires, focus group, journal)	May 1998-June 1999
Identification of indicators	May 1998-June 1999
Imagined solutions	May 1998-June 1999
Implementing solutions (ongoing)	May 1998-June-1999
<u>Production of report</u>	
(claim to knowledge)	June 1999-September 1999
<u>Evaluation of project</u>	
(thesis defense)	September 1999

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practice that she would like to improve. Next, she imagines a way forward and tries it out taking stock of what happens. If she finds that there is still room to improve, she then modifies her plans and continues with the action. She must again monitor what she is doing and then modify her plan until she is satisfied with that aspect of her work. As illustrated by the previous example, action research can continue to proceed into a series of different cycles.

The first cycle of my research includes the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that I have done between March 1998 and August 1999. The second cycle of my research is beginning in September of 1999, as I start planning for the 1999-2000 school year.

### The First Cycle of Research

The first cycle of research began when I identified the research problem. (See Table 4.) The formulation of the problem for the research and the plan for how to alleviate the problem began in the 1996-1997 school year. Although I formulated the initial question in March of 1998, the problem and the question began to emerge as early as the 1996-1997 school year. 1996-1997 is the first year that Carla and I became the CPP facilitators in our school. During the first year we realized that a number of students were not completing the CPP. Of those students who qualified and registered for the program in September, not all students came to our information meeting in the fall. Not all of the students who came to the information meeting booked a follow up interview. The follow-up interview is a one-on-one interview between the student and a facilitator. The purpose of the follow up interview is to give individual assistance to students by determining their interests and needs for the CPP. When we began to interview students on an individual basis, many changed their minds about the program and discontinued their participation. Of those who stayed in



Table 4. The First Cycle of Research

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**1. PLAN**

Use questionnaires for grades eleven and twelve students to identify barriers to completing the CPP. (May 1998 and 1999)

Start students on work experience earlier by encouraging grades ten through twelve students to begin their work experience in the summer. (Summer of 1998 and 1999)

Increase communication with students, staff, parents, and the community to increase support of the CPP. (September 1998 - June 1999)

Establish a student focus group to identify barriers to completing the CPP and themes and experiences of participating in the CPP. (January 1999 - June 1999)

**2. ACT**

Placed fifteen grades ten and eleven students on work experience in the Summer. (1998)

Communicated the benefits of an early start to work experience to grades eleven and twelve students during Fall registration. (September 1998)

Identified volunteers for student focus group (September 1998) and conducted focus group meetings. (January 1999 - June 1999)

Held a student career fair to raise awareness of career opportunities and allow students to interact with and question employers who sponsor volunteer work experience. (October 1998)

During visits to classes for course planning, encouraged grades ten and eleven students to begin their work experience in the Summer of 1999. (March 1999)

Placed thirty students in grades nine through eleven on work experience for the Summer. (1999)

**4. REFLECT**

Did the number of students who completed the program in 1998-1999 increase from the previous school year? What can be done to increase completion for the 1999-2000 school year?

What interventions can I make as a facilitator to increase the successful completion of the CPP for individual students in 1999-2000?

**3. OBSERVE**

Worked with individual students in the CPP and noted and addressed any problems they had while trying to complete the program.

Worked with students in the focus group to discover barriers, themes and experiences they had while doing the program.

Focused on the interventions to remove barriers and to see if the barriers were being addressed or eliminated for students.

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(Continue to repeat cycle with changes made based on observation and reflection.)

the program, a number of students did not complete the necessary number of volunteer work experience hours in order to get credit for the program.

#### The Problem of Students Not Completing the Career Preparation Program

In our first year of the program, it was obvious that there were problems with having students complete the program. While discussing these problems between ourselves and with our students, Carla and I decided that we had started placing students in work experience placements too late in the school year. We did not actually start placing most of our students in our first year until January, 1998. Our predecessor made most of her placements in the spring. Therefore we thought we were giving our students ample time to finish their volunteer work experience. However, students became bogged down with their course work and exams, and many started to look for paid work as their financial needs increased with impending graduation.

Placing students on work experience late in the year no longer worked for our students. One of the reasons that a late start no longer worked for students is that the number of academic students who do the CPP is growing. The majority of our CPP students are academic students who qualify for the Science Careers program. Academic students are under a lot of pressure from the demands placed on them in their regular courses and they are not willing to miss class time to do the work experience. This is also true for the students in the less academic CPPs who in the past did not feel the same pressure that they do now about missing class time. This pressure can be attributed to an overall increase in the expectations for students in our school, which has always had a reputation for high standards and rigorous academic programs.

### 1997-1998 Interventions to Increase Student Completion of the CPP

Our plan for the 1997-1998 school year was to alleviate some of the problems students had for not completing the CPP. When we visited English eleven and twelve classes in September of 1997, we made a point of communicating to students the importance of deciding when they would be able to do their work experience in the school year. What would fit their personal schedule? Could they afford to miss school or would they have to do their work on evenings and weekends? Next, we reinforced the importance of getting a head start on their work experience at the CPP group meeting that is held a week after we register the students for the September 30 deadline. We encouraged students to book their individual meetings with us quickly. The more quickly we started meeting with students, the sooner we could help them to plan their work experience. We made an effort to keep better track of how students were doing in their placements. Were they enjoying their experience? How many hours had they worked? Did they think that they needed another placement in order to complete their hours by June of 1998?

I am responsible for placing the Science Careers students who make up the largest CPP in our school. Many of these students volunteer at hospitals where they are scheduled to work only for two hours a week. They are also limited to the type of experience that they get at the hospital, and most end up working in long term care with elderly people. In order to give students a more rounded experience and to expose them to other areas in the medical field, I often find one or two other placements for them. For example, I will have a student do a job shadow with an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist. This presents a challenge both to me and the students. It is difficult to get placements in the medical field, and the number of hours that the students can get in each placement is also limited. The need for more than one

placement and the limited number of hours students can get in a week, extends the length of time each student needs to complete the program. Multiple placements for each students also increases my workload as a CFP Facilitator.

In February 1998, I joined the Teacher Research Inquiry Project (TRIP). Carla joined the TRIP at the second meeting in March 1998, at which time we formulated the initial action-research-question.. In May 1998, I began interviewing our grades ten and eleven students in order to place some of them in work placements during the summer. Although students in grade ten had not started the career related courses that they would begin in grade eleven, if students knew their area of career interest the initial work experience in the summer would begin their journey of career exploration. The summer placement alleviated a few problems. First, students could work regular Monday to Friday, 9-5 hours, without missing school. Second, students could finish or complete part of their work experience hours before they began their grade twelve year. Grade twelve is the most time consuming and demanding school year for our students, and students often drop the CFP during grade twelve if they become too busy in other areas of their lives.

By June 1998, some of our grade twelve students did not have enough hours to complete the program. We allowed these students some flexibility by letting them finish the hours during the summer. We did this with students who were in steady placements and had accumulated approximately 80 or more hours by June of 1998. These students were committed to the program and had a placement, but just needed more time in order to finish. They were required to turn in all of their paperwork including the employer's evaluation by the end of June, and then submit their log sheet when they had completed their hours. The time extension worked out very well and

alleviated some of the intense pressure that these students were feeling in June due to exams and graduation activities.

During the summer of 1998, I kept in touch with the students and their employers in order to make sure that their placements were going smoothly. By September 1998, a number of the grades ten and eleven students who did work experience during the summer, were either finished or close to completing their work experience hours. Labour Day fell a week into September, giving Carla and I one week less to complete the registration visits to our grades eleven and twelve English classes. We met with the students on September 24 for the CPP group meeting. Thereafter, we immediately began meeting with students on an individual basis. We encouraged grade eleven students to attend the group meeting which we previously held only for grade twelve students.

#### 1998-1999 Interventions to Increase Student Completion of the CPP

We increased our efforts during the 1998-1999 school year to improve the intensity of communication with our students. The increased communication assisted students while they were completing their work experience hours. During our September 1998 classroom visits, we encouraged grades ten and eleven students who wanted to begin their work experience in the summer of 1999 to see us by May of 1999. We also encouraged all students to begin making decisions about where they would like to work and when they would like to get started. We let students know which employers were willing to take our students for the 1998-1999 school year.

In spring of 1998, our principal, who has since retired, was approached by the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC is a group of parents who have children in our school and meet on a regular basis to advise the school administration on various issues. The parents wanted to have a career fair in 1998-1999. They felt our students

did not have enough exposure to the types of career possibilities available in the real world. The principal asked the parents to meet with Carla and I so that we could collaborate with them on the career fair. We agreed with the stipulation that we would combine the career fair with our mandatory Career Advisory Committee meeting. The Career Advisory Committee meeting is where people from the business community that sponsor our students on work experience meet with the CPP students and their parents to answer students' questions about various careers, work experience opportunities, and many other career related topics. The meeting is usually held for our CPP students in October of each school year.

On September 22, 1998, Carla and I met with our new principal and members of the PAC career fair sub-committee to finalize plans for the career fair. The career fair took place on October 28, 1998. There was a keynote speaker who gave a presentation on the projected demographic environment for careers in the future. The presentation also predicted which jobs would be obsolete and which would be in demand when our students graduated. There were booths where a variety of business and professional people gave information about various careers and were available to answer our students' questions about their area of expertise. Delta Cable videotaped the fair and the booths were very popular with students who displayed a high level of interaction with the employers at the booths.

There were also sessions that grades eleven and twelve students attended with panels of business and professional people from fourteen different career categories. At the sessions, students had an opportunity to ask questions and speakers talked about opportunities in their career areas. As well, the speakers talked about their own career paths. Many of the speakers we invited sponsor our students for work experience and answered questions specific to the work experience placements. Carla and I

announced the career fair during our visits to the English classes, our CPP group meeting, and at our staff professional day in September of 1998. The career fair helped to increase support to our students who participate in the CPP, by raising awareness of the program with our parents, staff, and the business community.

I continued to be diligent about communicating with the CPP students and following up on their placements and progress in the program. From January through June 1999, Carla and I held monthly meetings with students in the focus group. The meetings helped us to identify problems students might be having with completing the program. The focus group questions also gave a broader perspective on the student's individual experiences in the CPP.

In March, Carla and I visited grades ten and eleven classes to promote the CPP. At the visits, we answered students' questions about the program. March was an important time to communicate the CPP to students because they would soon be choosing their courses for the following school year. We encouraged students to meet with us soon after our class visits if they were interested in doing work experience in the summer of 1999.

During the spring, I did a major recruiting of the business community to get potential placements for our students. I also created a CPP bulletin board in a well-traveled area of the school near our office. On the bulletin board, I posted volunteer work experience opportunities. We increased our communication of volunteer job opportunities utilizing a variety of methods. We posted volunteer job opportunities in the school announcements. I sent memos to students in particular programs about volunteer job opportunities they might be interested in pursuing. I also targeted the teachers of the students in the CPPs that I facilitate, and I delivered job posting bulletins to them to read to their students.

Our school had video monitors installed in the summer of 1998. Carla was placed in charge of the information on the monitors because she teaches the software that is used to program the monitors. Therefore, it was convenient for us to post volunteer job opportunities on the monitors. (Students fill out an application form when they begin the CPP that indicates their specific area of work experience interest.) I used these applications to identify students for particular volunteer job opportunities as they arose.

Carla and I also utilized the school newsletter to communicate information about the program to students, staff, and parents. We highlighted important information such as deadlines for completing the work experience. Our career advisor, who operates the Career Resource Centre in the school included CPP information in her newsletter for grade twelve students. We continue to establish a supportive and cooperative relationship with the career advisor in order to benefit our students. Many of the students do not know what they want to do or which courses they need for post-secondary education. The career resource centre contains all of the calendars for various post-secondary institutions. There is also software available that enables students to list their interests and aptitudes to determine career areas that may be suited to them.

When appropriate, I included the career advisor in the work that we did with the CPP. If there were meetings or events that I thought she would be interested in, I invited her. Establishing an interactive relationship with the career advisor is important because we can support each other's work which benefits our students. (The students benefit through the open communication which keeps us aware of what is available for students in their career exploration.) I also made an effort to improve communication with classroom teachers in the CPP areas that I facilitate. For example,



I arranged for the coordinator of engineering Co-op programs at UBC to speak at our school to students interested in a career in engineering. I arranged this through our science department head. The UBC engineering Co-op coordinator brought students in the Co-op program with her from various engineering areas. There was a good turn out of students who asked many questions. This event accomplished a number of things for the CPP. First, it increased awareness of the CPP and communication with the science department head and the other science teachers who attended the meeting. Second, it attracted a number of our science students who were able to listen first-hand to the benefits and drawbacks of participating in a Co-op program.

Another intervention I made was to include interested science teachers in various events at Science World. The first event in February of 1999 and was about women in science careers. I invited the female science teachers on staff to attend. This networking session helped to communicate to teachers the importance of career awareness and exploration with students in science programs. The event was a good way to establish communication between myself and the female science teachers about what I do with students and the role that each can play in supporting students in the CPP. In May 1999, Science World had another event which was a networking session for students, teachers, and people in science careers. I invited the members of our science department and science students. The second event also helped to raise awareness of careers in science for both teachers and students. Including science teachers with students at science career events, benefits the CPP by opening up communication and establishing better support for the program.

In May and June of 1999, Carla and I focused our effort on assisting students in grade twelve who were completing the program. We made sure that we met with each student to determine where they were in their program. As well, we asked each

student what assistance we needed to give them in order to complete the program. During these last two months we also put a lot of our energy into placing our grades ten and eleven students on work experience for the summer of 1999. The number of students doing their work experience in the summer increased. Summer is an excellent time for students to do the work experience because they do not have to worry about school work and are available during the day on weekdays when many of the businesses operate. Having students work in the summer does raise issues about supervision. I am required to keep in touch with students and employers during the summer and I must visit the work sites that I have not worked with previously. The issue of Career Preparation Facilitators supervising during the summer while we are on vacation is one that our District is currently addressing. The first cycle of the research ended in the summer of 1999. (See Table 4.)

#### The Second Cycle of Research

In September of 1999, I begin the second cycle of research based on the actions, observations, and reflections from the first cycle of research that I completed in the summer of 1999. I am choosing to continue into a second cycle of research for a number of reasons. One reason is that the number of students who completed the CPP in 1999 did not increase from the two previous years since I began facilitating the program. Although I was able to identify barriers to completion of the CPP, more research is needed to ensure that more students are able to complete the program.

Another reason that I will continue the research is that I have not satisfactorily answered the other five research questions. For example, I have yet to fully explore the question about the stigma of vocational education and how it might affect the participation of students and other people involved in the program. Action research is an ongoing process. I do not feel that all of the research questions have been

thoroughly explored. Therefore, I will continue my research into the 1999-2000 school year.

During the 1999-2000 school year there will be a lot of discussion and input from career practitioners about the proposed changes to Career Programs from the Ministry. It will be an interesting time for me to continue to explore my research questions as the structure of Career Programs is debated and changes are proposed for the future.

#### Limitations of the Research

It would be erroneous for me to assume that the research does not have limitations. I can identify some of the limitations, but I think that a main limitation to any research is the personal experiences and biases of the researcher. Therefore, it may be difficult for me as the researcher to identify limitations caused by my own life experiences and subsequent biases. I collaborated on a majority of the research with my colleague, Carla Rizzardo. Carla and I have worked together for thirteen years. We know each other well and have a collegial working relationship because we share similar work related values. Hence, our research may contain biases that we may have overlooked due to our similar perspectives.

Another limitation is that the research was specific to students at Seaquam Secondary School in the Career Preparation Program. Using similar research methods and questions with other high school students in BC might produce different outcomes based on the variety of student and community demographics throughout the province. Action research really personalizes the research and makes it very specific to the person conducting the research. Action research explores the researcher's own practice. Therefore, the research that I conducted was specific to my own students and teaching circumstances.

The research mainly involved students in grades eleven and twelve. Opening up the scope of the research to include younger students, parents, and employers could give a different perspective on the research questions. The efforts that Carla and I have made in the past three years to promote the CPP may have trickled down to students in lower grades. I have been experiencing an increase in the number of younger students who come to our office to inquire about work experience opportunities. Therefore, the younger students in our school may have a better understanding of the CPP than the students that we conducted the research with. As well, we did not do any research that specifically included parents or employers. Including parents and employers may have given a different outlook on the research questions.

The research is also limited by the methodology used. The surveys were the only research done that included the entire population of students in grades eleven and twelve (although not all students actually were present to fill in the questionnaires). The student surveys only asked questions about CPP completion. Therefore, the other research questions were only addressed through the student focus group and my journal.

The students who participate in the focus group were already quite motivated about the CPP which may have influenced the type of responses they gave to the focus group questions. The focus group acted as an intervention for completion of the program by providing increased support to those students that participated. The increased support and contact with the CPP Facilitators may have influenced the students to respond more positively to the focus group questions. Finally, my journal is heavily influenced by my own beliefs and biases.

## CHAPTER IV

### Presentation of the Data

The results of the student survey, the student focus group and journals, and my journal are all explained in this chapter. The student survey, using questionnaires, addressed the initial research question of how to increase the number of students who complete the CPP. Students were surveyed to find out what barriers or obstacles they encountered that either prevented them from qualifying for the CPP, or if they qualified, prevented them from finishing the CPP. The results of the survey will enable me to make some changes to my teaching practice in order to enable more students to complete the CPP.

The student focus group and journals provided very interesting insights into the individual experiences of students who participate in the CPP. The student focus group and journals address many of the other research questions, especially the question of what constitutes a successful experience for individual students who participate in the CPP. Finally, my own journal provided support for the other research methods and helped to confirm or deny my findings. My journal also helped me to take a broader perspective of the research questions and to discover types of work experience, other than the CPP, where I can provide support to students who have a variety of interests and needs.

#### The Results of the Student Surveys

The purpose of the student questionnaires, administered in May 1998 and May 1999, was to survey students to identify barriers to completing the CPP. The numeric results of the surveys do not yield actual statistics but rather patterns of completion. These patterns help to identify areas where I can eliminate some of the barriers and obstacles that students encounter when they try to qualify for or complete the CPP.

### May 1998 Survey

The results from the May 1998 survey of students in grades eleven and twelve highlight the following: (See Table 5.)

Table 5. Results of the May 1998 Student Survey

Grade Eleven Survey Results	Grade Twelve Survey Results
(117 students completed the questionnaire.)	(106 students completed the questionnaire.)
86 (74%) of the students who filled in the questionnaire qualified for the CPP in 1997-1998.	56 (53%) of the students who filled in the questionnaire qualified for the CPP in 1997-1998.
31 (26%) of the students did not qualify for the CPP.	50 (47%) of the students did not qualify for the CPP.
The main reasons stated for not qualifying were: students were uncertain which career area to prepare for; students did not know what the CPP was; the courses students wanted to take did not fit a CPP area; students did not want to work after school, during summer, or during holidays.	The main reasons stated for not qualifying were: student course loads were too heavy to miss school to do work experience; students' part time jobs take up too much time; students were not interested in doing unpaid work experience.
60 (70%) of the students chose the courses needed to qualify for the CPP program in grade twelve.	17 (30%) of the students who qualified for CPP said that they would be completing the program in grade twelve.
26 (30%) of the students did not choose the courses needed to complete the CPP in grade twelve.	39 (70%) of the students who qualified said they would not complete the CPP.
The main reasons given were: the courses they wanted did not fit into any one of the program areas; students were uncertain what career area they should prepare for; students did not want to work after school, during the summer, or holidays; students' part-time jobs take up too much time; course loads were too heavy to miss school to do work experience; the courses needed to qualify for the CPP did not fit into the student's timetable.	The main reasons given were: they were unable to complete the work experience because they left it too late in the year; they were not able to complete the work experience because their course load was too heavy.

An open-ended question at the bottom of each questionnaire asked students to identify what the CPP facilitators could do to make completion of the CPP easier for students. The most frequently provided responses by students include: students confused CPP with CAPP; students wanted a reduction in the number of work experience hours prescribed (Unfortunately, the number of hours are prescribed by the Ministry and teachers, therefore, cannot change them.); students did not seem to know enough about the program and wanted more communication and clarification about the CPP. (See Appendix C for student responses to the open ended question on the May 1998 and May 1999 questionnaires.)

A number of students in each grade did not complete the questionnaire. One reason was that some students were absent from their CAPP class when the questionnaire was administered. Another reason was that some of the grade twelve students were no longer attending the class that their CAPP class was attached to. CAPP is integrated into regular classes at Seaquam. One block out of the timetable each year is chosen as the block that CAPP is attached to. Time is taken out of silent reading each week during the block to attend to CAPP activities. Therefore, when some of the grade twelve students finished a course early and had written the final exam for the course in April, they were no longer attending the course where they also had CAPP. The discrepancy in the number of students who said they would complete the CPP in grade twelve in 1997-1998 (17 students) and the number of students who actually completed the program in 1997-1998 (35 students), indicates that a number of grade 12 CPP students did not complete the questionnaire.

#### May 1999 Survey

The results from the May 1999 survey of students in grades eleven and twelve highlight the following: (See Table 6.)

Table 6. Results of the May 1999 Student Survey

Grade Eleven Survey Results	Grade Twelve Survey Results
(164 students completed the questionnaire.	(99 students completed the questionnaire.)
118 (72%) of the students who filled in the questionnaire qualified for the CPP.	43 (43%) of the students who filled in the questionnaire qualified for the CPP.
46 (28%) of the students did not qualify for the CPP.	56 (57%) students did not qualify for the CPP.
The main reasons given for not qualifying for the CPP were: they were uncertain which career area to prepare for; the courses they wanted to take did not fit any of the CPP areas; they did not know what the CPP is; they did not want to do unpaid work experience.	The main reasons for not qualifying for the CPP were: the courses they wanted to take did not fit a CPP area; their course load was too heavy to miss school to do work experience; the courses needed to qualify for the CPP did not fit their timetables; their part-time job takes up too much time.
90 (76%) of the students chose the courses needed to qualify for the CPP in grade twelve.	25 (58%) of the students who qualified for the CPP said that they would be completing the program in grade twelve.
28 (24%) of the students did not choose the courses needed to complete the CPP in grade twelve.	18 (42%) of the students who qualified said they would not complete the CPP.
The main reasons given were: they were uncertain what career area to prepare for; the courses they wanted to take did not fit a particular CPP; their course load was too heavy to miss school to do work experience; they did not want to do work experience after school hours, during the summer, Spring Break, or Christmas holidays.	The main reasons given were: they did not attend the October CPP group information meeting; their course load was too heavy; they did not book an individual interview with a CPP facilitator; they were no longer interested in the career area that they qualified for.



### Similarities in Students' Responses to the Surveys

The responses to the May 1998 and May 1999 surveys indicate a number of similarities. The first similarity is that the main reasons given for not qualifying in the program were almost the same for both school years. The number one reason for both years was that students were uncertain which career area to prepare for. Also, many students still did not know what the CPP is, even though we made a concerted effort in the 1998-1999 school year to communicate more clearly what the program is to students. Finally, many students wanted to take courses that did not fit into a CPP.

Each fall, the Ministry requires that school boards submit a list of changes to any of the CPPs in order to receive approval. In the fall of 1997 and 1998, Carla and I made some changes to the courses students could choose from in each of the CPPs. We added new courses being offered at Seaquam and tried to increase the number of courses students could select from in each of the CPPs. However, the course changes do not take effect until the following school year. For example, the changes made in the fall of 1997 would not take effect until the 1998-1999 school year. Giving students greater flexibility in their course selection for each of the CPPs has helped; however, changes still need to be made to CPP course selection in order to enable students to qualify more easily for the CPP.

The second similarity was that more students qualify for the program in grade eleven than in grade twelve. Fewer students qualifying in grade twelve is expected because students must qualify in both grades eleven and twelve for the CPP. Many of the courses needed by grade twelve students for the CPP are only offered once during the entire school year. Courses that are only offered once are called singletons. Singleton courses are difficult for students to fit into their timetable. Often, one singleton will be offered during the same block as another singleton. Therefore,

students can only take one of the singleton courses during the same school year. By their grade twelve year, many courses are singletons, making them difficult to fit into student timetables. Also, students' interests may change which affects the courses they choose for grade twelve and reduces the likelihood that their course selection will qualify them for a CPP.

#### Differences in the Students' Responses to the Surveys

The grade twelve students who qualified but would not complete a CPP gave different reasons in 1998 than they did in 1999. In 1998, students named course scheduling conflicts, paid work conflicts, and uncertainty about career choice as some of the main reasons for not completing the CPP. In 1999, their main reasons for not completing the CPP were: they did not attend the group information meeting in the fall; their course load was too heavy; they did not book an interview with a facilitator; they were no longer interested in the career area they qualified for. One way to account for the change in reasons between 1998 and 1999 is that some of our interventions did work. For example, we had already started placing students on work experience in grades ten and eleven. Therefore, paid work conflicts would be alleviated since students had a longer time period to do the volunteer work experience. Also, scheduling conflicts may have been removed for some students with the changes we made to some of the CPPs to allow greater choice for 1998-1999. Uncertainty about career choice is a more personal issue for students and many factors and people influence student choice. It is doubtful that we had an influence on this barrier, and other forces must be given credit. For example, students may be getting more support from teachers, parents, and employers regarding potential career paths.

### Results of the Open-Ended Question

The open-ended question on all of the questionnaires requested student's suggestions for what the CPP facilitators could do to make completion of the CPP easier for students. In the surveys from both years and both grades, some common responses were given. Suggestions included: reduce the number of hours needed to complete the program; communicate the program more clearly; make the course requirements less restrictive; have more varied job opportunities.

Unfortunately, we do not have the authority to change the number of hours needed. Also, communication is a major problem in our high school for many programs and activities. Although we increased the ways and how often we communicated about the program, communication problems must be addressed as an entire school issue. Communication has been and continues to be an issue at Seaquam in general, not just for the CPP.

The CPP course requirements continue to be restrictive, even though Carla and I make changes to course requirements each fall to enable more students to qualify. However, there are Ministry guidelines that we have no authority to change. The type of job opportunities are restricted by the students' skill level and training. For example, students working in a doctor's office would be given less responsibility than a medical student from a post-secondary institution. However, we make every effort to find new placements for students and to place students in jobs that they choose. Since students stated that we need to provide more varied job opportunities, we need to communicate to our students that we offer a variety of job opportunities and that we also will pursue other employment opportunities depending on the individual interests of students.

### The Results of the Student Focus Group and Journals

Of all of the research methods we used, the focus group meetings were the most informative and enjoyable. Face-to-face interaction with the students allowed us to probe more deeply into what the students were experiencing while participating in the CPP. The support of the group enabled students to speak freely about their likes and dislikes, triumphs and failures. The most provocative insights of the research have come from the focus group discussions and student journals. The questions discussed in the focus group meetings were answered by students in their journals. The following are some common themes found in the journals.

#### More Preparation Required for Job Interviews

One theme that emerged is that students did not feel they were properly prepared for a job interview. We do not teach the CPP as a course. Therefore, we rely on subject teachers, such as CAPP teachers, to conduct interviews with students. One student wrote the following suggestion: "To prepare for an interview, Ms. Dean and Ms. Rizzardo should practice small interviews with us, and ask us questions that would be related to the job placement." In the future, conducting mock interviews with students would better prepare them for their work experience job interview.

Students also felt that it was important to have an interview with the employer before beginning their work placement. One student wrote: "I believe an interview before the work placement is important. An interview not only gives the employers a chance to get a better understanding of the CPP students, but it also gives CPP students an idea of what their job and schedule will be like. Therefore, if there are going to be any problems, the students and the employers can solve the problem before the students start working."

Sometimes students do not have a formal interview with their employer. One student said that there was only a short orientation. She wrote: "That [the orientation] went very well. The people there were very friendly and devoted. In a way, every day was an interview. I meet different directors every time I go to work there. I get the vibe that they are testing our skills, attendance, and personalities. Most of the time I try my best to be myself, work hard, and get involved."

#### Problems Communicating the CPP to Students

Another theme that emerged was the problem with communicating the program effectively to students. Most students felt that announcements were the best method of communicating volunteer job opportunities and other CPP information. However, students also admitted that not all of their subject teachers were consistent about reading the announcements in their classes. One student wrote: "Once students reach grade twelve, some grade twelve teachers always shut down the speaker so some information could never get to the students. I don't think the announcements on the video screen work very well, maybe it does a little bit, but not very much. No one really stops in the hallway and reads the video screen. The best way to get the information across to students is by getting the teachers to read out the announcements in class."

Another student suggests: "It was hard for me to receive information about work experience opportunities through the daily announcements, because often when the announcements were on, the students were talking, so it is extremely hard to hear the information. Also, some teachers did not give us the opportunity to listen to the announcements. The best way of communicating is by having all the daily announcements down on a piece of paper and let the teachers read them out to students. That way, no one will be talking when the announcements are on, and CPP

students will receive their information loud and clear." According to students, the second best mode of communication was the CPP bulletin board that was put up in the spring of 1999. The least effective form of communication was the TV monitors, even though two of the students in our focus group were responsible for posting the announcements on the monitors.

#### More Information Needed about Work Placements

Another theme that emerged was that students felt there should be more background information about the work placements. For example, what were the expectations of students at a particular work site? What would students actually do at the work site? Students suggested that it would be beneficial to have something in writing for them to look at before they chose each placement. They suggested that students who had worked at the site previously could write a brief report about what they did. For example, one student wrote: "The description of the work site was not clear enough. Maybe, make students who have worked at that site before write a description of what the place is like, and then stick the description into the workplace binder." (The student is referring to the CPP Facilitators' binder that has information about each work site.)

Another suggestion was that a representative of the work site could come to the school to discuss the placement with interested students. One student wrote: "I believe having a tour leader take the CPP students around their work site before the CPP students start their work experience would give students a chance to know whether they are prepared and know what they will be expected to do at the work site."

#### Too Much Paperwork

A common theme was that there was too much paperwork. This theme is echoed in the literature, where it is cautioned that work experience should not become

too much of a worksheet type experience. Students realized that paperwork was necessary and admitted that our paperwork was organized and easy to follow. For example, one student wrote: "I didn't have much problem with the paperwork. The work was neatly piled for me, all organized so I wasn't confused with that. All I remember was that there was a lot to sign, and also getting others to sign. Also, having to get like five people to sign one contract. It is sometimes hard to find that person and sometimes I forgot to do so."

The contract that the student is referring to is for Workers' Compensation coverage and legally requires the signatures of a number of people, including the employer, the student, a parent, a union representative (if applicable), and an administrator from the school. Unfortunately, even though Carla and I worked with Delta District staff to change the format of the contract for the 1999-2000 school year, students will still be required to get the same number of signatures.

Students did not like having to remember to hand paperwork in, and some would forget or lose their paperwork. One student wrote: "Normally, the paper work would not have been a problem at all. However, because I volunteered at several different work sites, the paper work just accumulated up on me." The paperwork seemed to detract from the purpose of the work experience of providing students with hands on experience at a career related work site. However, most students realized that the paper work was necessary for the program. As one student wrote: "I think that everything done is necessary and the paper work was not difficult to complete."

#### CPP Facilitators are Doing a Good Job

A theme that was strongly echoed throughout the journals was that students felt the CPP Facilitators were doing a good job. They stated we were very organized and very clear with our expectations. One student wrote: "My placement went very

smoothly. Ms. Rizzardo, who was my facilitator, was very helpful and got me set up very quickly." They also knew that if they came to see us we would help them and answer their questions. Another student wrote: "Ms. Rizzardo and Ms. Dean showed great effort and pride towards putting the students into a career placement that they wanted." Students seemed to feel supported by us, and many mentioned that we were one of their best sources of support while they did the CPP. The positive comments about our work with students is encouraging.

#### Problems Matching Work Experience to Students' Interests

Another theme was that there needs to be more variety in the types of volunteer job opportunities available to students. Students realized they would not have the opportunity to do high-skill level work due to their limited education and training. However, some of the programs have limited opportunities for students. One student wrote: "There weren't many software companies willing to take high school students because of the fast paced nature of the business. Everyone is almost always working to a deadline and would not have time to look after a student."

One student admitted that she could have put more effort into finding a suitable placement for herself in her area of interest. The job placement is a team effort between the CPP Facilitator and the student. Also, subject teachers, parents, and others can be involved through the students' own network. It is crucial that students get the best job placement for their interests in order to give them the most valid work experience placement. However, if this is not possible, students still gain valuable insights simply from being in a work setting.

One student who experienced problems matching the CPP she qualified for with the career area that she was actually interested in wrote: "I just think that Career Preparation should be a tool for career exploration. Many of us have no specific career



path that we want to follow. If we could do work in different areas, it would be better. Since most of us take science and some other courses (e.g. business), we should be able to do jobs in both areas. This is because the courses we take in school are of no significant importance to the work we do." Personally, I agree with this student. If I have a student who qualifies for one CPP but has an interest in another, I will place the student in two different work sites so that the student can explore both career areas. Unfortunately, although I worked closely with the student quoted above, her busy schedule prevented her from taking advantage of opportunities for an accounting placement which she wanted.

#### The CPP Helped Students to Make Career Decisions

Overall, students felt that the CPP was a good program and that all students should participate. One student wrote: "The CPP is a unique program for any students in grades ten and above. It is an opportunity for students to experience what the field that they are interested in is like and the obstacles that they might have to face." The program helped students to facilitate their decision making about possible career paths. Another student wrote: "The CPP re-assured me about my decision to enter the medical field when I am older."

Even when students decided against the career that they did their work experience in, they felt the experience helped to clarify their decision. Another student wrote: "After finishing the CPP, I changed my mind about my career. In the future, I have decided that I will pursue a career in commerce instead of in science." When students enjoyed the work experience they became more focused about their future career path. One caution about my research findings is that the students who finish the CPP probably had more vocational maturity than other students in the

school. Whether all students would benefit from the program and get the same type of experience as the students in the focus group is uncertain.

### Personal Experiences of Students

Perhaps the most interesting insights from the focus group came from the individual experiences of the students. Each student had their own personal experiences in the program, and what follows is an account of some of their experiences.

One student worked at a hospital for elderly patients who have some degree of dementia. Throughout her journal, she spoke of feeling sad and having to deal with patients who were upset. She wrote: "Sometimes the patients recall their memories and most of the memories are sad. It causes me to be so upset, just like the patients." She said that she often turned to the hospital staff for support and guidance when she felt ill at ease with a situation. For example, she wrote: "I got support during my work experience especially from my supervisor. She always helps me if I have a problem or get a terrible feeling during work time. I can talk to her. She really gives me a big amount of support."

Another student who worked at the same hospital stated: "I now understand that to be involved in the medical field you must be caring and patient." This same student spoke about her realization at length at one of our focus group meetings. I felt that her experience at the hospital had been somewhat transformative for her. She was very thoughtful and reflective as she spoke about the needs of the patients, her personal experiences, and the change in her awareness about working with people in the medical field. When asked what the highlight of the CPP had been, the same student wrote: "The highlight of my CPP experience was when we passed a balloon around with some of the residents who were all happy."

Another student had a very inspirational experience at the work site. She is studying to be an animator and worked at an animation studio. Her skill level enabled her to do hands on computer animation work. The staff was very impressed with her work. She wrote: "I was given enough support during my work experience because everyone saw my potential and told me to continue my drawing skills." It was evident in her journal and in her discussions in our focus group that the experience showcased her potential and helped her to gain self-esteem about her abilities in her chosen field. She listed three of her subject teachers as influential to her career choice: "They all influenced my decision to become an animator because they knew I had the potential and they taught and helped me to improve my work." The findings in the Ministry's Summary Report document also suggest that the role of the subject teacher is key to students having a successful experience in their work placement.

One student wrote at length about the problems she had selecting the courses needed to qualify for the CPP that she was interested in. She felt that her high school counsellor did not give her enough information about course selection and the CPP. Her work placements echoed this conflict. She went to two different sites and did not have very positive experiences at either of them. She wrote that at one site: "The staff had conflicts...kind of scary!" The atmosphere of the work site made her feel uncomfortable. At the same site, she said that there was no attempt to show appreciation for the volunteers. She wrote: "[Employer] has no appreciation for the volunteers. No thank-you letters, no cookies, no drinks, NOTHING!"

At the second site she worked at, the same student wrote: "Nobody knows anything about the CPP. It took me so long to locate a coordinator who knew only a tiny bit about it." In some cases, the supervisor who was initially contacted by the facilitator, is not the person who actually supervises the student. In fact, sometimes the

supervisor changes each time the students goes to the work placement. The change in supervision can lead to problems for the student. This particular student is very bright and has excellent interpersonal skills. Therefore, I believe that her account of her experiences is accurate and reflects some of the difficulties students encounter at the work sites.

Another student stated that the subject teacher in his career area did not give any support or information about careers. He wrote: "[Teacher] never gives us any insight into the field. All he ever does is give us notes on [subject]. I made my decision to pursue this field based on my own interest and then I found the CPP to help me to get a better knowledge of this field and it [CPP] does pretty well." This student's experience contradicts the Ministry's claim that subject teachers are key to successful work experience placements. However, it is evident that someone from the school must be supporting the student during his program. In spite of the lack of career awareness in his class, he enjoyed his work experience, felt the facilitators did an excellent job of helping him in the program, and he plans to continue to pursue a career in the CPP field he chose.

The same student who did not receive support from his subject teacher credits his mother for pushing him to go to the work placement. He wrote: "My mom gave me the most support during the CPP because sometimes I just didn't feel like going to the workplace and my mom always forced me to go. I have to thank her that I completed my hours." He wrote that the highlight of his work experience was: "Cake time! It was someone's birthday and someone brought a cake to celebrate. It was really heart-warming to see that people on the job remember each other's birthday!" I think sometimes even as teachers we forget that little things such as remembering something about a student makes all the difference to them.

The same student, when asked why he decided to do the CPP, wrote: "I decided to do the CPP when I was in grade eleven because I wanted to know what I'm going to be doing in the field. What's the workload? What kinds of things are associated with it? How's the pay? What kind of people will I meet?" His last comment about the kind of people he will meet shows that work is not just about what you do, but who you do it with. One student worked with elementary school children at Saturday morning workshops. She observed that the low point in her work experience was: "...when some children did not show up to the reading workshop because I was expecting to see every one of them every Saturday morning." Her observation is very humane and personal. The observation shows the importance of the people that we work with and the meaning that they give to our workplace experience.

The same student was very inspired by her high school psychology teacher and is planning to pursue a career in the social sciences. She wrote: "My psychology teacher influenced my decision about my career path. Before I took psychology, I wasn't sure of what I wanted to be. However, after all of the effort and enthusiasm that [Teacher] put into her classes, I have made my decision." The CPP also helped to confirm her decision. She wrote: "After doing the CPP, I have decided that I'm going to pursue the fields of psychology and education. Before the CPP, I was thinking of going into medicine."

In her final reflections about the program the same student wrote: "The CPP is an excellent program. I encourage future students to start this program when they are in grade ten. I love this program because I learned a lot of things from it, and I have met a lot of different people which has helped me to grow up a little." Her work experience showed her how to take on responsibilities and demonstrate leadership.

She wrote: "Before doing the CPP, I always knew that I was good working with children. After doing the CPP, I think becoming a teacher is not a bad choice at all."

Another student recognized the value of doing the CPP. She wrote: "I decided to do this program right away when I heard about it because I immediately knew this was a once in a lifetime opportunity. I didn't want this chance to go to waste." She found the work experience at a local cable network to be quite stressful. She wrote: "The work placement site was not what I expected. I thought that I would go through a few practices with the camera at different sites and be a shadow and watch the professionals do their job. Instead, the first day of work was hands on, filming live. I was freaked out because it was all live and there wasn't even a practice. My knees started to knock. I had never watched the channel before so I had no idea how the concept worked except to follow what the director was saying. However, after all the stress and getting used to the place, I started getting the hang of the camera and understanding the director."

The same student found that one of the directors on the job site was the most helpful person to her during her work experience. However, she did not feel that all of the directors were necessarily helpful. She wrote: "I don't feel that I have enough support from them [directors], but that could be because I haven't asked enough questions. They are very supportive when I ask them questions. They are very happy to teach me how all the machines work. Basically we [students] have to make the first move." She seems to realize that she has a responsibility to let people know when she needs help and not just assume that they know what she needs. She also wrote: "This one director picks on me all the time because I'm the youngest, but I don't mind because he is just being silly. We can't take things too seriously in the film industry." It is interesting to note that she already has a sense of belonging to the film industry.

The same student wrote that the highlight of her work experience was: "When one of the directors brings some animals from the SPCA. This makes me feel happy that stray animals are still loved and cared for." Once again, the humanitarian aspect of a student's experience is the most remembered and rewarding. In one of her final journal entries, the same student observed: "First impressions are always important. From previous experience, handshakes are very important. I went for this one interview and I completely forgot about the handshake. So instead, I gave the most wimpiest handshake ever. The interviewer knew from the handshake that I was inexperienced and that I was very shy. As I went through my other interviews, I always gave the strongest handshakes that knocked their socks off!" Her experience at the work site demonstrated to her how much she still has yet to learn.

#### What I've Learned from the Student Focus Group and Journals

The experiences of the students related to me through the focus group meetings and their journals give the most insight into the research questions. One of the research questions is whether the CPP is worth having more students complete it. The students felt that the CPP was a worthwhile program, regardless of their individual experiences. Therefore, the CPP should be a worthwhile program for more students to participate in. Another question was whether the CPP was a failure if students dropped the program before completing it, or did students still gain some benefits from participating in the program. Even the focus group student who dropped the program gained the knowledge that she did not want to pursue the CPP area that she had chosen as a career.

The research question that I believe is the most important is what constitutes a successful experience for individual students who participate in the CPP. As shown in the individual experiences of students, the CPP is a very personal experience for

students. As a CPP Facilitator, I can improve my practice to help students in the program as much as possible. However, the success of the experience for individual students depends on so many different factors. These factors include: the vocational maturity of students; the support that students receive from all people involved in their program; the individual personalities of students; the atmosphere of the work site; other factors that vary from student to student.

#### The Results of My Journal

The journal that I kept had two distinct types of information. One type of information was a record of dates, times, meetings, and interventions. The other type of information was reflections about parts of the research that either confirmed I was doing the right interventions, or that I still needed to make improvements in my practice. Most of what I wrote was confirmation about what was found through the student questionnaires and the student focus group and journals. To avoid being repetitive, I will only write about a few areas that have not yet been mentioned.

Re-formulating the initial research question to address the other questions opens up a lot of issues. One of the issues is whether career exploration is something that all students should participate in. Also, do all students have the vocational maturity to do the CPP? The following two additional research findings are documented in my journal.

#### Many Students Want to do Volunteer Work

One of the needs of students that has become evident in the three years that I have worked in the CPP is the need to do volunteer work. Many students simply want to volunteer, while others see volunteer work as necessary when applying for scholarships and some post-secondary programs. A few of the younger students in grades eight to ten who do not yet qualify for the CPP have approached me about doing



volunteer work. Ironically, the younger students at Seaquam are more likely to listen to announcements, and many hear about the volunteer work experience opportunities that I post and are interested in participating in them.

Volunteer work differs from work experience in the CPP because it is not necessarily career specific. Students who want to volunteer at a hospital may not be pursuing a career in the medical field. They may simply be interested in working with people. As a result of identifying this student need, I held an information session for a Volunteer Leadership Club at the end of May 1999. I asked our career advisor if she would be interested in being a sponsor of the club, since many students approach her for volunteer work as well. She agreed to help, and we had a large turnout of students in grades eight through eleven. The purpose of the meeting was to see if there was student interest for the club. The large turnout of approximately 35-40 students demonstrated that they were interested in participating in a volunteer club.

I chose to call the group the "Volunteer Leadership Club" because I intend to have students who participate in the club assume a leadership role. My hope is that students will take on the responsibility of organizing groups of students for various community programs and events. In their leadership role, the students will be responsible for communicating with individual sponsors, organizing student helpers, and making sure that the volunteer work is completed. In the fall of 1999, our club will communicate to organizations in the Delta community that Seaquam Secondary School has a volunteer club and that students are interested in helping out.

At the May 1999 Volunteer Leadership Club meeting, I announced that I would try to have a representative from the Duke of Edinburgh award program attend a meeting the following month, in June. In June 1999, I held a second meeting with a representative from the Duke of Edinburgh award to speak to any students interested

in participating in the award program. Students who attended the May 1999 meeting were invited to attend. As well, I announced the meeting to the entire student body. Many students from the Volunteer Leadership Club and other interested students attended the June meeting.

The Duke of Edinburgh award program requires a commitment from students to achieve recognition in the three levels of bronze, silver, and gold. The requirements of each of the levels focus on a well-rounded citizen, with components that include volunteer community work, skill development, and others. Twenty-seven students signed up for the award program, many of which are in the volunteer club. A number of the volunteer club students have already begun volunteer work during the summer of 1999.

Part of my determination to form the Volunteer Leadership Club was to meet the volunteer work experience needs of a variety of students at Seaquam. Not every student is old enough or qualifies for the CPP. Also, not every student wants to do volunteer work for a specific career area. There are many reasons that students want to do volunteer work experience that are based on their personal needs, interests, and abilities. The need to have a variety of volunteer work experience options and opportunities for students is echoed in discussions at local meetings with career practitioners. Many local career practitioners see the need for changes to our current Career Program structure in BC to allow for a variety of student needs.

#### More Effort Needed for Secondary School Apprenticeship

Another discovery made this year was that we had not put enough effort into Secondary School Apprenticeship training. There are students who are already doing paid work in an area of career interest where they could do an apprenticeship program. Carla works with CPP students who are in the apprenticeship program, and

through our work with the Delta School District staff, she helped develop a questionnaire that would identify students who might already be eligible for Secondary School Apprenticeship. The questionnaire was administered to students during the spring in 1999. Carla will be working on communicating the SSA program to students during the 1999-2000 school year.

The Journal has Broadened My Perspective

The journal helped me to sort through my questions and concerns about the CPP. I am able to take a broader view of career programs and volunteer work experience. I realize now that students have various needs and that a single program cannot possibly meet the needs of every student. I need to be more flexible with students in order to give them a more personally rewarding experience in the CPP. In order to be more flexible, I need to take more time communicating with individual students to help identify their needs, wants, career goals, and vocational maturity. By starting the CPP at an earlier point in their high school program, I will have a longer time period to work with students and identify when changes need to be made to their program.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This final chapter gives a brief recapitulation of the process of identifying the research problem, the initial research question, and subsequent research questions. The summary is followed by a discussion of the benefits to students in the CPP, the methodology used in the research, interventions, themes, and the level of success achieved in addressing the research questions. Finally, a reflection on what was learned through the research, provides a number of recommendations for further study.

#### Identifying the Research Problem

The initial research question was formulated to address the problem of students not completing the Career Preparation Program. During the 1996-1997 school year, I became a Career Preparation Facilitator. After spending many months working with students in the CPP, my colleague Carla Rizzardo and I noticed that although we were working hard with the students in the program, only 30% of the students who qualified for the CPP in grade twelve were actually going to finish the program. In June 1997, Carla and I decided that we needed to make improvements to our teaching practice in order to ensure that more students would complete the program in the 1997-1998 school year.

In September 1997, Carla and I began to make a number of interventions to increase the likelihood that more students would complete the CPP. The interventions included: starting students on work experience earlier in the school year; increasing communication of the program through the school newsletter, announcements, and class visits; contacting employers to secure a number of work experience opportunities

for students; spending more time interviewing individual students about their career interests and goals.

In January of 1998, Carla and I each enrolled in a master's program and decided to use the problem of low student completion of the CPP as the focus for our master's research. In early 1998, we also joined the Teacher Research Inquiry Project (TRIP) in the Delta School District. The purpose of the TRIP was to provide support to teachers at the high school level who wished to make improvements to their teaching practice by actively exploring instructional, assessment, and curriculum alternatives. The method for accomplishing the improvements was through action research.

In March 1998, Carla and I formulated the initial research question. We wanted to find out what we could do in our own teaching practice to increase the number of students who complete the CPP. The research for the initial question led me to formulate a number of additional questions. Therefore, the research that I did evolved as I tried to investigate a number of questions about the Career Preparation Program.

#### The Initial Research Question

The initial research question was: What could I do within my own teaching practice to increase the number of students who complete the CPP? The initial question needed to be researched for a number of reasons. First, many students who qualify for the CPP do not even start the work experience. Second, of those students who do start the work experience, many students do not finish for a variety of personal reasons.

#### Benefits to Students Who Participate in the Career Preparation Program

Feedback from students has consistently shown that they experience some degree of disappointment when they do not complete the CPP. Most students realize

the benefits of completing the program which may include: quoting work experience in a career related field on their resumes; personal experience working with others; clarifying career goals; being hired after the volunteer work experience for paid work by the employer; gaining employable skills in a real work environment.

Olson (1997), Steinberg (1998), and Kincheloe (1995) all support the benefits of Career Programs for students. Involvement in Career Programs usually increases students' motivation in school. Students' motivation is increased when they can identify a clear connection between what is learned at school and what they do at the work site. Students often have limited knowledge about career opportunities. The lack of career knowledge is often coupled with unrealistic expectations about their career paths. Career Programs increase students' knowledge of career possibilities and present realistic expectations about their future. Involvement in Career Programs increases the probability that students will continue in post-secondary education or training.

Students at Seaquam Secondary School are rich in social capital. Many come from well-educated families and have parents who are in professional or business related occupations. Most students are supported in their desire to have a career. Many students are also well connected through their network of friends and family to people who can provide them with job opportunities or role models. However, students are also limited by their families. Some parents do not discuss career information or goals with their children. Other parents pressure their children to pursue careers that do not interest them.

Participation in the CPP is advantageous to students. Participation in the CPP enables students to either confirm or negate what they want to do for a career. The CPP can help students to make the choices they need after graduation in order to

pursue the career pathway that will be the most relevant and valuable to each of them. As a result of identifying the benefits provided to students who participate in the CPP, we chose to use surveys to find out what was preventing more students from completing the program.

#### Student Surveys

The research methodology used to address the initial question was student questionnaires. The questionnaires were used to survey grades eleven and twelve students in May 1998 and again in May 1999. The purpose of the surveys was to identify any barriers that were preventing students from completing the CPP. To a lesser extent, the student focus group and journals along with my journal, were also used to address the initial question.

#### The Main Barriers that Prevent Students from Completing the CPP

The research to address the initial question indicated a number of barriers that prevent students from completing the CPP. These main barriers include: students who do not qualify for the program; students who do not know which career area to prepare for; students who did not know what the CPP is; and students who were unable to fit the required courses into their timetables. In order to address the problems, there are a number of interventions that should be implemented in the future.

#### The First Intervention

Changes should be made to the course requirements for the CPP to allow more students to qualify and to enable students to fit required courses into their timetables. Although Ministry guidelines must be followed, greater flexibility in course selection can be achieved by including more courses in each program area. Also, an umbrella approach can be implemented where similar program areas offer more discretion for

choosing courses that fall under the same umbrella. For example, students who choose a fine arts program such as music, could choose courses not only from music, but also from drama and visual arts.

However, there is a problem with making changes to the course requirements for individual CPPs. Every fall, Carla and I approach teachers in the various CPP areas prior to making changes to the course requirements. We use the following process to attain teacher input. First, we send out a memo to teachers requesting input for changes based on any new courses being offered or old courses that are no longer available. In the same memo, we encourage teachers to review the courses offered in the program and request suggestions for courses that could be added. We give teachers a deadline for returning the information to ensure that we have enough time to make the changes and submit them to the Delta School Board by the board's fall deadline.

Many of the teachers who receive the memo return it to us with changes or requesting no changes to the course selection. If we do not hear from a teacher by the deadline, we make a point of seeing that teacher to confirm that there are no changes. Based on the information that we get through our work with students and employers in a variety of CPPs, Carla and I often have suggestions for courses that could be added to individual CPPs. For example, Carla works with students in the general mechanics CPP, and in her conversations with employers, she has been told that students need training in mathematics, physics, and computers. The highly technical nature of the automotive industry requires more technically skilled employees than in the past.

A problem that Carla and I often encounter when suggesting courses for various CPPs is that some teachers are very territorial about their subject area. Some teachers do not want to allow courses from other subject areas into their CPP for fear



of either watering down their program or losing student enrollment in their classes. Ironically, the research that we did showed that making the program more flexible would most likely increase the number of students who participate in individual CPPs. Rosenstock and Steinberg (1995) found that when teachers in vocational subject areas collaborated rather than competed for programs and students, a more collegial environment developed. Teachers were more likely to discuss their teaching, collaborate on projects, and support each other when they no longer competed with each other.

### The Second Intervention

Students who do not know which career area to prepare for need more information and guidance. Unfortunately, career awareness is not specifically taught to all of our students. However, the Career Advisor, annual career fair, and information supplied by Career Preparation Facilitators all offer some career awareness to students. Bringing in more guest speakers about career opportunities, similar to the visit by the UBC Co-op engineering coordinator, would increase students' awareness of career opportunities. This problem can also be addressed by communicating to students that the CPP is for career exploration and that they do not need to be clear about their career path in order to participate in the program.

### The Third Intervention

Communication to students about what the CPP is needs to be increased. Part of the problem is differentiating the CPP from CAPP. Clarification for students about what the CPP is can be accomplished by continuing to promote and inform students, parents, staff, and the business community about the CPP. Promotion can be achieved through: school announcements; the school newsletter; the grade twelve newsletter; TV monitors; the career fair; PAC meetings; staff meetings; interaction with the

business community. Communicating the program to younger students occurs through word of mouth when older siblings and friends participate in the CPP. Younger students who participate in the Volunteer Leadership Club will also have a better understanding and awareness of the CPP through their volunteer work experience and their interaction with the CPP Facilitators.

#### Outside Factors that Affect Completion of the CPP

Students' completion of the CPP exists in a larger framework than the work I do as a Career Preparation Facilitator. There are many other factors beyond my control that affect completion of the CPP. For example, the school timetable limits students' choice of courses. The inflexible hours of the timetable also reduces the hours in a week that students are available to do volunteer work experience. Pressures on students from other teachers and activities also inhibit completion of the program. Mandatory requirements for the CPP by the Ministry create an inflexible framework for making significant changes to the program. Competition from CAPP for work experience hours in the community is also a debilitating factor.

The initial research question of increasing students' completion of the CPP remains important and will continue to be addressed through my work in the program. However, the other research questions that were formulated during the research process are also important and give a broader perspective of the issues surrounding the Career Preparation Program.

#### The Other Research Questions

As the research progressed, a number of other research questions were formulated. The other research questions are: Is the CPP worth having more students complete it?; Is it a failure if a student who begins the program but does not complete it gains some benefits from participating in the program?; Is the CPP the best program

for our students or should there be a number of different Career Programs available to students at Seaquam Secondary School to fit their needs and interests?; Does the stigma attached to vocational education affect the participation of students and others in the CPP? Finally, the most important research question to me is: What constitutes a successful experience for individual students who participate in the CPP?

The research questions were formulated at various stages of the research process. They were formulated as revelations about the program were made based on my participation in the research. While some of the research questions were addressed through the research, others still need to be addressed depending on what point in the timeline of the research they were formulated. For example, the research question that addresses what a successful experience in the CPP is for individual students was formulated early in the research to provide a broader perspective of the initial research question. It did not seem to be important enough that students simply complete the program, rather they should be experiencing a certain degree of success and gaining some benefit through their participation in the CPP. Otherwise, the program would not be worthwhile to complete. I was able to address the question of a successful experience for individual students through the student focus groups and journals.

The research question about the possible stigma attached to Career Programs affecting the participation of students and others still needs to be addressed. I did not specifically research this question, but rather formulated it later in my research as I reviewed the literature about Career Programs. For example, one of the passages that I read about vocational teachers discusses the old way of doing business in vocational classrooms. In the past, vocational teachers had very little patience for students who had not decided on a career path and were not interested in learning the skills of a specific trade. The teachers felt that their own identity as a skilled trades person was

being changed to one of "caretakers of marginal students" (Little, 1992, cited in Rosenstock and Steinberg, 1995, p. 52). Hence, the belief that vocational courses are only for marginal, non-academic students.

Historically, vocational programs served the function of keeping at risk students in school. The division between the status of academic programs and vocational programs still exists in schools today. There is still an ongoing battle over status between teachers in academic programs and those in elective course areas. The stigma of being in a program for marginal students still haunts elective programs. Career Programs have their roots in vocational education and must also carry a similar stigma. Is it safe for me to assume that the attitude of students, teachers, parents, and employers towards Career Programs is influenced by the negative connotations associated with a vocational program? Although I did not address this question directly in my research, I believe that it is an important question that merits further study.

#### Themes Identified from the Other Research Questions

In order to find answers to the research questions formulated after the initial one, a student focus group and journals, as well as, my own journal were utilized. The questions and discussions in the student focus group and journals identified some themes. One theme was that students did not feel they were prepared for a job interview. Therefore, one of the factors that would contribute to successful completion of the CPP would be if students were better prepared for job interviews. In order to achieve this, mock job interviews and information about possible job interview questions should be incorporated into the CPP experience for students. As well, tips about being on time, getting proper directions to the work site prior to the interview,

how to dress, possible interview questions, and proper conduct should be discussed with students.

Another theme was that the types of volunteer job opportunities available to students needed to be increased. More job opportunities can be made available by taking more time to interview students who qualify for the program to ensure that the facilitator and student choose the most appropriate job site for the student. Once a good match between a realistic job placement and the student's interest, skills, and aptitudes is determined, both the facilitator and the student can actively pursue the actual placement. Involving the student in the search for the work placement may give the student ownership of the placement and will hopefully lead to a better match.

Lack of information about possible work sites was also identified as a concern by the focus group students. Students suggested that a write up be provided by former students who did their work experience at a site. This would provide new students with information about the site, what to expect, and what activities they would do there. Information provided to students prior to accepting a position at the work site would increase the likelihood that students would have a more suitable experience. Increasing the possibility that students' needs will be met at the work site should also increase the value of the experience for individual students.

Finally, the personal experiences of students appeared to be the most significant to the focus group students. For example, having to deal with personal feelings enriched the experience for many of the students on work experience. Some students worked with unhappy or unhealthy people at the work site and then had to cope with their own feelings of sadness and sympathy. Gaining self-esteem and learning about their individual career potential was also a highlight for some students.

The personal experiences of students are not something that can be artificially created. The value of students' personal experiences will vary according to student needs, vocational maturity, and the environment in which the work experience occurs. However, the personal experiences that students have in the CPP can mean successful completion of the program for students.

#### A Variety of Success Addressing the Other Research Questions

The other research questions that were formulated after the initial question have been answered to various degrees. As discussed previously, the question about the stigma attached to vocational education affecting participation in the program still needs to be addressed. I believe that the questions of whether or not the CPP is worth having more students complete and whether the CPP is the best program for our students were addressed. As long as the CPP program meets the needs and vocational maturity of the students who participate in it, then the experience will be worthwhile for students. If not, other Career Programs such as Secondary School Apprenticeship, should be pursued by the facilitators for those students for whom it applies. The Volunteer Leadership Club will provide volunteer work experience for students who do not necessarily want to do work experience for a specific career sector but would like the experience of volunteering. Therefore, the CPP is a good program for our students and it is worth having more students complete it, but only if the program fits the needs and goals of students who participate in it.

The question of whether it is a failure if a student begins the CPP, does not finish it, but gains some benefits was also addressed. One of the focus group students did not complete the program but still benefited by it when she realized that she was no longer interested in the accounting field. Other students that I have worked with in the CPP who did not complete the program also seem to have benefited through their

participation. Some have benefited by being hired by the employer. Others were able to cite the work experience on their resumes. Therefore, as long as a student gains some type of benefit from the program, even if she does not complete it, the experience is not a complete failure.

The most important research question to me about what constitutes a successful experience for individual students who participate in the CPP was addressed. The students focus group and journals made it clear that the experiences of individual students varies with each individual. Therefore, if a student learns something from her participation in the program, then the experience can be considered a success for that student. Students will have varying degrees of success with the program. The improvements that I make to my practice to ensure a good match between students and employers will help improve the chances of success.

In order to accomplish a good match, I must spend more time with individual students in order to assess their vocational maturity and to develop an open relationship for better communication. Improved communication with students will give me a better idea about their interests and abilities. Establishing a supportive relationship with students will help to ensure that they will also discuss problems with me so that I can assist them with their program.

### Reflections and Recommendations

It is evident through the research that was done that Career Programs can benefit most students. What the Career Program is or when a student participates in the program varies from school, to district, to province, to country. If a community values career awareness and education, then time, funding, and educational reform must be supplied to support the program. It is important that all stakeholders: students; parents; teachers; school boards; employers; and government, have a voice in

what the program is and how it is implemented and delivered in the school system. In my own practice as a CPP Facilitator, I can ensure that these voices are heard by continuing to act as an advocate of the program by staying actively involved with the Parent Advisory Council, the Delta School Board, employers and business organizations, and the Ministry. By taking an active role in promoting and communicating the program both inside and outside the school, I will be able to stay in touch with the people who support and effect the program.

The research that was done on the Career Preparation Program is situated in the ongoing debate between a liberal arts and a vocational education. Based on the debate, there is an important question that needs to be addressed. Should high school curricula include only those subjects and learning outcomes that provide students with general knowledge and skills, or, should high school curricula include subjects and learning outcomes that provide career related skills and exploration?

There are a number of factors that influence educational reform and subsequently, curricula. The past and current interest in education of organizations such as the Conference Board of Canada, BC Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Council of BC has an impact on Career Programs. These organizations encourage the development of employable skills in high school students in order to meet the demands of a highly skilled workforce and to ensure a healthy economy. The BC Ministry of Education also supports the efforts of these organizations through the goals of the education system and the implementation of the CAPP program in 1995 for grades kindergarten to twelve.

There is a need in BC for all parties involved in Career Programs to reflect on their motives for promoting their personal agendas in order to ensure that what is being done in these programs is best for our students. This is not an easy or simple



task. However, on a personal level, my research of the CPP has given me a more critical view of the purposes of career education. By continuing the research into a second cycle I will hopefully continue to question and improve my own teaching practice in this area.

On a final note, Rosenstock and Steinberg (1995) remind us that the initial intent of vocational education, based on the industrial revolution model for low income families, was that students should be able to predict their adult occupations. We are constantly being reminded through the media that we will change careers a number of times during our lifetime. Therefore, career practitioners need to ensure that the Career Programs we offer to students provide career exploration rather than stream them into a particular career area. As Rosenstock and Steinberg so aptly state: "Who can decide at age fifteen what we will do as adults?" (p.47)

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## Appendix A

A Sample Student Questionnaire

## GRADE 12 - CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE 1998-1999

1. Did you qualify and register for the Career Preparation Program (CPP) this year, by taking a minimum of 5 courses including your grade 11 courses, in any one of the program areas? (Check yes or no.)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ (If you answered yes, turn over the page and go on to question 2.)

No \_\_\_\_\_ (If you answered no, please check the reason(s) why or explain on the lines below why you did not qualify for the CPP.)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ you do not know what the Career Preparation Program is
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ you qualified for the CPP but missed the September 30 registration deadline
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ the courses you wanted to take did not fit into any one of the program areas
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ the courses you needed to qualify for the CPP were not available
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ the courses you needed to qualify for the CPP did not fit into your timetable
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ you were absent when the CPP facilitator (Ms. Dean or Ms. Rizzardo) visited your English class and you did not receive CPP information
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ your course load is too heavy to miss school to do work experience
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ you do not want to do work experience after school hours or during summer, spring or Christmas holidays
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ your part-time, paying job takes up too much time
- j. \_\_\_\_\_ you already have a job or work experience in your area of career interest
- k. \_\_\_\_\_ you already have a job after graduation in your area of career interest
- l. \_\_\_\_\_ you are not interested in doing unpaid work experience
- m. \_\_\_\_\_ you are not aware of the benefits of doing the CPP
- n. \_\_\_\_\_ your parents do not want you to do work experience
- o. \_\_\_\_\_ you are uncertain of which career area you should prepare for
- p. \_\_\_\_\_ other (explain on the line below)

Please suggest what we could do to make completion of the CPP easier for students

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## GRADE 12 - CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE 1998-1999

2.	Will you be completing the courses and 100 hours of work experience necessary for the WE12A course credit and completion of the Career Preparation Program (CPP)? (Check yes or no.)
Yes _____	(If you answered yes, which CPP will you qualify for: _____) (Please go on to section 3.)
No _____	(If you answered no, please check the reason(s) why or explain on the following lines why you did not qualify for the CPP.)

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ you dropped one or more of the required courses
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ you will not be completing or passing one of the required courses
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ you were not able to complete your work experience because you needed a paying job
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ you were not able to complete your work experience because you left it too late in the year
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ you were not able to complete your work experience because your course load was too heavy
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ you did not attend the October CPP group information meeting
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ you did not book an individual interview with a CPP Facilitator (Ms. Dean or Ms. Rizzardo)
- h. \_\_\_\_\_ you and your facilitator were not able to find a suitable work placement.
- i. \_\_\_\_\_ you decided you were not interested in the career area you qualified for
- j. \_\_\_\_\_ your parents did not want you to complete the work experience
- k. \_\_\_\_\_ other (explain on the lines below)

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3. Please suggest what we could do to make completion of the CPP easier for students.
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## Appendix B

Student Focus Group Meeting QuestionsJanuary 1999

1. How did you find out about the Career Preparation Program (CPP)?
2. What is your understanding of what the CPP is?
3. Why did you decide to do the CPP?
4. When did you decide to do the CPP?
5. What are your goals in regard to the CPP?
6. How did you think the CPP will help you in pursuing your career goals?
7. Who has influenced your decision to do the CPP? (Parents, Peers, School Staff, Other?)
8. What barriers/obstacles have you encountered prior to doing the CPP?

February 1999

1. Are the courses that you take within the program, useful to you while doing the work placements?
2. Do the courses that you take within the program make sense for your career path? If not, which courses do you think would be more useful to you for your particular program?
3. Did you have any problems in grade 11 or 12 being able to take the courses that you needed for your particular program? If yes, why?
4. Which of the courses that you took for your particular program (if any) have been the most influential to you in deciding your career path?
5. Which of the teachers in these courses (if any) have influenced your decisions around your career path? How did they influence you?
6. Please make any other comments about the courses you need to take for the program or teachers in your program area that would be helpful for us in determining any changes that could be made to improve the CPP in this area.

March 1999

1. You decided to do the CPP program, you made sure that you took the right courses and registered, was it clearly communicated to you what you needed to do next? If yes, how did you find out what to do next. If not, why not?
2. The CPP program areas are divided up so that Ms. Dean and Ms. Rizzardo look after particular programs. Is this a good way to handle who looks after which program? Was it made clear to you who you would be working with? Was there any confusion as to who you needed to see?
3. Once you met with your CPP Facilitator, you had to choose where you wanted to work. Were you given enough time, options, guidance? How can we improve this step?
4. There is some paper work that must be completed after you first meet with your Facilitator (e.g. timetable, parent consent form, application). Were there any problems doing this? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

5. Throughout the year there are many work experience opportunities that come up and are announced through the daily announcements or on the video screens. Are you getting the information? Can you suggest better ways of communicating these opportunities to students?
6. After you chose a work placement site, your Facilitator calls to make contact and then lets you know if the employer is interested in having you call to book an interview. How smoothly did this step go for you? Was there a lot of time that passed before the Facilitator communicated with you? How can we improve this step?
7. Please give us any other suggestions for improving this stage of the CPP program.

#### April 1999

1. How did you choose the work placement site?
2. Describe how the initial interview went with the employer(s).
3. Do you think an interview is important before the work placement? Why or why not?
4. What could be done to better prepare you for the interview?
5. Was the work placement site(s) what you expected? Why or why not?
6. What could be done to ensure that you are prepared for the work placement site and what you are expected to do there?
7. Describe a typical day on the job.
8. Who is the most helpful to you on the job site and why?
9. What are the highlights of your time on the job site? Why?
10. What are the low points of your time on the job site? Why?
11. Did you feel that you were given enough support during your work experience? Why or why not?
12. List any suggestions for improving the interview, choice of work site, and actual work experience.

#### May 1999

1. What is your understanding of what the CPP is, now that you have completed the program?
2. How does the CPP differ, if at all, from what you expected?
3. Did you gain any skills or training by doing the CPP?
4. Did the CPP help you to make any decisions about your career path? If so, what did you decide?
5. Did the CPP help you to discover anything about your career interests and potential? If so, what?
6. Who has given you the most/least support during the CPP?
7. What obstacles or barriers did you encounter, if any, in doing the CPP?
8. List any final suggestions for improving the program for future students.
9. List any final reflections/comments you have about your personal experience doing the CPP.



## Appendix C

### May 1998 and May 1999 Student Responses to the Survey Question:

Please suggest what we could do to make completion of the CPP easier for students.

#### May 1998 Grade Eleven Student Responses

- give them a bigger selection of courses that they would be able to take to qualify for the work experience program
- I took the courses but didn't qualify
- get rid of it, it's a waste of time and money (CAPP?)
- list options for students to choose to complete the CPP
- let students tell the teacher where they want to go
- It's not easy for everyone to find out which places will accept them
- allow us to use courses like social studies for CPP related to law
- have CPP reps explain in detail about the program and have pamphlets discussing each one
- make it more clear
- give out pamphlets with descriptions of the programs, this will encourage students to plan for the program
- make the benefits of CPP more clear
- not as many hours of work experience
- unclear, uninformed
- too many prerequisites
- more choices for each category
- make the requirements more flexible
- make a list of all opportunities
- find paying jobs that can still prepare students, less course load, working takes up a lot of time, we still have school
- make more students know what it is because a lot do not
- have more promotion on the program
- it is too easy to mix CPP with CAPP
- things are great
- more information about how to fulfill the requirements
- many students were unsure if it was a course that had to be signed up for
- make it so that you have to take less classes to get into it
- shorten the amount of hours needed
- have more programs where it is only after school so no school is missed
- a one hour work experience only
- have a wider range of programs
- drop CPP it's irrelevant (CAPP?)
- my counsellor said that I wasn't able to take the business courses I wanted because they would be too hard for me academically

- well, I was interested in taking film production CPP but the required courses were not easy for me to take and there was no way I could have applied
- give more time to complete forms
- incorporate more classes
- get rid of CAPP (CAPP)
- not as many courses to take to get work experience
- allow us to be able to do the work once a week
- only associate courses that have something to do with the career program
- make students and parents understand the program more
- more different areas
- come to the classes to talk more
- less hours of work experience
- I think it is good the way it is
- more information about the CPP

#### May 1998 Grade Twelve Student Responses

- make it a full course (CAPP?)
- allow students more breaks from other classes missed while doing work experience
- I did not wish to take acting for the stagecraft program, it was the only course I did not have, the reason I took stagecraft was because I did not like acting
- I was not interested in doing the CPP
- get teachers to be more involved in the CPP so they are more understanding about missed work
- explain how the program works better, less hours would be nice, but the hours help to get a job afterwards
- I did not want to miss school because I would not have time to make up the work because I have a job and other homework
- reduce the amount of hours to complete the CPP
- allow students who do not fit in to one category to do work experience anyway because it is a great experience
- find places that allow you to do work during evenings and weekends
- work should be during the summer
- more interesting/fun for the students, more informative, practical for future use
- have more jobs for people going in to education or counselling
- let them choose what they want to do in work experience instead of having to qualify for it
- it is fine the way it is
- did not have enough time between a heavy course load and extra curricular activities
- it was set up very well
- make it less time
- my part-time job interfered with time
- don't make it so hard for students to qualify for the CPP
- keep it the same, or lower requirements

- cut the BS and spend some time actually reviewing the course and put some effort into making the course worthwhile (CAPP?)
- make sure the students have time to complete
- post more posters
- do not force students to do work in the CPP just give them a passing mark (CAPP?)
- I had other things to worry about
- maybe make the hours less
- make hours more available
- start earlier in the year
- less sheets to fill out for placements
- I had the grade 12 PE tutoring course but I needed the grade 11 one, then I was not allowed to enter
- hours are too many
- I already got my work experience at another school last year
- start them off early in the year, have the contacts ready
- lower hours from 100 to 50, this will make it easier for the students with heavy courses to complete it
- not as many hours
- I did not qualify and I do not care
- make students more aware of what it is
- more than one job should be available to choose from
- find jobs that pay or give more than 4 credits
- I already have 12 more credits than I need to graduate so I do not see the point

#### May 1999 Grade Eleven Student Responses

- be more lenient
- explain in more detail
- talk to students more about it so they understand the program better
- tell them the importance of volunteer work
- do not make us hand in all the stuff (e.g. resume, cover letter, thank-you letter), or give us more time to do it
- make it easier to understand what you need
- have meetings every week so we know what's going on
- make yourselves more available
- let us know more about it
- go to each class and talk to people
- go to each class and talk to students individually
- make it more understandable and easier to qualify.
- go to each class
- talk about the program more often
- give more information
- more publicity
- you are doing a good job
- more one on one information

- more explanation
- spend a day exploring each program area
- visit job sites
- less qualifications to get into the program
- less required courses
- have less requirements, allow students to do work experience if they don't meet the criteria but show a genuine interest in the area of work
- expand the program choices
- reduce the numbers of classes for the CPP
- less restriction on courses you have to take
- make the courses needed to qualify easier to fit into timetables
- academic courses take up too much room to fit in electives
- more student input for choosing required courses
- fewer than 100 hours
- make jobs well known
- wider variety of options for work experience
- more work experience opportunities for the humanities
- more available jobs
- complete hours during school time
- lower the number of maximum hours
- have a list of places to go
- find more readily available jobs in specific areas
- find more job opportunities
- fewer hours
- make available openings more well known
- decrease the necessary hours required for work experience
- more openings and opportunities for the CPP
- make more volunteer options open, provide more names and numbers of companies hiring students
- you could ask what other kind of work experience they would like to do if you cannot get the right one and they will work during the summer
- reduce work experience hours, or introduce it in grade 10 so students have more time to complete the requirements
- most Science Careers CPPs in grade 12 cannot work during the week
- more time
- provide computer science places to get work experience
- students should take their work home to discuss it with others (e.g. parents) CAPP?
- make it more interesting, something that can hold my attention for more than 5 seconds (CAPP?)

#### May 1999 Grade Twelve Student Responses

- let students drop in and get information themselves
- make it easier to qualify for each program
- let more people know of the advantages

- need to talk more about it because I never heard about it before now
- give more information to new students to the school
- provide more information about it
- announce it earlier in the year
- emphasize the benefits
- change the criteria for the programs
- it's all good
- have more than one CPP group information meeting during the year
- have monthly meetings to inform students on a regular basis
- let the students drop-in and get the information themselves
- have time limits for when we can start and when we can hand things in
- less paperwork
- by offering more tourism types of courses you could get more people, this is a large interest area
- make it easier to get into the CPP
- make the required courses less then more people would be eligible
- let grade tens see the list before they put in their course form for grade eleven
- make the five course requirements actually have something to do with the CPP
- have lots of alternative courses
- I couldn't do it because the CPP I wanted couldn't work around my schedule
- get more people started in grade eleven so there is more time for them
- reduce the number of hours required
- more flexibility in the completion of the hours
- less time required or easier to spread the hours over the course of the year
- less hours, 100 hours for grade twelve is too much
- force students to complete 50 hours in grade eleven and 50 hours in grade twelve
- less hours, more places to work
- let students start after grade ten during the summer
- suggest students do it in the summer
- give students more choices as to where they can work
- start at a younger age, otherwise it worked fine
- lower the amount of hours you need to complete it
- more career placements available, but that is not really the fault of Ms. Dean or Ms. Rizzardo, it's the businesses
- make looking for the work easier
- find places that students will benefit at
- make it easier to find places to work
- actually, I though the program went fairly well; I received every info I could and the CPP teachers supported and helped me as much as they could; if there were any problems it would definitely be from the work experience site
- not so many sheets because some supervisors do not like to do them
- make sure there are jobs for each program
- give students more choice of places they can work at