STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF WORK EXPERIENCE:
INQUIRING INTO A FASHION DESIGN AND MERCHANDISING
CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAM

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Abstract

Career preparation programs in British Columbia high schools have gained prominence in the last decade and as a career preparation teacher for Fashion Design and Merchandising, I began to wonder what motivates students to participate in such programs. Most published literature on career preparation programs have focused on benefits to education and industry, but few of these studies look at work experience from the students’ perspectives. This thesis gives voice to nine students’ perspectives in a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program’s work experience placements.

Career preparation programs are an explicit linkage between high school and post-secondary studies. The work experience component of career programs has allowed students to work in a variety of work placements within the fashion industry, thus providing insights into the various careers available within this diverse industry. Work experience enables schools to access facilities and resources in the community that provide students with experiences they otherwise might not have. Work experience is the bridge between school and the work world.

The nine student participants are my students and I have a very close relationship with them. Visiting students during their work experience placements and getting their reactions is part of my regular teaching duties as a work experience supervisor teacher. As I visited the students during their placements, I hoped to gain some insights into what motivates students to participate in work experience programs. What do they perceive is the purpose of work experience and do work experience placements meet their
expectations? I collected their impressions through formal interviews, which were tape recorded, as well as informal conversations, classroom discussions, journal entries and students' work experience information logs. The data are presented as descriptive narratives, is important for pedagogy because it functions as experiential case material on which pedagogic reflection is possible.

All nine students in the study found participation in work experience to be very beneficial and they gave many positive reasons for participating in work experience. Prior to their work experience, only three of the nine students had part-time jobs. The students felt that they developed many relevant skills such as occupational-specific skills, self-reliance and employability skills working with professionals in this program. They have gained insight, knowledge and first hand experience about the apparel industry through working with professionals. Implications are drawn for improving the program and for further research.
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Chapter One

Introduction

What Do Students Need to Know?

There are a number of trends that will likely affect employment opportunities in the future (Sharpe, 1993). According to Employment & Immigration Canada 1990, 40% of future jobs as compared to 23% in 1986 will likely require more than 16 years of education or training (Sharpe, 1993). Trends such as an increase in the literacy and numeracy requirements in most occupations, and a need for a life-long learning approach to keep up with technological change in the work place are the realities facing our students (Sharpe, 1993). “A recent Harris Poll revealed that employers turn down five of every six young applicants. Most students coming out of high school today simply don’t have adequate job skills for today’s workplace” (Kentucky State School-to-Work Initiative, 1996, p.1). A few decades ago, enrolling in almost any post secondary program guaranteed a choice of employment offers in the graduating year. Students did not have to worry about competing for a limited number of jobs with other equally qualified individuals. But in today’s more complex and competitive world, a post secondary diploma, certificate or degree is no longer a guarantee of employment. Today’s labour market has undergone a revolution of rising skill requirements. Most people now appreciate that new ways of doing business and increasing innovations in technology demand more education and training of workers. Employers have increasingly expressed the view that many young people leaving school are not well prepared to meet the current
demands of the workplace or those anticipated in the future (Developing Skills for Today’s Workplace, no date).

But what kinds of skills are needed? Crider-Fleming (1995) states that parents and educators continue to debate the issue of academic versus career education. Most high school students choose academic courses even though the majority do not go on to university and are not equipped with any skill that prepares them for their place in the market place.

In BC nearly three out of four businesses interviewed by the Chamber of Commerce in 1994 stated that graduating students from the K-12 educational system did not have the necessary numeracy, literacy, communication, work ethic and self-discipline skills to enter the work force. (Developing Skills for Today’s Workplace, no date)

According to government, education, and business there are three major types of skills needed in today’s workplace: occupation-specific skills, self-reliance and employability skills. Occupation-specific skills are those needed to work in a particular occupation. This expertise is obtained through on-the-job training and experience as well as specialised education or training. They include problem solving and critical thinking (Crider-Fleming, 1995; Developing Skills for Today’s Workplace, no date; Sharpe, 1993).

Self-reliance and academic skills are the entrepreneurial skills, the self-providing skills and research skills that are the basic competencies necessary to prepare one’s personal career and life goals in times of uncertainty and change in a global economy. Today, the market for non-standard work, such as part-time, part-year, temporary, contract and/or freelance work is growing. This means that students will need business management, marketing and networking skills to obtain jobs (Crider-Fleming, 1995; Developing Skills for Today’s Workplace, no date).
Employability skills are a wide range of skills and personal qualities that are sought in new recruits for all occupations by employers in both private business and government. These skills are not necessarily occupation specific. They encompass dispositions and attitudes. In 1992, the Conference Board of Canada published the *Employability Skills Profile*. In it they laid out three broad categories of employability skills: academic, personal management and teamwork (Crider-Fleming, 1995; Developing Skills for Today’s Workplace, no date).

**How Can Career Preparation Programs Help?**

Traditionally schooling in North America followed the notion that learning is done in the abstract, using decontextualized general knowledge. It is only in recent years that American education theorists have recognised that many students may learn better in applied settings (Kosmahl Aring, 1993). The relevance of education and training programs to labour force need is still a relatively new phenomenon. Joyner (1994) states that “traditional education is based on the tenets of philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, Aquinas, Locke, Rousseau, and Dewey. Schools were first created as a means of developing the intellectual elite of society” (p. B69). The linking of traditional education and occupational needs slowly came about in the twentieth century with the advent of the technical evolution (Joyner, 1994).

Recently, career preparation programs have been an important educational issue for governments from the local level to the national level (Wisconsin State, no date). A “career preparation program is a program that is designed to prepare a student for further study in a particular career in a post-secondary institution and to provide a student with
some entry level skills for employment” (Ministry of Education Skills Now Unit Province of British Columbia, 1995, p. 8). (See appendix A for terms used in relation to Career Preparation Programs) Career education prepares students for the challenges of gainful employment. “High school graduates have difficulty establishing themselves in ways that enable them to become economically independent. Their ability to do so has seriously deteriorated in the last two decades” (Barton, 1994, p. B64). “They show students how to make the connection between the classroom and the world of work” (School to work overview, no date, online). Career programs encourage students to develop their interests and to start learning about how they might apply those interests and aptitudes in gainful employment situations in their chosen field of study. Today, the majority of new, good paying jobs will require education beyond high school (School to work overview, no date; Sharpe, 1995). However, most students and their parents know little about what these jobs are, or what education and skills the jobs will require (School to work overview, no date, p. 2).

Much of time, money and energy have been spent on developing, implementing and analysing career preparation programs in the last ten years. However, the majority of the literature on the topic comes from the United States with a very limited amount from Canada. Most of the reports look at career preparation programs or School-to-Work Programs, as they are known in the United States (Barton, 1996; Ministry of Education, undated; Steinberg, 1998; Stern, D., Finkelstein, N., Stone III, James R., Latting, J., & Dornsife, C., 1995) as a whole without distinguishing between the various components. Career preparation programs consist of classroom teachers and schools which provide the background and theoretical knowledge for the required course work; industry and
business which provide placements and occupational skills; different levels of government which provide funding and legislation, as well as students that participate in the various programs.

The issue of how schools should enable young students to become self-sufficient adults is an important one; one that not just schools, but the community as a whole, needs to address (Paris, 1989). Academic ability alone does not guarantee success in school or the work place (Edwards, 1986). “A lot of people graduate from high school and go to college, but they are lost. They really do not know what to do in the future” (Lozada, 1995, p. 33). College bound students can often profit from vocational education even if the vocational courses they take are not directly related to their career goals. “The Perkins Act defines vocational-technical education as organised educational programs offering sequences of courses directly related to preparing individuals for paid or unpaid employment in current or emerging occupations requiring other than baccalaureate or advanced degree” (Division of Vocational-Technical Education, No date, online).

Having some practical training in a vocational field can help students improve their earning capacity while in school, as well as gain valuable life experience. “Occupational or career development is an important part of the individual's psychological and social development” (Compton, 1969, p.183). Today, vocational training has evolved into career preparation programs that are aimed at all students. This includes special needs students as well as the university bound academic students. “Students with special needs are given the opportunity to practice skills they will need in the work place” (Lloyd, 1995, p.47), while academic students gain skills that will help in their post-secondary pursuit and career choice. The resulting change in name from vocational programs to career
preparation programs has brought about a change in status in the eyes of many stakeholders such as students, parents, business, education and community.

How Can Work Experience Help?

Aspirations for career choices can change over time and will be influenced by educational and work experience factors (Sharpe, 1993). The eventual realisation of career goals is often dependent upon job opportunities and a person’s perception of the opportunities to which they are exposed (Sharpe, 1993). Raby’s (1990) report on the California Partnership Academies Program concluded that work experience could break the cycle of disaffection with school programs that leads to joblessness. Work experience then can provide students with the motivational tools needed for success in school and in the working world.

One of the important components of career preparation programs is work experience. “Work experience is a course, or component of a course that provides a variety of workplace experiences that will help prepare students for the transition to a work environment” (Ministry of Education Skills Now Unit Province of British Columbia, 1995, p. 8). In British Columbia, it is a credited course that must be taken outside the regular school timetable. Students cannot get credit for completing a career preparation program, unless they have completed 100 – 120 hours of work experience.

Most research studies of work experience thus far are American and have looked at it from the perspectives of the employers, communities and educational personnel (Ministry of Education, undated). Consequently very few studies have looked at work experience from the students’ perspectives. This thesis will look at work experience from
the student's point of view in a Canadian setting. What benefits, if any, do students think they get out of work experience? Do students think the work experiences they encounter really provide a valuable service?

It is commonly believed that students can receive many benefits from participating in work experience. Raby (1990) argues that work experience allows students to learn first hand about the changes occurring in the business world. Through work experience, the business community provides the classroom where students are able to gain knowledge and experience about the workplace and a frame of reference by which to review their career development goals (Ministry of Education Skills Now Unit Province of British Columbia, 1995).

Some of today's students do not enter the work force until after completion of their education, because their parents prefer them to spend all their time and effort on studies and other learning experiences without the burden of having to maintain a part-time job. As a result, students have difficulties finding desirable employment. Companies prefer individuals with experience when they seek prospective employees. Work experience provides students without prior experience entry into companies where they can gain skills and experience that will allow them to access future employment.

These career preparation opportunities in high school will have a long-term impact on a graduate's experiences in the labour market (Alexander, Eckland & Griffen, 1975; Blau & Duncan, 1967). Through work experience, students acquire opportunities to observe and practice attitudes and employability skills required in the work place, as well as use the workplace to reflect upon possible career directions.
For some students, participation in the work experience component of career education represents their first opportunity to experience work in a business or industrial setting, thus challenging some of their assumptions about work. For example, some students feel anyone with basic intelligence can maintain a job. Other students feel that as long as they are achieving high academic grades they can get jobs. Some students lead very sheltered lives at school and home and hold unrealistic goals and images of the 'paid' work world.

**Work Experience in a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program**

The fashion industry in Canada is growing and gaining an international reputation. It has a need for skilled workers and new programs are being developed in high schools to encourage students to consider the industry. Therefore, it is a useful context in which to study a work experience program.

“Work experience exposes students to the variety of job opportunities in their vocational/career field” (Raby, 1990, p.8). People outside of the fashion industry usually see the fashion industry as being very glamorous. They do not see beyond the media images to the high stress, the competitiveness, the low pay, the tedium and the repetitiveness of the industry. I believe realistic experiences gained from work experience will help students to avoid disappointment and disillusionment in the future. Apparel design is just one of many types of jobs available within the fashion industry. However, most students and their parents perceive being a fashion designer or working as a sewer in the factories as the only choices in the fashion industry. Working in a variety of work
experiences within the fashion industry will provide some insights into the various careers available within this diverse industry.

What does the fashion industry hope to get out of fashion oriented career preparation programs? Are they just looking for free labour (Au Yeung, Y.N., Lai, C.C., Ho, W.F., Sivan, A., Gow, L. & Ledesma, J., 1993) or do they truly want to facilitate student learning? Students on work experience placements provide a rich pool of labour for business, because they have some basic knowledge of and skills in the fashion industry. Therefore, they can work more effectively at specific tasks. The students in fashion career programs tend to have advanced sewing skills and have a good basic understanding of terminology and jargon used in the business. The industry’s perspective is important; however, I will limit the focus of my research to the student’s perspective on work experience. I will mention the industry’s perspective only in connection with specific student experiences.

**Research Questions**

Missing from most published research is any attempt to find out from students what work experience means to them (Cress, 1992). Cress (1992) states two reasons why we should pursue this question. The first is an ethnographic one: we need to listen to what students themselves think, if we want to find out if career programs are producing effective results. Second, as businesses begin to play an increasing role in the socialisation of our students, we need to find out if business participation is accomplishing what we claim. “Surprisingly, little or no evaluation has accompanied the raft of business-led employment programs that have sprung up in recent years, and this lack of accountability
must be corrected" (Cress, 1992, p.173). There are many aspects of work experience that educators must strive to understand better. In order to do this, we need information that only students on work experience can provide (Cress, 1992).

In this study I explore students' perspectives of their work experience component of a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. Specific questions which guide the study are: What motivates students to participate in career preparation programs? Do students feel participation in work experience helps them to be better prepared for post-secondary challenges? Do students feel work experience placements help them decide on future career goals? Do students feel that they are better prepared for the world of work after participating in work experience? Have the work experiences fulfilled the students' expectations, or were they disappointed by the reality they faced and why? What occupation-specific, self-reliance and employability skills do students think they gained from their work experience?

At Central Secondary School, I am the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation teacher as well as the work experience co-ordinator for these students' work experience placements. Through the students' own stories I will answer the above research questions. Data has been collected through informal conversations, formal interviews, field notes, work experience documents, class assignments, classroom discussions and my observations of classroom activities and work placement settings.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Career Preparation Programs

The responsibilities of schools go far beyond the minimum essentials of reading, writing and arithmetic. "Increasing globalisation of production and markets, rapid technological change, and stringent economic conditions have created tremendous structural changes in the economies and labour markets of many countries in the world." (Joyner, 1994, p. B59). "It used to be that companies were perfectly content with employees who showed up for work on time, knew their place and did what they were told" (Busse, 1992, p. A27). Although employers may be willing to provide on-the-job training, today's employees are expected to have some basic skills when they enter the workforce (Busse, 1992). Schools must do their part to teach and facilitate these new employability skills to students (Busse, 1992). Schools need to provide programs to help every student discover areas of special interest and competence. These programs enrich life, add meaning, encourage productivity, and help each individual throughout a lifetime keep a variety of doors open to careers that at the moment may not yet be of interest to the students (Trump, 1981). The lack of a formal school-to-work transition system for both college-bound and non-college-bound youths was a major contributing factor for the development of vocational education, the prelude to career preparation programs (Kosmahl Aring, 1993). Career preparation education can help individuals identify career interests and provide preparation for entrance into one or more of these vocations (Lerman, 1994; Paris, 1989; Trump, 1981). Across the United States, school systems are
making drastic changes to better prepare students for life after high school. An increasing number of students in recent years have claimed that school is an unrealistic and irrelevant institution. Many students feel that school experience tends to isolate them from the realities of life (Trump, 1981). In order to combat these accusations of irrelevance, more secondary school districts are turning to career-oriented programs to make education useful and valuable for all students (Lozada, 1995).

Career preparation programs were originally designed to keep non-college-bound or potential high school dropout students in school (Paris, 1989). Some of these programs were designed to facilitate First Nations’ students and students with “mental handicaps” to find entry-level jobs. However, the aims of career preparation programs have changed to assist students who are either entering the work force or proceeding to a post-secondary educational institution to further develop knowledge and skills for a professional career.

In 1990, the American Congress authorised the Department of Education to introduce a new, school-based track called the ‘tech prep’ program. This program established a formal technical track linking the last two years of high school with two years of community college in acknowledgement that future generations of workers were not acquiring valuable technical skills as school students (Kosmahl Aring, 1993). Unfortunately, the program had a vocational implication and the word ‘vocational’ had a negative connotation of being manual, low-status work (Kosmahl Aring, 1993). In 1994, the United States introduced the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. It was developed with the input of business, education, labour and community based organisations that continue to have a strong interest in how students prepare for the changing world of work.
in the 21st century. School-to-Work is based on the proven concept that education for all students can be made more relevant and useful to future careers and lifelong learning. Rather than just memorising facts out of a textbook, students learn by applying what they learn to real life, real work situations (United States Department of Education and Labor, No date).

The purpose of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act was to bring career awareness to students through a program of instruction and curriculum that integrates vocational learning and academic knowledge. The Act allows States and localities to build high quality school-to-work opportunities that prepare students for further education and careers in high skill and high salary jobs (United States Department of Education and Labor, No date). An important component of the Act is the option of incorporating entry requirements for university in the career cluster programs. A structured, work-based learning experience is seen as grounding students’ coursework in the practical reality of production, and preparing them for life long learning in the context of work. A major element of school-to-work programs is combining the academic and vocational curriculum. This is believed to offer more effective instruction for a broad range of students. Potentially it can improve students’ learning in academic subjects by placing it in a practical context that gives concrete meaning to theories and abstract information. At the same time, it can deepen the intellectual content of vocational subjects. This is very important to parents and students in overcoming their negative preconceptions of career programs (Hudelson, 1994; Lozada, 1995; Pauly, 1994; Stern et al, 1995). Steinberg (1998) believes that the things we learn in school should take us somewhere in adult life:
school learning should make us better at solving new problems and more efficient in our performance in life and at work.

Students planning to attend university and other post-secondary institutions can benefit from career preparation programs. A school-to-work program is an explicit linkage between high school and post-secondary studies. This provides access to careers requiring higher education, and prevents the school-to-work program from being stigmatised as an option only for students who lack the ability or ambition to attend college. Young people need assistance in making career choices. Educators with the help of parents, employers and community leaders can provide this help by giving students opportunities to reach beyond school walls (Stern et al, 1995). Career preparation programs can move education into the community. Educators will not only be able to tap rich learning possibilities, but also to give students the exposure and confidence they need to make it on their own (Paris, 1989). "Through co-operative projects with industry, students develop business and research skills, and begin to realise what is involved in developing a competitive product" (Capjack, 1993, p.98). The work experience component introduces students to expectations in the workplace concerning dress, language and behaviour. Working to learn curricula places a high priority on involving workplace supervisors as partners in the learning process (Steinberg, 1998).

Through career preparation programs university bound secondary students benefit by trying out a career. This can avert program changes in university -- changes that can be extremely costly and stressful. The students can also improve their prospects for admission as many specialised post-secondary programs frequently make special efforts to attract students from high school career programs. Some of the courses taken in high
school could gain university and college credits or advanced placement with close articulation between secondary and post-secondary institutions (Edwards, 1986). For example, inclusive in the fashion merchandising programs is an emphasis on job and career preparation. In the United States, fashion or apparel merchandising is one of the most popular majors in colleges and universities, but few high schools offer courses that will help prepare students for their selected field (Delaurenti, 1988). School-to-Work is based on the proven concept that education for all students can be made more relevant and useful to future careers and lifelong learning. Rather than just memorising facts out of textbooks, students will learn by applying what they learn to real life and real work situations. These programs are developed with the input of business, education, labour and community-based organisations that have a strong interest in how students prepare for the changing world of work in the 21st century (School-to-Work, 1998). The goal of career education is for students to make more informed decisions about the skills and knowledge they need in order to be better prepared for additional education or work. When students learn more about what is required in the real working world, they then better understand the need for strong academic skills, as well as occupational-specific skills and employability skills. Career programs provide smoother transition to whatever they choose to do after high school (Province of British Columbia: Ministry of Education, 1995; School-to-Work, 1998; School to work overview, no date).

However, there are many problems associated with career preparation programs. Inadequate funding, especially in these years of fiscal restraint and funding cutbacks is a concern. There is generally a higher staff to student ratio in career preparation programs than in existing traditional school-based programs (Trump, 1981); therefore, there is a
higher cost factor in these programs. Resistance to the work experience component of career preparation programs by some employees is another concern. The expansions of employer-based training opportunities are viewed as a threat to their employment security, especially during times of high unemployment rates. "Tight limitations on the number of job trainees are already part of negotiated agreement in many firms and industries" (Trump, 1981). Employees fear the loss of their jobs, if there are too many unpaid labour sources available to employers. Another drawback is the lack of time and space available in school timetables for interested students to commit themselves to these programs. These programs tend to compete with academic core subjects, required for post-secondary entrance, for the students' time. "One of the challenges facing home economics educators is to adapt course curriculum to have it keep pace with a rapidly changing environment, and to make it relevant, challenging, and marketable" (Capjack, 1993, p.96). However, this will not be possible without funding, training and time available to address these challenges.

**Career Preparation Programs in British Columbia**

In British Columbia, as well as the rest of Canada, similar developments are taking place. For example, a Ministry of Education Curriculum guide on career preparation programs says:

Courses related to career fields at the senior secondary level are intended to improve the transition of students between school and employment and between school and post-secondary institutions. Students enrolled in a career preparation program will participate in co-operative career preparation studies to spend part of their school time in a learning situation in the community at a training station. The experience is designed to provide practical experience for a student in an...
British Columbia offers four different types of secondary career programs. They are: Career and Personal Planning/Work Experience (CAPP); Career Preparation Program (CPP), Secondary School Co-operative Education (CO-OP); and Secondary School Apprenticeship (SSA). All students in the province are required to take CAPP in order to graduate. The program involves the completion of 30 hours of career-related work experience. Career preparation programs will be discussed in later paragraphs, as this program is the focus of this study. Secondary School Co-operative Education involves two courses of work experience that are linked to one course of study in either Grades 10, 11, or 12 (Secondary Career Programs and Post-Secondary Co-op Education in BC, no date). Students are registered as apprentices in SSA programs. They are trained and paid by an employer to complete four courses of workplace-based training during Grades 11 and 12 for a minimum of 480 hours (Secondary Career Programs and Post-Secondary Co-op Education in BC, no date).

Today's programs in British Columbia are aimed not only at non-college-bound or potential dropout students, but also at the university-bound students. Requirements for graduating from a career preparation program in British Columbia consist of five core subjects in the students' career area to be taken in Grades 11 and 12 and three weeks (100-120 hours) of meaningful work experience (Secondary Career Programs and Post-Secondary Co-op Education in BC, no date). Many of these programs are now designed to allow students to still carry many core academic courses such as mathematics and sciences. This design offers "the opportunity to experience mathematics at an applied
level using such concepts as percentages, probability, ratio, use of computers, making and interpreting various kinds of graphs, as well as applying basic math functions” (Delaurenti, 1988, p.173). Busse (1992) and Developing Skills for Today’s Workplace (no date) concur with Delaurenti’s findings.

Career Programs in the Province of British Columbia are recognised by educators across the country for the unique exposure to career opportunities they offer secondary students. The more than 2000 programs in Career Preparation, Co-operative Education and Secondary School Apprenticeship provide BC students with provincially recognised graduation credits for workplace based training thereby fulfilling course requirements (British Columbia School District Career Programs, 1997, online).

The work experience component is off the regular school timetable, although it has a four-credit value towards graduation. Students are responsible for the completion of course requirements such as resumes, journal entries, employer evaluations and student/teacher conferences (see appendix B), even though they do not have a regular class to attend. Three different work placements are completed in two years, one of which is usually completed in Grade 11 and the other two in Grade 12. Students usually miss one week of regular school time for each work experience placement. However, arrangements can be made to do some of the work placements during holidays and after school hours.

At present, the Provincial Government provides extra funding to school districts for implementing and maintaining career preparation programs. In this time of government restraint and cutbacks, career preparation programs provide schools with a valuable source of funding for new supplies and equipment.
Career Preparation Programs in the Vancouver School Board

The Vancouver School Board approved forty career preparation programs for implementation in its secondary schools in September of 1996 (Vancouver School Board, 1996). These programs provide Vancouver students with valuable life skills and important industry contacts. Each secondary school tries to offer as diverse a selection of career preparation programs as possible. However, it is not always possible or advisable to start career preparation programs in every area. There are only limited resources and teachers available to teach in these programs and not all programs can sustain and serve the students best interests.

Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Programs

Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Programs can offer students many immediate and future potential for employment. “Often a high school student’s first job is in the area of apparel merchandising” (Delaurenti, 1988, p.173). Upon graduation from secondary school, many students get jobs in the field of fashion merchandising and become members of the retail work force, either as a career option, or as a means of earning funds to further their education in post-secondary institutions (Fairhurst, 1991). “Previous research has predicted that the inclusion of fashion merchandising in many states’ high school curriculum will increase over the next five years” (Ward & McNabb, 1989 in Fairhurst, 1991, p.150). Plumb and Thomas (1976) feel it is appropriate to enlarge clothing and textiles courses to acquaint students with entry-level jobs, technical jobs, and supervisory, management and other advanced level
occupations. Career opportunities are available for both men and women in the fashion apparel industry.

"Retail merchandising is often reported to be one of the 'hot' careers of the next decade" (Delautenti, 1988, p.173). Therefore, one of the work experience placements within Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Programs is often in the retail end of the fashion industry. "Fostering apparel industry linkages not only broadens the apparel design student's experience, it also brings some of the realities of the apparel design workplace into the classroom" (Capjack, 1993, p.98). "Fashion merchandising allows students the opportunity to explore various careers in the fashion industry, in a relatively cost-free environment as opposed to spending college tuition dollars experimenting with career options" (Delaurenti, 1988, p.173).

Most post-secondary institutions are not familiar with career programs. "Very few colleges and universities see any value of the increasing trend of the school-to-work programs in the admissions process" (Balbale, M., Stamoolis, J., Lawson, P., Woodiwiss, A., 1999, p.6). Some colleges remain wary of school-to-work programs because they fear that these programs may push students into early career decisions (Balbale et al, 1999). However, Fashion Design & Technology Programs favour students who have skills provided through work experience placements. Kwantlen University College in Richmond, British Columbia (1999), with a post-secondary program in fashion design, lists two of their minimum entry-level requirements:

1. Basic awareness of the fashion profession

- Work experience in the areas of apparel design, production, marketing or retail.
• Names of local-based design/manufacturing companies and a description of their products.

2. Life skills

• Team skills, personal management skills, problem solving and organisational skills, stress management.

**Work Experience**

A key element of many though not all, school-to-work programs is that they combine school and work during the same period of time. This may mean some hours of work each day, some days of work during the week, or some weeks working during the year. Combining school and work serves two purposes. First, it may help young people learn skills and knowledge to qualify for a full-time job in the near future. Second, it may give them the experience of using work to foster their own learning, and thus contribute to their capacity for change and continued growth in the longer run (Stern et al, 1995, p.10).

The work experience component of career preparation programs provides many benefits for students. Students gain insight, knowledge and experience in areas of interest to them. They could develop the three essential types of skills - occupation-specific skills, self-reliance skills and employability skills - needed for future employment. They can also receive offers of part-time work during school breaks, as well as improve their self-esteem through the opportunity of being a valued member in the workplace (Ministry of Education Skills Now Unit Province of British Columbia, 1996). Cress (1992) finds that some students clearly recognise and consciously seek the future-oriented benefits of
working. They want, value and seek productive jobs skills and good work habits from work experience. Ellen Greenberger and Laurence Steinberg in Cress (1992) observed that improved work habits develop on the job. Stern et al (1995) found a positive association between employment or earning a few years later and the amount of high school work experience in their high school studies.

Work experience enables schools to access facilities and resources in the community that provide students with experience they otherwise might not have. The increasing cost of equipment acquisition and maintenance make school-based programs in some occupational areas prohibitively expensive (Trump, 1981). Having access to industry's equipment and facilities reduces some of these prohibitive expenses. Employers benefit from having a venue for input into the training and knowledge provided by the school. Companies can receive extra help in the business, and it gives them a chance to be exposed to young people who are skilled in the area. They also have opportunities to assess students as prospective future employees (Paris, 1989). As there will be more interaction and co-operation between industry and school, therefore, society will benefit as a whole from career preparation programs.

Work experience is the bridge between school and the work world and as such provides students with realistic perspectives of the work world without many of the stresses of paid work. For example, students are not expected to meet daily sales figures and/or compete for commission in their retail work placements. Students learn on work placements. They learn by doing and by observing experts in the field (Cress, 1992).

Connecting activities provided by work experience ensures the co-ordination of the school based learning and the expectations of the work world. The notion of work experience is
based on the belief that education for students can be made more relevant and useful to future careers and lifelong learning. Instead of just memorising facts and learning from textbooks, students will learn by applying what they learn to life after school and work situations.

Students often complain that their work experience lacks challenge and responsibility. They are disappointed that they are not given more interesting and challenging work during their work placements. However, few take into account their own lack of experiences and expertise for specific tasks. “While it is laudable to volunteer to take on more responsibility, students need to know that disappointment is inevitable if they do not have the time or the skill to complete a task correctly” (Busse, 1992, p. A29).

Work experiences expose students to the reality of work in business and industry without the stress and worry, heavy workload and competitive nature of a full-time job. Students become aware of the burden of a job, but are cushioned by the protection of the sponsoring participants and the guidelines provided by schools. In work experience students have an emergency exit; if a work placement turns out to be too stressful, or unsuitable in any way, the work experience teacher will pull the student from the unpleasant situation. In the paid work world, workers often face distressful situations without recourse to such supports. During work experience placement, the sponsor supervisors tend to provide many “safe” tasks that will allow students to experience the flavour of paid work, but not the responsibilities.

In the work experience course, employers provide structured learning experiences for students that develop broad, transferable skills. This course provides students with opportunities to study complex subject matter as well as vital workplace skills in a hands-
Work experience placement allows employers to provide structured learning experiences for students that develop broad, transferable and realistic skills. Work experience provides students with opportunities to study complex subject matter as well as vital workplace skills in hands-on "real life" encounters. In addition, this allows them to apply reading and writing on the job as well as problem solving skills they have learned in school. Work placements permit students to have contact with adults on the job and good relationships with their supervisors. The program expects that the job will be related to their desired career and that the work is meaningful and motivating (Ministry of Education Skills Now Unit Province of British Columbia, 1995; School-to-Work Fundamental Elements, No date). In addition, the Provincial Government has made it a priority to integrate students into the work environment and improve their attitudes towards supervision, self-confidence, practical reasoning and job skills (British Columbia School District Career Programs, 1997).

Work experience placements are a form of practicum, a practice that has been used in many professions to provide training for new learners. Regardless of the practicum model, the basic expectations are the same for different disciplines. Daresh (1990) believes practica provide many opportunities to students. They allow students to test their commitment to career goals and gain insight into the preparation of further education. They let students apply knowledge and skills gained through studies in a practical setting, develop competencies progressively through participation in a range of practical experience and to identify and evaluate areas that require further development. Au Yeung
et al (1993) concurs saying that “practical application of knowledge, contributions to students’ personal and intellectual development, and acquisition of technical skills” (p.207) are some of the benefits of work experience. Other successes of work experience according to Au Yeung et al (1993) are providing students with access to job prospects, developing interpersonal and communication skills, and developing important job skills and performance. An added benefit of work experience is that it provides opportunities to increase contact between teachers and industry (Au Yeung et al, 1993).

However, work experiences are not without difficulties and problems. It is not always easy to arrange appropriated work experience placements. Au Yeung et al (1993) express concern that some businesses are only looking for cheap labour, and do not provide consistent supervision and well-prepared supervisory staff. For work experiences to be effective there must be integration of theory and practice. Regrettably it is not always the case and students find their work experiences contradict their school education program. Fortunately most work experiences do provide appropriate and quality experiences for students.

The goal of career preparation programs is to integrate school-based and work based learning, occupational and academic education (Kentucky State School-to-Work Initiative, 1996), and to allow students to make a smoother transition from secondary to post-secondary institutes and the work place. This study will look at the students’ perspectives of a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. Do the students feel participation in this Career Preparation Program, especially the work experience component, will benefit their future career choice?
Chapter Three

Research Approach

The research subjects for this project are students in a career preparation program in Fashion Design and Merchandising. I am the researcher and the teacher in this program. The subjects are my own students. I have a very close working relationship with them, as most of them have been my students for a number of years. I am the primary evaluator for their course subjects for the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher interacts with those they study, "whether this interaction assumes the form of living with or observing informants over a prolonged period of time, or actual collaboration" (Creswell, 1994, p.6). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science, which studies persons; it is interested in the significant world of the human being. (Van Manen, 1990).

This research falls within the general parameter of a qualitative study. Which does not start with a theory to test or verify. The theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phase or be used relatively late in the research process as a basis for comparison with other theories (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative inquiry is the process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Unlike a quantitative study that views reality as something independent of the researcher, the individuals involved in the research situation construct the qualitative researcher's reality. Therefore, multiple realities exist in any given situation, the
researcher's, the subjects' under investigation, and the audience’s interpreting the study.

This type of research is characterised as systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and is undertaken by the participants of the research (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990; Quicke, 1995; Zeichner, 1993).

"From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (Van Manen, 1990, p.5). Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience; therefore, it is the perfect vehicle for my study of students' perspectives of work experience in a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program.

"Phenomenology asks, ‘What is this or that kind of experience like?’” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Hermeneutic phenomenological is interested in the human world as we find it in all its variegated aspects (Van Manen, 1990). This form of research finds its point of departure in the situation, therefore, it is a very suitable method for researching my students and their work experience placement reflections.

Phenomenology does not ask, ‘How do these children learn this particular material?’ but it asks, ‘What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning (so that I can now better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children)?’ (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

The lived quality and significance of the work experiences can be described to show the essence of the experiences through the study of phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990).

This research will not be seeking solutions; instead, it will examine students’ perspectives of their lived experiences of work experience. Phenomenology research does not problem solve nor look for solutions. It asks for significance and meaning for
situations and events (Van Manen, 1990). The aim of phenomenological research is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence (Van Manen, 1990).

Working and researching with my students could be viewed as coercion. The pressure for the students to participate was there, even though I had made it clear to them that participation was not a course requirement. Their evaluation and letter grades were not dependent on their participation in my research. Visiting students during their work experience placements and getting their reaction was part of my regular duties as a work experience supervisor teacher. The evaluation of the student’s work experience for grading purposes was based on multiple sources of data. Part of it was based on the documentation completed by the students and their business sponsors. Part of it was based on my personal observations before, during and after the work experience, as well as student feedback and sponsor feedback. There was no percentage mark given for each work experience segment. A letter grade was assigned at the end of the Grade 12 year after all the required work experience had been completed and all the necessary documentation had been submitted. The students were not evaluated on what they disclosed about their experiences. Therefore, they did not feel any pressure to embellish or hide their experiences. They did not feel threatened by my research in any way and often went out of their way to provide additional information. Pressure was further reduced by the fact that the personal interviews with each student were not conducted until after classes had officially ended and the report card marks had been submitted to the office in June.

“In personal experience methods the ethical dimensions of researcher-participant relationships are highlighted” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.422). The teacher/student
relationship required serious consideration of who I was as the researcher in the stories of my students, because I was a character in their stories, and I changed their stories. According to Creswell (1994), the qualitative researcher admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases, as well as the value nature of the information gathered from the field. As a personal experience researcher, I was very much aware of responsibility to my students and how my research may affect their lives. I had a great deal of influence on these students, due to the strong bonds that had developed over the years. Being their clothing and textiles teacher as well as their career preparation program teacher, my values and beliefs influenced the students consciously and subconsciously. “A student’s mouth can be your best ally or your greatest detractor. The message that your students carry into 'their community' about vocational-technical education has a major impact on their peers” (Hite, 1994, p.33).

Research Setting

There is a rapidly growing fashion apparel industry in Vancouver. In 1994 British Columbia established its own apparel counsel known as Apparel BC. Today, the apparel industry is British Columbia’s sixth largest secondary industry. On a walk through Yale Town, a trendy area in downtown Vancouver, one can find many small independent design and apparel companies and workshops. British Columbia is known internationally as a leader in outdoor/adventure clothing. There are a number of post-secondary institutes that offer fashion studies that are nationally recognised. However, there are very few programs available in secondary schools. Therefore, it is important to start career programs in fashion apparel in our secondary schools in order to introduce students to the
various aspects of the fashion industry and to de-glamorise the popular media image of fashion.

Central High is a large urban secondary school with approximately 1,700 students. It is considered to be one of the newer secondary schools in the city, even though it was originally built in 1962. This school is considered to be a very academic school. The majority of the student population plan to attend university and other post-secondary institutions. It is located in an upper middle class neighbourhood of Vancouver. I graduated from the school in 1976, and have noted that the composition of the school’s population has been changing over the past decades. When I graduated from Central High in the 1970s, it had a significant Jewish and Canadian born Asian presence. Today there is a significant Asian majority, many are new immigrants – mainly of Chinese ancestry. The remainder of the student population is of European, Japanese, Korean, Filipino or Indian background. There are more than forty different languages and dialects spoken among the students; for many, English is not their first or even second language. Students who are fluent only in English are in the minority. Mandarin and Cantonese are the popular Chinese languages among the ethnic Chinese students. Although Central High is located in an affluent part of the city, it draws its students from a wide range of economic backgrounds though the various special programs for high academic achievements, fine arts and applied skills.

I started teaching at Central High School in May of 1988 with the first English as a Second Language class. But over the years I started to teach more and more clothing and textiles courses as home economics was my teaching major. The school has a well-equipped clothing and textiles lab and over the years the clothing and textiles program has
grown. The school administration is supportive and encouraging of career preparation programs. In September of 1996, I started a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. The program started due to students' need for better preparation to enter the post-secondary studies in the area of fashion. A number of students who had over the years entered into post-secondary fashion studies. Often returned to school, showed me their work, and lamented over the limited preparation they had in high school.

Central High's Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program is a two-year program (see appendix C). The core courses consist of Clothing and Textiles 11, Clothing and Textiles 12A (tailoring) and/or 12B (pattern drafting), Career Preparation for Fashion Merchandising 12A and Work experience 11 & 12. Two elective courses can be selected from a wide range of courses that will allow students to maintain an interest in fashion related areas. Most of my students tend to select all the possible clothing and textiles courses available. In some cases, I have created additional clothing and textiles courses to accommodate the students' needs.

Mathematics 11 is designated as a support course in our program because students need the mathematics skills and knowledge in drafting, design and merchandising. Fashion design and merchandising offers "the opportunity to experience mathematics at an applied level using such concepts as percentages, probability, ratio, use of computers, making and interpreting various kinds of graphs, as well as applying basic math functions" (Delaurenti, 1988, p.173). Our school stresses academics and most of the students' parents expect them to go to post-secondary institutions. The inclusion of Mathematics 11 as a support course allows interested students to have more flexibility to meet the requirements of
graduation, college and university entrance requirements, other career possibilities and still have the opportunity to take part in our program.

The school provides students with basic employability skills of academics, personal management and teamwork that can be transferable to any program and life-long enjoyment. I want my students to have both ‘textbook knowledge’ and job-specific skills, in order to open a number of pathways for future opportunity (Leftwich, 1992). “Fashion merchandising at the secondary level prepares students to function at a higher level of competence in the fashion world than their peers who have not had such an experience” (Delaurenti, 1988, p.174). It is critical that these students upon graduation from secondary school be fully prepared for the challenges in the work place or post-secondary institution.

There are many areas of specialisation in the fashion industry. In order to expose the students to as many areas as possible, the work placements for the students in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program include: retail sales, apparel manufacturing, and designer/workshops. As well, I arrange for other activities to enrich the program. For example some students participated in a New York field studies tour, which provided exposure to the New York fashion industry during Spring Break 1997, while others have participated in Skills Canada Competitions and the Pacific Rim Fashion Show.

**The Researcher**

I have always been interested in fashion. I remember as a child, I was always making clothes for my dolls from scrap fabric and pretty paper. In high school, I took all
the available clothing and textiles courses. In Grade 10, I dressed up Barbie dolls in period costumes of the early settlers for a social studies project. In Literature 12, I designed and constructed garments, for Barbie, based on stories from the Canterbury Tales. I would have liked to have pursued further education and worked in the fashion industry. However, there were few opportunities available at the time as most of the post-secondary institutes that had fashion as a study option were in the eastern provinces.

Because my parents were not willing for me to travel and study so far away from home, I went to a provincial university and completed a degree in general Home Economics and then completed my teaching certification. I have taught all the areas within Home Economics; however, I teach mainly in the clothing and textiles area. Clothing construction is my passion. I love working with fabric and design. This is why I enjoy teaching clothing and textiles and putting in extra hours after school to work with students who are interested in clothing construction and in the fashion industry. I hope to provide my students with opportunities and skills that I did not have at their age.

Today, the only university in the province offering Home Economics does not have a strong clothing and textiles component, although there were a number of very good instructors when I attended the program. Therefore, I did not have a strong background in the fashion industry. Over the years, I took numerous courses and seminars in the area of clothing construction and on the fashion industry to keep up-to-date with new developments. I feel that my passion for fashion and my knowledge of clothing and textiles allow me to encourage students who wish to pursue a future in the fashion apparel industry.
The Subjects

Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation at this school attracts a limited number of students. The chances of its gaining dramatically in a school of about 1700 students are slim. However, it can make a significant difference for the few students who are interested in this career field. The students who have enrolled in the career preparation program are all planning to attend further post-secondary institutions. Some of them want to pursue programs in fashion related areas such as fashion designing, retail merchandising and fashion illustration; others plan to obtain a general degree for example a Bachelor of Arts first and then enter the field of fashion. Because of the need to maintain university entrance requirements, the program has to integrate academic and career education. The course selection includes Math 11, French 11, Japanese 11 and Mandarin 11 so that students can meet university entrance requirements. The inclusion of the language courses also opens up the possibility of working abroad, since fashion is of global interest.

The students in the programs are females, aged between 16 and 19 years old, most of whom are from middle and upper middle classes with little if any real job experience. Although some are well travelled and sophisticated in 'cosmopolitan' matters, they tend to be somewhat naive about the work world. Few of the students worry about the cost of fabric and sewing notions they use in their clothing projects. Most of them are academic-bound -- even if they themselves do not want to go to university, it is expected by their parents.

I prepare my students before each work experience by telling them to listen and observe the everyday routines of the establishment. "Do not assume that you are more
knowledgeable, be willing to attempt and do any task within the basic safety and ethic
margins. All knowledge gained during work experience will help to provide a more
complete picture of the real work world.” I urge the students to ask questions and seek
clarifications when necessary. It is better to ask for clarification than to complete tasks in
correctly and/or late (Busse, 1992). Many of my students have English as a second
language backgrounds; therefore, it is especially important for them to develop good
listening skills. Poor listeners waste time by bungling instructions and taking incorrect
approaches to projects (Busse, 1992).

**Approaching the Research**

In this research project, I am a participant-observer. Teaching clothing and textiles
is one of my duties at the school. I am the teacher, designated to teach Career Preparation
for Fashion Design and Merchandising. As part of my duties, I contact and visit
sponsoring companies to make sure they are suitable and able to provide a safe working
environment. Keeping in mind student interest and ability, I match students to job sites. I
am familiar with most of the students' strengths and weaknesses in clothing and textiles
and their interests, motivation and drive to succeed in an area of the fashion industry. I
have taught most of them in previous clothing and textile courses over the years. This
information helps me in the placement of students for work experience. In making work
placements, I consider: the hours of operation of the sponsoring companies – during
and/or after school hours; the student’s suitability and/or compatibility to the sponsoring
company; and the ways students can be exposed to as many experiences as possible within
their three different work experience placements.
To organise the work experience program, I contact the sponsoring companies and find out when they are willing to take students in order to co-ordinate the time with the students. For these young people, many factors must be taken into account to determine when it would be the most convenient for them to go out for their work placement. Today, in many things can make work placements difficult. Arrangements must take into account whether there are any professional development days available, and how many projects and assignments the students have to complete in a specific time period. Extra-curricular activities such as team sports and music lessons, and tutors and the rearrangement of part-time jobs are also complications that must be considered. Some students tend to delay their work experience placements. I often have to push the students into a placement, otherwise they might miss important opportunities and/or panic at the end of the school year when they have yet to complete their work experience requirements. It is often difficult to please all the stakeholders at the same time. The student, the sponsoring company, the subject teachers and the student’s parents all have a voice in the work experience placement.

Most of my visits to students while they are on work experience tend to be short for a number of reasons, the most important one being that I do not want to disturb the students while they are working, since the experience is intended as a paid work situation. The students are often doing specific tasks which should not be interrupted. The sponsor supervisor may not be available to discuss the student; as well, some sponsors may not want to discuss the student when she is present. Some of my most enlightening visits occur when there are no students present, or when I am visiting one student and an earlier student is discussed. On each visit, I make sure that I take a few of photographs that
document the work experience. Copies of the photos are always given to the students to enrich their portfolios. Other copies are kept for my records and for publication in school related documents such as school newsletters.

Each work placement can vary from one work week to a couple of months in length depending on the arrangement with the sponsoring company. Each student completes 30 to 40 hours of work experience in each of three work placements. During a student’s work experience, I arrange a time to visit her to make sure everything is going smoothly. During the visit, I speak to both the student and supervisor, individually and together when possible, to get both of their perspectives. I ask the students to tell me what tasks have they done? Are they learning anything interesting? This is also the time the students voice any concerns they have regarding the work placement. The visit provides an opportunity for the sponsor to speak to me about the quality of work of the student. In most cases the sponsors are pleased with the performance of the students. We sometimes discuss the student’s strengths and weaknesses, and how they can be improved upon. In all work experience situations, sponsoring companies are required to complete a student performance form, which is returned to the school. Students are required to fill in a daily job description log and a feedback sheet as part of their work experience assignment (see appendix D & E).

**Data Collection**

This research was completed from January 1997 to June 1998 after I received official approval from the School Board to do the study. The actual time periods of data collection depended on the availability of work sites and student preferences in being
absent from a week of regular school classes. Some of the students’ work placements were completed prior to the research period, since it is part of my duties as a work experience teacher to monitor and collect information on students’ work experience placements. Many of the work experiences were arranged for after school and during summer vacations.

“The lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is both the source and the object of phenomenological research” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 53). To make a study of the lived experience of my students, I used a journal to document events as they occurred in and out of the classroom related to the work experience component of the career preparation program. Van Manen (1990) states that sources such as journals and logs may contain reflective accounts of human experiences that are of phenomenological value.

Other data in this study included student work experience reports from sponsoring companies and student feedback forms. The student feedback forms were analysed for similarities and differences. Conversations as to how the students were progressing were conducted with both students and sponsors while visiting them on site during their work experience and were recorded as field notes. “Field notes may be written by researchers or by participants, and they may be written in more or less detail with more or less interpretative content” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.422). Field notes were used because the students did not welcome the use of a tape recorder and it seemed out of place on the work site. The students lacked spontaneity in conversation with it present. Instead, I made notes of the important points of the conversations after the fact. I had to be very careful about what kinds of field notes were created, since “all field texts are constructed representations of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.422).
Debriefing of students after their return from their work experience and class discussion of student work experiences were a regular part of Career Preparation Fashion Design and Merchandising 12A. The students shared with the class their duties and experiences during work experience. I tried to tape these discussions; however, they were often spontaneous and setting up of the tape recorder would have interrupted the flow of the discussions. Therefore, once again I had to write them down after the fact. It was often not possible during the busy workday; many notes were not done until I got home at the end of the day.

Formal interviews were conducted with students once all the letters of consent were returned. The individual interviews were conducted after the official end of classes in June 1997. They were scheduled during the exam period, after I submitted my final marks for the students. Interviews are another source of data in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, 1991; Mishler, 1986). Interviews yield voluminous data that enriches the quality of the research. When the students related their valuable perspectives to me, I felt that I had gained something, even though the 'thing' gained was not a quantifiable entity (Van Manen, 1990). The interviews were tape-recorded, because

An interviewer who takes notes cannot give full attention to the informant. Physical movements, gestures, and facial expressions give clues not to be found in the words themselves, and some of these fleeting non-verbal cues will be missed while the interviewer is writing. (Whyte, 1982, p.118)

The students were assured that their comments would be anonymously reported in the research report. All nine students involved in the Fashion Design and Merchandising program consented to be interviewed. According to Van Manen (1990), interviews may be used to study the way individuals see themselves and others in certain situations.
At the time of the interviews, six students were graduating from Grade 12 and three students were continuing in the Fashion Design and Merchandising program the following year. Each student was given the same set of questions at the start of the interview (see appendix F), although there were slight variations, additions and/or omissions depending on the student’s understanding of the questions and/or number of work experiences completed at the time of the interviews. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to an hour in length. There was often much laughter and sharing of stories that happened during their work experiences. The atmospheres of the interviews were relaxed and very informal. The students appeared comfortable voicing their perspectives. Additional informal interviews were conducted with the three students at the end of their Grade 12 year to add new information after these students completed their work placements.

The interview questions were in two forms, semistructured questions and unstructured questions to allow students freedom of expression from limited response questions. Semistructured questions have no choices from which the respondent selects an answer, they tend to be open-ended questions but are specific in their intent. Unstructured questions allow the interviewer great latitude in asking broad questions in whatever order seems appropriate (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). However, I knew I had to be careful not to let the method rule the questions (Van Manen, 1990). Some students may need to directed with specific examples of instance, situation, person, or event (Van Manen, 1990) in order to explore the experience to the fullest.

Many of the student responses came from casual or impromptu conversations and discussions. These encounters were often the most informative segments of the data collected. This was an advantage of working with my own students. The students were
very open with their comments; they did not feel inhibited from expressing their perspectives. However, for me, it was not always easy to remember what they had said, because it was difficult to stop class to make notes. Some of the graduates in the program also kept in touch and told me about what and how they were doing. They provided additional information on how the career preparation program had affected their lives and post-secondary education.

**Interpretation**

Student experiences are written in this report as descriptive narratives.

The use of story or of anecdotal material in phenomenological writing is not merely a literary embellishment. The stories themselves are examples or topics of practical theorising. Anecdotal narratives (stories) are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case material on which pedagogic reflection is possible. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 121)

This method allows me to look for common themes and differences in their perspectives on their work experiences (Carter, 1994; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Creswell, 1994; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

Phenomenology is an analysis of qualitative data to provide an understanding of the concept from participant’s perspective and views of social realities. The researcher constructs a picture that takes the shape as he or she collects data and examines the parts. The subtle meanings of the concept can be understood more clearly by the readers. (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 95)

Van Manen (1990) states, natural attitude of everyday life experience characterises phenomenological research. Narratives are stories that consist of events, characters, and settings arranged in a temporal sequence implying both causality and significance. They are a way of capturing the complexity, specificity, and interconnectedness of events and
actions that takes place. Carter (1993) states that stories allow us to impose order and coherence on the stream of experience and work out the meaning of incidents and events in the real world. When we tell stories we are deciding what to tell and what to leave out and imposing structure and meaning on events. Therefore, stories are theories and how we tell them are revelations of what we believe. Stories are not merely raw data from which to construct interpretations but products of a fundamentally interpretative process that is shaped by the moralistic impulses of the author and by narrative forces or requirements (Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Recording the events and highlights of the students' experiences over time makes it possible to gain insights into what the students know, how their knowledge is organised, and how their knowledge changed with additional experiences of participating in work experience.

This is the appropriate method for this study, because of the limited number of participants. "While there are statistical rules for probability sample size, there are only guidelines for purposeful samples size" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 382). I looked for any possible patterns, and grouped together similar themes from the students. In qualitative methodology, inductive logic prevails. The categories emerge in interaction between the researcher and the date; the categories are not identified prior to the study. These themes were then compared with the critical literature review for any similarities and/or differences in findings. The findings of the research were also analysed in the educational context from which the data had been gathered. Did the students gain the skills and meet the objectives of the work experience course? The data that emerged from the study were rich 'context-bound' information that led to patterns or theories that help to explain the results.
Chapter Four

Students' Journeys

Nine Students' Work Experience in a Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program

In this chapter I will tell the stories of the students in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program at Central High. Each story is unique and informative. I call these stories 'journeys' because they reflect the perspectives of the students as they evolved and acquired knowledge and confidence through their work experience placements.

Stories provide a mode of knowing that captures in a special fashion the richness and the nuances of meaning in human affairs (Carter, 1994). They are important because they allow the human science text to acquire a narrative quality that is ordinarily characteristic of story (Van Manen, 1990). Stories are a distinctive mode of explanation characterised by intrinsic multiplicity of meanings. They often provide more information than facts and statistics. They are a means of interpreting or reinterpreting events by constructing a causal pattern which integrates that which is known about an event as well as that which is conjectural but relevant to an interpretation (Carter, 1994).

The nine students did a variety of work experiences. I made sure each student did at least three different types of work placements; some students did more than three placements depending on the opportunities available at the time (see appendix G)
Judi's Journey.

Judi came to our Secondary School in Grade 8 as an ESL student. Her family came from Taiwan five years ago. During her first year at the school, she was introduced to Home Economics as part of her ESL classes, and discovered a liking for clothing and textiles. For her elective when Judi entered Grade 9, she selected Clothing and Textiles 9/10. In clothing and textiles 9/10, Judi maintained a B average. During the latter part of that year, she started to develop a serious interest in clothing construction and started to stay late after school to do extra projects. Judi's clothing construction skills improved steadily with each passing year. She was always willing to try new techniques and experiment with new designs and fabric. She achieved a very high 'A' average in her senior clothing and textiles courses. Judi was the co-winner of the department award for clothing and textiles in her graduating year. However, she was not there to receive her award, because she represented British Columbia in the third annual National Skills Canada competition in fashion design. Her efforts garnered her the gold medal in her category. Judi was also one of the four district scholarship winners for the school.

Judi wanted a future in the area of fashion but did not feel that she had enough knowledge or skills. She and other students like her were the reason that we started the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. Judi was one of the first students to sign up for the program and she was also the very first student to go on work experience in this program. In order for her and other Grade 11 students to qualify for the program that did not officially start until September 1996, she had to do her first work experience in the 1995 - 1996 school year. During her Grade 12 year, three of Judi's courses were in clothing and textiles. Judi's parents, like many Asian parents, wanted her
to attend university; therefore, she had to keep up her academic marks to maintain
university entrance requirements. In order to take all the clothing and textiles courses and
Fashion Career Preparation Program, Judi spent summers taking math and chemistry.
Although Judi is not an academically strong student, her hard work and persistence did
pay off with early admission being granted for science at a provincial university. Judi
considered going into Home Economics at the university; however, the program did not
offer a strong clothing and textiles component. Instead, has decided to attend a two-year
fashion design program. Depending on the status of the post secondary institution
(whether it will achieve university status) Judi plans to go to Ryerson, in Toronto and
complete a degree in the area of fashion. She hopes for a career in fashion design or
merchandising but she is also contemplating getting a teaching certificate after her degree.

Judi’s first work experience was at one of the largest local manufacturers that sells
across Canada and into parts of the USA. The company does about $10,000,000 worth of
business annually. She felt this introduction into the fashion industry was “a real eye
opener”. “I saw the factory, how they operate and everything, and how they worked.
How the products go from the designer to the sample maker and to the factory and
everything.”

Judi found her duties to be very boring and repetitive during work experience and
stated, “I just sat there and did the sample sheets for the new line for their clients.”
However, she felt it was a very valuable experience because she worked right in the design
room and was able to observe all the actions and reactions of her environment. “I can
hear the designers yelling at each other and see how they work, and listen to all the
frustrated and often heated exchanges. I was glad that I was just the assistant and did not get in the line of fire. Everybody was very nice to me.”

Learning does not have to come from doing important or complicated tasks. She reflected, “I only learned how to do the sample sheets, but I learned how important it was to do things clearly and concisely.” The quality of Judi’s school assignments did reflect the knowledge she gained on the work experience. Her work tended to be more carefully done, they were more polished and professional looking. Working on the sample sheets may not have been exciting, but they did teach Judi the standard of work expected in the fashion industry.

During her breaks, Judi was allowed to move through the factory and view the various aspects of the manufacturing facilities. She noted, “Most of the factory workers were women and did not speak very much English. They work very hard, but they are low paid and do not have much education. I want to go to post secondary school so I do not have to work in factories.”

A small independent designer specialising in bridal wear was Judi’s second work experience placement. The company is located within a bridal supply retail store. She did this work experience during the first week of summer holidays with another student because the sponsor had requested two students at the same time.

Working for this company was a very different perspective from the previous work experience. Judi felt that she learnt a lot from the bridal wear firm. “I learned how to grade the pattern, how to custom fit clients, and tips on how to make bridal wear and things like that. You have to learn on the job for many things, books and classrooms do
not teach you; you have to do it on the job to understand how and why. Learn the tricks of the trade.”

Although she appreciated the knowledge that she was able to gain from this work experience, she felt that the sponsor exploited them. “Well like seriously he asked too much, we were only high school students and he was making things really hard for us. We did not know that much and he wanted so much from us. Free labour you know.” On hindsight, Judi was glad that he worked them so hard. “He is a one man operation and he has to keep his overhead down. Free labour is one way of doing it.”

Judi and Jay continued to work for the company during the summer and receive far below minimum pay. However, they thought of it as job experience, paving the way for the future. When the students worked for the sponsor, the premises consisted of two small rooms -- one was the reception/retail outlet and the other was the design/production room. Since then, the company has extended to the whole of the top floor of the building and the designer is making a name for himself locally in bridal wear.

For her last work experience, Judi went to a retail store that sells clothing for the young junior contemporary and kids' markets. The store is part of a Western Canadian chain that has a number of stores in the surrounding suburbs. The store is located in a popular high-end mall near the high school. It has over 7,000-sq. ft. of retail floor space. This allowed the students a variety of experiences within the retail component of the fashion apparel industry.

“In this job you have to mainly know how to talk to customers, how to communicate with them. It was not very difficult for me, specially when many of the customers are Chinese and they want to deal with someone that can speak their language.”
Being an ESL student, Judi did have some apprehension about her fluency with English. Her sponsor supervisor did comment on Judi’s language skills but found her very willing to learn and took constructive criticisms well.

One of the comments by the supervisor was that Judi was a very willing learner, helpful and co-operative with both clients and staff. “She always did her work quickly and effectively, and always had a ready smile and friendly attitude.” Judi rotated throughout the store learning different duties and responsibilities. She remarked after this placement that, “team work is very import in retail sales. Every job is important to the running of the store, although some jobs are not very exciting.”

The students start their training as greeters, a very monotonous job that requires little intelligence, but a lot of diligence. One of the duties of the greeter is also to act as security for the store. “Someone had to be the greeter, someone the sales and someone the cashier. You are not alone.”

Judi wanted experience doing visual displays; therefore, she asked the manager if she could stay after her shift and help with the visual changes. “I was nervous, but I wanted to be able to do it so that I can put it on my resume.”

Five students did their work experience at this retail store at the same time and were all fortunately able to go through the employees’ orientation before starting their in-store experience. Of the five students, three were offered seasonal jobs and later two were employed as part-time employees. Since the first set of students, this retail sponsor has been used for many other students’ work experience requirements.

New York provided Judi with more insight into the fashion world. The seminars and tours provided her with glimpses of other areas of the fashion industry. The many
possibilities provided Judi with new focuses and ideas for her future in this industry.
Subsequently, Judi has been accepted into a two-year Fashion Design program at a well-known local college after graduation.

**Portia’s Travels.**

Portia is a very mature young woman, with a lot of self-confidence and poise. Portia’s self-assurance was evident even from CT 10. The choice of patterns and fabric displayed an innate awareness of design and colour. Although clothing construction is not something that Portia really enjoys, she knows the importance of understanding the concept of clothing construction is a vital component of the fashion industry. Clothing construction was not her strong point, but she was always very conscientious and always put in her best effort in her clothing projects. Portia has an excellent eye for the elements of design and is an accomplished illustrator. She is also very reliable. Her assignments were always well done and completed on time. Her sense of organisation and time management is an asset for the future. Having very supportive parents also will help Portia to actualise her future goals.

Portia started her work experience at the same designer/manufacturer as some of the other students. “During my first work experience, I noticed how very much it was like a factory; I didn’t expect that. I was expecting the glamour found in fashion magazines.” “Working there, I got to see the clothes being made from scratch, just like the factories; I didn’t expect to see it in Vancouver. It just wasn’t very glamorous. A lot of manual labour.” Portia did not expect to do some of the work she actually had to do. “I don’t want to say slave labour, but I think they just saw me as someone who could finish up all
the jobs that haven’t been done.” Portia had the unfortunate task of sorting and organising all the slopers (the basic blocks used in pattern drafting) that had fallen the previous day. During her time there, Portia witnessed the financial stress that small independent companies are always under. “This experience has given me a realistic look into the fashion industry. My eyes are opened to how hard it is to work and be successful in this industry.”

Retail was Portia’s second work experience assignment. She found the work to be easy and enjoyable, although very repetitive. The sponsor found Portia to be quick to learn and very conscientious. She enjoyed doing the window displays, especially when she was given a free hand. The only thing that Portia had difficulty dealing with was the friction between the manager and the sales associate. “They were always trying to outdo each other. One would want me to do things one way, and the other would counter the orders with something different.” Portia was very diplomatic and tried to keep the peace.

Portia was one of the first students to sign up for the New York trip. Portia loved the shopping in New York and plans to revisit the city at the earliest opportunity. However, it was more than just a shopping trip for Portia. She accumulated many insights from her trip.

What’s most obvious to me is that you have to work really hard. Everyone that I met who works in the fashion industry really stresses that you have to really love your work and that you have to be really dedicated. It becomes part of your lifestyle, it is not just a separate career, you have to dedicate yourself and work really hard to succeed.

Portia hopes to attend FIT, Fashion Institute of Technology, in New York, in the future. She feels that to experience the full excitement of the fashion industry you must work and live in New York, the fashion capital of North America. Vancouver is still in the
embryonic stage when it comes to the fashion industry, even though it is the sixth largest secondary industry in the province. “New York had made me more determined to pursue a career in the fashion industry, although not as a designer.”

For her last week of work experience, Portia spent time in a designer studio. From the sponsor Portia learnt about organisation and the many tasks that must be done in order for an independent operation to function. It was a quiet week without any deadlines; therefore, the sponsor had Portia organise her studio and redo the displays. She also had the opportunity to attend a lecture/workshop featuring the designer and other local designers in the city.

Portia felt the career preparation program provided many advantages for her. School is supposed to prepare you for the real world, like getting a job and I think work experience helps. Work experience helps more than sitting in a classroom, especially if you really are going into the field that you are in the career preparation program for.

The intensity of the program and the hard work were very challenging for Portia, but she expressed no disadvantages other than the interruption of class time. “Teachers tend to get upset when you miss a week of classes. I had to spend a lot of time catching up with some of my studies. Thankfully I did not have a heavy academic load.” Portia plans to take courses in fashion and keep her options open for the future.

**Wendy’s Trip.**

Wendy took clothing and textiles in Grade 8 as part of her applied skills requirement, and did not take any further courses until Grade 10. Born in Canada, Wendy is fluent in English and has maintained her heritage language, Cantonese. Right from the start, Wendy expressed a strong interest in fashion and clothing construction. She was
always starting new projects and experimenting with new fabrics and patterns; however, she was often frustrated because her skill level had not developed to handle many of the challenges of the projects. In Grade 11, Wendy took Clothing and Textiles 11 and 12 and produced an impressive number of quality garments. In Grade 12, she maintained university entrance requirements for Arts as well as taking three Grade 12 level clothing and textiles courses and visual arts courses to enhance her preparation for post-secondary studies in the fashion industry. Wendy received a very high ‘A’ average in her senior clothing and textiles courses. She was the co-winner of the department award for clothing and textiles in her graduating year and she was also one of the four district scholarship winners. Wendy was one of the team of four students who won the gold medal in the first annual British Columbia Skills Canada competition for fashion design. Unfortunately, only one student was allowed to proceed to the national competition that year. Therefore, she did not have the opportunity for further competition. Of all the career preparation students, Wendy was the most diverse of the career preparation students. She participated in many different school clubs and activities because she felt that various activities would improve her overall preparation for her education and career goals. Wendy’s wide spectrum of interests and activities also displayed her organisational skills and artistic abilities.

Wendy’s first work experience was at one of the largest garment manufacturing companies in the province. At first she found it difficult to get to her place of work experience on time. The workday started at 8:00 am and she had to travel by bus to get there. By the end of the week she had learnt the importance of being on time. Her supervisor had reminded her of the consequences of late arrival if she were a full-time
employee. There was a certain amount of resentment and surprise on the part of Wendy, but it was a lesson well learnt. According to Busse (1992) teenagers do not understand why it is so important for them to come to class on time with completed homework. Keller (1991) concurs that students should be given a more realistic idea of the importance of responsibility in the areas of attendance and punctuality at the work place. In the workplace, employers will not accept many excuses for being late and not having tasks completed.

Wendy worked in the production room, under the supervision of the head designer. “The electric cutter and the denim washing machine” were Wendy’s most vivid memories. It was not an exciting introduction into the apparel industry. “All I did was stick fabric samples onto paper, and they had boxes and boxes of them.” However, it was eye opening. Wendy was able to wander around the complex on her breaks. “Everyone was very nice to me, but there was so much back stabbing among the workers.” Wendy experienced the tension, competitiveness and stress that are common place in a production room. This was in contrast to school where we tend to work together and help each other.

For her second work experience, Wendy worked with a local designer who specialised in legal wear and had a line of clothing in a well-known department store. Wendy really enjoyed working for the designer. She was very open and helpful with Wendy’s questions, always more than willing to share her experiences and expertise to help the students to gain a better understanding of the industry. “Creativity is not the most important part of being a fashion designer was what I came away with from this work experience.” Hard work, perseverance, business skills, and interpersonal skills are
more important than being able to create. Wendy had the opportunity to meet and interact with some of the clients. She discovered the importance of meeting the needs of the clients and designing to suit the target market.

Working in the retail sector rounded-out Wendy’s work experiences.

The stuff you learn there you can apply to reality. The people there took advantage of you. They ask, ‘can you do me a favour?’ and you can’t really go ‘NO’ or like they go ‘can you do this for me?’ and you can’t go like no I can’t. So you just do it. You get to see what it is really like instead of just from textbooks. You learn that commission is really bad and you don’t really know until you’ve worked there.

Wendy went to work for the company a few months after her work experience. However, she specialised as a cashier because she did not want to fight for the commission.

Wendy felt participation in the career preparation program really helped her to prepare for post-secondary education in the fashion industry. “The work experience component of the program provided excellent insight, even though they were not always enjoyable.” The main disadvantage that Wendy found with work experience was when it came into conflict with school.

Work experience usually takes a whole week and you have to miss important assignments and things. The teachers expect you to make-up and catch-up on all the work assigned. You take a subject where you have to learn continuously everyday, and then if you miss one day then you are like thrown off and then if you miss a week then you are thrown off for a few days and you have to catch up on your own.

Participation in work experience has helped Wendy to have a clearer vision of her place in the apparel industry.

I can see myself as either an assistant designer or in the marketing area. Before I went on my work experiences, I thought of fashion design as being so glamorous, then I realised there is so much work behind it, and frustration behind the glamour. You get a reality check. The odds of becoming a designer are very slim; it is more likely for you to become a pattern maker or grader.
Wendy will be attending the same Two-year Fashion Design program as Judi after graduation.

**Jay’s Tour.**

Jay started sewing in Grade 8 as an ESL student. At the time her English was very limited and required a lot of help. Over the years, Jay developed a love of sewing and spent a lot of her free time in the clothing lab. She was always buying unique fabrics and materials for her projects. She would often spend half of her monthly allowance on sewing supplies instead of food and other essentials. (Only Jay and her two siblings lived in Vancouver; her parents remained in Taiwan. The children were each given a monthly allowance for all their needs, including food and clothing. If they overspent, they would have to do without until the next month.) Jay joined the fashion career preparation program against her parents’ wishes. Her parents wanted her to go to university in a more academic field; however, Jay felt that she had a flair for fashion design. The glamour of being a fashion designer had woven its web around her. But she did maintain the academic standard for university entrance to satisfy her parents’ aspirations.

Jay’s first work experience was in a small designer/manufacturing company. “The first experience, I think it was bad; it really took away my concept of fashion design. It was like being in a factory; the floor did not have anything, no carpet or something, just a cement floor. The wall was dirty, and all the fabric piled and stacked everywhere, very unorganised.” Jay’s concepts of the fashion designer and the fashion industry were totally shattered by the reality of her work experience. “You have to think about many things;
you have to think about your target market, what will appeal to the customers and how to make your garment marketable, not just what you want.”

Jay found her work experience was not as exciting as she had hoped. She felt that her talents were not well utilised and that she had to do a lot of cleaning and organising work that was not related to fashion. On the other hand, Jay’s supervisor felt that she was not very self-motivated and had to be told repeatedly to do things.

In business, many employees have the mistaken belief that their job is insignificant; however, when employees understand the importance of individual jobs to the smooth workings of a business, they will develop self-worth (Busse, 1992). The nature of work in the future means that employees will need strong communications and thinking skills to be able to adapt to new environments and meet new challenges. Students will need a solid work ethic and entrepreneurial skills to compete effectively in tomorrow’s economy.

Jay did her second work experience with Judi during the summer of 1995. The sponsor had requested two students at the same time. He felt that two students could learn more together, and they could be of more use to him. Like Judi, Jay felt it was a very good learning experience, however, it was the least enjoyable of her work experiences. “He really took advantage of us. He always wanted us to come in early and would make sarcastic comments when we wanted to leave at 5:00pm.” Both students felt the work experience was very eye opening and they did learn a lot. However, neither felt it was a very suitable placement for future students. Jay observed, “I did not expect to work so hard. I don’t think some of the other students will be willing to put up with some of his demands.”
During our interview, Jay reflected that this work experience was an excellent life experience. "I learnt about the running of a small business, working to a deadline and working to client specifications. The owner is so careful about his money and counts every penny. Most important, I learnt about the reality of making a living, working for a hard taskmaster. You should send some of the students that are always complaining about hard work to him. Then they will really know what is hard work."

Retail merchandising was not something that Jay enjoyed. Previous to this work experience, Jay thought of becoming a retail store manager. However, this soon changed as her retail work experience progressed. "I always thought that selling was very easy and that I would enjoy doing it. However, it was much harder than I thought and I did not like working with some of the people that I had to work with." Jay did not care for the repetitive nature of retail work and the everyday maintenance that was needed in order for the store to run smoothly. "It was so boring, doing the same type of work all the time. Having to smile and say things you don’t mean." Jay felt the working condition were a lot better than at the bridal store, "no more hand sewing, everything is factory made, but you have to deal with customers, you have to sell your garments and meet store quotas."

From the sponsor’s perspective, Jay was not one of the stronger students. "She was not very motivated to work. She tended to rush in at the last moment. We generally like the workers to arrive a few minutes before their shift, in order to be ready on time."

Jay loved New York, especially the shopping. However, after attending the seminars and having the reality of the fashion apparel industry reinforced by every presenter, Jay started to really think about her place in the fashion industry. "May be this is not what I really want to do."
"My dream is to design for Prada, but it is not reality. Participation in the Fashion Design and Merchandising program has been really beneficial for me." Jay plans to attend a provincial university after graduation. Jay enjoyed participating in the program, although she found the work overwhelming at times and that it took up too much school time, but she has no regrets about being part of it. "Being in this program has shown me that I do not have what it takes to be a fashion designer."

Jay is attending a provincial university in the area of Home Economics. She still has a strong interest in the area of fashion, but feels that she does not have the passion or dedication needed to work as a fashion designer, and does not wish to work in other areas of fashion. She does love to sew, but she does not necessarily enjoy the rigor of the industry. Jay is keeping her options open with a general Home Economics program, because she is also very interested in the area of nutritional science. Jay did not keep in touch after the first year; however, some of the other students said that she is still at university and enjoys participating in fashion shows and other events put on by the Chinese community.

**Jo Jo's Jaunt.**

Jo Jo, like many students in the fashion career preparation program came to the school as an ESL student. She found clothing and textiles classes less taxing on her language abilities and they provided a creative outlet. A very quiet and introverted person, Jo Jo took all the clothing and textiles courses offered at the school. Although she could have put more time and effort into her projects and assignments, Jo Jo was happy to maintain a C+ average.
Although Jo Jo has been in Canada a number of years and did complete her high school graduation requirements, she does not always have full comprehension of the English language. Some of her interview was conducted in Mandarin Chinese to facilitate her responses. According to Jo Jo, she had never worked before her work experiences; she did not consider working in a Chinese restaurant as working. “It was working for friends and everything was done in Chinese, I did not need English.” Her work experiences provided Jo Jo with exposure to the paid work world. She had to deal with total strangers, and she had to speak English all the time. “I did not like to have to rely [sic] on English only, but it was very good for me.”

Jo Jo’s first work experience was at the same designer/manufacturer as Jay’s. Her supervisor found Jo Jo to be quiet and obedient. She was very willing to follow instructions and did her work efficiently. However, her supervisor felt that she lacked self-initiative and drive. She would do her work and wait for further instructions, but did not initiate any activities. When I asked Jo Jo about her work there, she said, “I just did a lot of pressing of sample garments and packaging for shipping and pick-up. Nothing very much, nothing exciting.”

Jo Jo found her retail work experience to be the most interesting and the best learning experience. “I did a lot of different things, and learnt a lot. It was both fun and boring.” Fun, because she learnt about the various aspects of the retail industry. Boring because after the novelty of the tasks wore off, the repetitive nature of the job became monotonous. Although Jo Jo found this work experience productive, she did not want to continue in it when the chance came for a seasonal job.
Working with an independent designer was Jo Jo’s third work experience. Again Jo Jo’s quietness and lack of interaction with others was commented upon. The sponsor reflected that,

Most of the girls that come to me tend to be full of questions and curiosity about the industry. Jo Jo is an exception. She just did what is assigned to her, and when she is finished she would just wait for the next task.

Jo Jo did a lot of removing and sewing on of buttons. The designer had asked her to do some fashion illustrations for her, but Jo Jo lacked the skills for this task, which made her feel inadequate.

Jo Jo commented during one of her work experiences that she would rather work in a factory without worries than go back to school. “I don’t have to study for tests and worry about assignments. I would like to work like this, a few days a week, and not have worry about anything.” When the comment was repeated to the sponsor, her comment was that she had tried to give Jo Jo simple tasks and minimum instructions for each one to reduce her confusion. “A production manager faces many daily challenges that Jo Jo is not aware of.”

From her three work experiences, Jo Jo felt her greatest gain was the need for her to interact with others.

I need to learn how to contact with other people, because I do not like to talk when I am working. You need to talk to people for them to notice you, rather than just sitting there and doing your work.

Jo Jo felt that the work experiences provided her with a flavour of what working in the fashion industry is like. “It was such a short time, so they only gave me easy things to do, but it helped me to see what was involved in some of these jobs.”
During our interview, I asked Jo Jo about her future plans. After graduation, she plans to complete a course in jewellery appraisal in Los Angeles and then return to marry her boy friend. Why jewellery appraisal? Jo Jo said it was her mother's suggestion. "I love jewellery, so maybe it will be interesting and it is a good career choice for a female.” She did not regret being in the career preparation program for fashion design and merchandising. The work experiences provided her with opportunities to explore areas of interest and she would recommend it to others. However, she felt that she would not pursue a career in the apparel industry, because she lacked the passion, drive and dedication needed for success. “I think it is difficult for me. I would like to be a designer, but… I do not to want to put in all the time and energy required.” However, Jo Jo still retains a love of fashion and clothing construction.

**Lucy’s Pilgrimage.**

Lucy came to our school from Korea four years ago. Right from the start in ESL clothing and textiles, she showed a great deal of flare and talent in the direction of fashion design and construction. (ESL Clothing and Textiles was a half-year course that was similar to the Grade 8 Applied Skills - clothing and textiles component.) After completing the required projects, Lucy purchased patterns and fabric on her own initiative and came in at lunch and after school to work on them. After taking ESL clothing and textiles, Lucy was not able to take any clothing and textiles courses the following year due to her ESL timetable that did not allow for an elective. During Grade 10, she was able to skip taking Clothing and Textiles 10 and go directly into Clothing and Textiles 11. Her construction skills were not as strong or experienced as most of the other students in CT 11; however,
Lucy’s determination to succeed allowed her to keep up. Lucy’s goal for the future was to go into the area of fashion design, return to her native Korea and set up a business there, and then expand into the international market.

Based on my career as a clothing and textiles teacher, this student is the most naturally talented individual of all the students I have had thus far. However, she is not the most diligent individual and often did not follow her work to completion. In addition, Lucy is not an academically strong student. Some of her academic studies did suffer due to her drive to succeed in the area of fashion design. She started to work part-time in order to purchase the materials and supplies needed for her craft. At the same time, Lucy also started taking night school courses with the local school board. Some of the courses she took included fashion illustration and basic and advanced pattern drafting. She was often the youngest student in these adult oriented courses.

Due to problems with Lucy’s brother, the family was going to transfer both children to another secondary school. Lucy pleaded and argued with her parents to remain at our school in order to participate in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. Lucy’s persistence paid off. She was one of the four district scholarship winners for non-academic subjects for the school in her graduation year, as well as the clothing and textiles department award winner.

Lucy was one of the four-team members that won the gold medal in the fashion design competition of Skills British Columbia in 1997. She was the individual silver medal winner in the same event in 1998 and represented British Columbia and came in fifth at the national competition of the same year. Participation in the Skills Canada competitions allowed Lucy to be more introspective. Lucy went into the 1998 provincial competition
over confident of her abilities and skills. Being on the winning team the previous year was a great confidence builder; however, she had forgotten that it was a team effort and the 1998 competition was an individual one. I tried to caution her about the ability of other participants, but she felt that the gold medal would be hers. She felt that she was more than prepared and ready for anything. Lucy was very disappointed with her silver medal and felt that it may have been my fault. “The judges may have penalised me because you are the technical chairperson and you are also my teacher.” However, the next day, Lucy came to me and said, “I was over confident, I did not think there would be anyone else better than me. I did not put in maximum effort. I will for the national competition.” The top three winners advanced to the national competition.

Lucy tied for fifth in the national competition. “I am very proud of myself; I cannot have done any better. I know that I still have a lot to learn. I was getting too cocky for my own good.” The experiences of participating in the competitions have been a very valuable lesson for Lucy. Our students are often too sheltered in their own classrooms and schools. Contact with other students and other evaluators can be just as important as formal work experience.

A small independent designer was Lucy’s first work experience assignment. This sponsor was a favourite among students, because the designer owner always went out of her way to help students interested to follow a career in the fashion apparel industry. This company specialises in customised legal wear for barristers. During her week there, Lucy also had the opportunity to work at a small manufacturing company that constructs the garments for the designer and other small local concerns. This provided Lucy with experience in working for a local designer and how small manufacturers provide a
necessary service for designers that do not have their own sewers to make their designs into clothing. “I want to have a business like hers. She works in a nice studio and has others ‘do’ most of the work. She just does the designing and the patterns.” Lucy was willing to work hard to reach her goal; however, she believed that she will not have to wait for as many years as the designer she visited. She was not aware of the financial part of the business. “The designer charges so much for a garment, even though it only costs a fraction of the cost to produce it.” Living at home, all the money Lucy earned was hers to spend as she wishes. Recently, Lucy had to move out of the family home and is living by herself. She now has a different perspective on money.

Lucy’s second work experience was a rare opportunity given to few students.

Lucy and a few of the other students answered an open call for models for a special Pacific Rim Fashion Show, featuring the designs of a well-known Japanese designer. The number of girls trying out for the show, as well as how unfriendly they were, surprised Lucy. “It is only for fun, why are they so ‘bitchy’,” was Lucy’s first reaction. However, when one of the other girls was selected first, Lucy confessed to having ‘mean’ thoughts about her. “Why is she so cocky, she has taken modelling courses before....” Lucy does not want to be a model, but felt it was a good experience to see things from that perspective. “They were not mean to us, but they talked about us as if we are not there.”

Lucy felt this was an important experience, because she saw the designer in action. She was especially impressed with his ability to pick out the right outfit for the right girl. “He just saw us once, the next day when we went back for practice, he had selected what everyone was to wear.” The designer had an image of what he wanted and communicated his wishes, even though he did not speak English. “We had to sit around and wait most of
the time. But I remembered what you said about keeping my eyes and ears open to what was happening.”

Lucy did not want to do a retail work experience. Prior to her retail work experience, Lucy had begged me not to send her out to a retail store. She felt that it would be too difficult because of her English language skills and reserved nature. “Why do I have to do retail work when design and illustration are what I want to do? It would be a waste of time.” Lucy tried to bargain with me to do two other weeks in manufacturing if I did not send her out to retail, but I did not give in to her wishes. Lucy had the highest evaluation of all the students from the sponsoring company. Her willingness to learn and work beyond the call of duty impressed the employer into writing an excellent evaluation report. Today Lucy works part-time for the store in which she did her work experience and is one of the best part-time workers on staff. Lucy, still does not enjoy retail, however, she has learned the importance of interaction with people in order to further her future in the fashion industry.

Lucy won the prize for being the biggest spender in New York. She loved New York, a place that allowed Lucy to come into contact with established designers for well known labels, although she was disappointed in not seeing any famous designers such as Donna Karan and Calvin Klein. Some of the ideas and knowledge Lucy gained on the New York trip were evident in some of her projects and assignments for the program. The trip reinforced her desire to become a clothing designer. However, it also reinforced to her the fact that it is a very long and difficult goal that she had set for herself. Lucy will be attending the same program as Judi and Wendy after graduation.
Brittany’s Trek.

Brittany was one of the few Non-Asian students in the fashion career preparation program. She tended to be more vocal and outspoken than the other students. She was more willing to enter into class discussions and issues. Although English is not her first language, she was very comfortable in its usage, unlike some of the other students in the program. Brittany decided to enter the career preparation program in Grade 11 without any previous experience in clothing and textiles courses, except for Applied Skills 8. Therefore, her understanding and ability in clothing construction and textiles knowledge were very limited. Although she had many ideas, she lacked the ability to carry them though into completed garments. Brittany’s skills were more towards illustration and modelling. She was very social and friendly, and had strength in public relation skills. Unlike some of the other students, Brittany’s family was very supportive in her desire for a career in the fashion industry.

Brittany loved New York, especially the shopping and the nightlife. She was a great bargain hunter. She was able to find some very unique and interesting items on a limited budget. Brittany was an asset on the trip, because she was not afraid to ask questions during seminars and tours, which allowed all the students to share in the responses. New York introduced Brittany to other sectors of the fashion apparel industry. Prior to the New York trip Brittany’s focus was only on becoming a fashion designer. She wanted to become a famous designer without real knowledge of the work involved in this dream. The knowledge gained on this trip started Brittany thinking about areas such as fashion illustration, fashion show organising and fashion styling. “The designers we visited all work for someone else. They don’t even get to put their own name on a label.”
Retail experience provided Brittany with future employment. Brittany had expected to be treated as a valued member of the sales team from her first day of work. Being assigned security work and stock taking during the beginning of her work experience unpleasantly surprised her. Brittany complained about the way the manager of the store treated the workers. She felt that there was a lot of distrust and supervision on the part of management. “Why employ us if they did not trust us?” After working a couple of months for the store, Brittany’s viewpoint changed when money went missing from her wallet while she was working. She began to understand the need to have bags and parcels checked before employees can leave and why valuables were always under lock and key.

Brittany also had the opportunity of modelling for the Pacific Rim Fashion Show featuring the designs a well-known Japanese designer. Brittany had taken modelling courses previously and had helped with the choreography of the school fashion shows. This was Brittany’s element. She loved all the excitement and glamour of fashion shows especially the modelling part. Brittany would love to be a professional model; unfortunately, she is shorter than five feet three inches. “I’m thinking about modelling in Japan after graduation. They like Westerners there and you can get good money.” This was her favourite work experience, even though it provided little real knowledge of the apparel industry. “Too bad, we were only given one outfit to model. I loved all the attention they gave us. They spent over two hours on my make-up and hair.”

Manufacturing did not interest Brittany; therefore, it was very hard to get her to do a work experience in this area. She did not see the need or benefit of working in this sector of the fashion industry. “I am never going to work in a factory so why do I have to
do any work experience in one?” This work experience was not completed until the last week of school in Brittany’s graduation year. However, the evaluation for this work experience was her best one. The sponsor was very pleased with her performance and attitude. Brittany is hoping to go into either fashion design or merchandising.

**Linda’s Excursion.**

Linda has taken all the clothing and textiles classes the school offered since Grade 8. Her duffel bag stood out from all the others because she used a remnant curtain fabric from her father’s drapery business. Over the years, Linda made many interesting projects from various pieces of remnants given to her by her father and she often shared her endless supplies with other students. Linda’s father soon became a supplier of remnant and sample fabrics to the clothing lab. Linda enjoyed sewing very much and was always proud to wear the garments she made. She was not a very strong academic student and always had to work hard to get good marks. By contrast she maintained a high B and low A in her clothing and textiles classes. Linda decided to change from an accounting career preparation program into a fashion design and merchandising one because she thought it would be more exciting and easy. She made this decision after completing one week of work experience with the accounting firm where her brother worked. However, she soon found that the fashion industry had only the facade of glamour. Enjoying sewing for oneself and family members does not mean an aptitude for fashion design and merchandising industry.

Through her father’s connections, Linda did her first work experience at a family friend’s company that specialised in the manufacturing of uniforms and small orders of
custom designed sportswear. "It was actually quite a nice experience, not as bad as what I thought a factory would be. Everyone was very kind to me, although the work was boring. Very repetitive and lacked challenge..." Linda did not do anything difficult and was rather disappointed in not being allowed to use the sewing machines until she saw the speed and efficiency this allowed the workers. "The women can work and talk at the same time, and they do not make any mistakes." Linda's tasks included clipping off loose threads from completed garments, measuring out and cutting lengths of cording, sorting garments according to sizes and organising slopers. "They showed me how to use some of the industrial machines and offered to make buttonholes for my jacket if I bring it in." Linda found the time and effort the supervisor spent telling her about the production process to be the most valuable element of the work experience. "The supervisor would tell me about all the transactions they would do with stores and what they have to order and what they had to show them before they would order from them." The supervisor spent most of his time on the phone, behind a desk. He made special efforts for Linda because of her father's connection and also because of her curiosity.

Linda's retail experience led to her first real paying job. Prior to this, she did not have a social insurance number. Her mother made a special effort to ensure that she obtained a social insurance number quickly in order to be considered for seasonal work at Christmas. Linda was very excited to get the seasonal work after her work experience. However, although she had the opportunity of becoming part-time, Linda did not continue to work in retail. "The jobs that I did were very different from what I thought you would do in retail, which is basically selling...." Linda is a very straightforward kind of person; she found it hard to work with the public. When she found an item to be unattractive, she
stated it without hesitation. “A first all I thought that I had to do was sell and just talk to
people.” Although Linda rotated on the sales floor and did her share of sales, she also had
to spend time as a greeter and stock taker in the back room.

Linda’s last experience was completed at the end of the school year, working with
her father doing custom drapery tasks. By this time she had decided that the fashion
industry was not something she wanted to pursue. Therefore, she was not very keen to
complete her last work placement. I had a serious conversation with Linda. I told her
that she only needed to complete this last work placement to gain credit for the course and
the program. “I don’t really care, because I am not going into fashion, so I do not need
it.” I asked how she would explain her failure to complete the program if someone were
to ask her. Linda thought about what I had to say and returned a couple of days later.
She wanted to complete the program by working for her father. I had some hesitation
about this placement; however, Linda was very insistent in wanting to do it. “I want to
show my father that I can be a very responsible person.” This work experience had
limited success. The father and daughter team often got into arguments. As a result,
Linda would often not be willing to do the work asked of her.

Linda will be attending the provincial university in general arts. She retains a love
of sewing and an interest in fashion trends. However, she feels that she lacks the talent,
passion and desire for working in the fashion industry. Linda also feels that she would
rather work in situations where she would not have to deal with the general public. “I am
the type of person that likes to work in an office. The manufacturing company was not
that bad, you did not really work with people, just co-workers. In retail, you need to be
so phoney in order to make sales.” Participation in the Fashion Design and Merchandising
Career Preparation Program has helped Linda to decide on what she did not want to pursue. Becoming a famous fashion designer was just a glamorous dream that met reality with further investigation. “I’m glad that I did the program. Now, I know the fashion industry does not suit me.”

Laura’s Voyage.

At the beginning of this study, Laura had been in Canada for only two years. She was born in Mainland China, but grew up in Hong Kong. She is fluent in both Mandarin and Cantonese; however, Laura still requires help with her English. She tends to be very quiet and does not interact with other students very much. Therefore, the other students often overlooked Laura’s talent. Laura has a lot of potential but she does not work to her abilities. She barely passed Clothing and Textiles 10 and 11 because she did not complete all of her required projects and only submitted some of her written assignments. I only got to know her better in her last year at Central when she stayed after school and we would have conversations when nobody else was around. Laura came alive in the latter half of her graduation year. She started to express her ideas and demonstrate her skills more. I remember asking her what had happened? Laura’s parents had finally agreed to allow her to study fashion in the West instead of returning to China to help with the family business.

Laura’s first work experience was working for a local designer. She found the work familiar and routine, because her father had a similar set-up on a larger scale in China. She was able to communicate very effectively with the sewers due to her fluency in Chinese dialects. However, her supervisor found it difficult to communicate with her, since Laura tended to answer in simple words and did not indulge in conversation. Laura
did quality control, packaging of completed garments for shipping and prepared fashion
illustrations during this work experience. “It was routine work. The designer was absent
most of the time; the supervisor was very busy. I did the work at my own pace.” Laura
can do excellent work if she is not put under time pressure, a situation that she has always
found a challenge.

Laura found an unexpected niche in her retail work experience, although not in
sales and customer relations. Her supervisor found her to be of particular help behind the
scenes, in the back room receiving and detailing stock. She was not very effective on the
sales floor, Laura found it very difficult to interact with the general public. “I like working
by myself.” Laura can work at a specific task for a long time and still give the same
amount of time and energy. Therefore, she was very valued in the stock room that did
repetitive work but required patience and care. While other students could not wait to get
onto the sales floor, Laura was happiest left by herself.

The Skills Canada 1998 competition provided Laura with her third work
experience opportunity. It was an unique experience for her. Laura had to keep track of
all the work she did to prepare for the provincial competition, and had to write a reflection
of the actual competition experience.

The competition was one of the hardest things that I’ve ever had to do. I’m glad
that I did not make it into the national competition. I can not work under so much
stress and pressure. I can do the work, but I have to do it at my own pace.

Laura’s project was well done; however, she did not complete all the requirements for the
competition. When I questioned her after the competition as to what had happened, Laura
said,
I panicked when the lining did not go in the way that I wanted to; therefore, I could not continue and complete the rest of the tasks. I just couldn’t do the information sheets. I had everything there but I just couldn’t do it.

This was a very valuable experience for Laura; it reinforced what weaknesses she must overcome. The necessity to work and produce under time constraint is very common in the fashion industry. “I cannot work under a deadline with time pressure. If I am allowed to work at my own pace, I would have been able to do a very good job.” Despite her frustrating experience, Laura will be upgrading and completing her high school courses and then pursuing a course in fashion.

These journeys were all from real life and they were all gathered around the notion of the student’s perspectives of work experience placements. The following chapter will see how these stories may open up a deepened and more reflective understanding of the notion of work experience. Students felt all the work experience placements provided them with valuable knowledge; however, they felt that each different work experience placement gave them specific skills and insights that were unique to that particular sector of the fashion industry.
Chapter Five

Perspectives on Work Experiences

Settings of Work Experiences

In this section, I will look at the students’ experiences in retail sales, apparel manufacturing, designer companies, the New York Field Studies Tour and other specific opportunities such as the Skills Canada Competitions and the Pacific Rim Fashion Show. Students learn different skills and insights from different settings.

According to Stern et al (1995), studies have found a positive association between the amount of high school work experience and employment or earnings a few years later. There is evidence that jobs that provide greater opportunities for students to use and develop their skills have more positive effects. Students who report greater opportunities for learning on the job also express a more positive orientation toward work in general. Productive work experiences will help to empower students to make informed career decisions (Classroom to Career, 1995).

What was learned from retail?

Generally, the students found the retail work experience placement very productive. They gained valuable experience in various areas of the retail sector of the apparel industry. The students learnt to do security, stock inventory, customer relations, store display and set-up, communications, sales and merchandising, and most important of all, how to work under and with other people. The average work placement was about two to three weeks in total length. The students usually worked two to three times each
week, after school and/or on weekends. Most of them worked five to seven hour shifts, until they accumulated their thirty hours of retail work experience. Of the nine students involved in the research study, eight students gained seasonal and/or part-time employment from their retail work experience. Two years later, three of the students still work for the retail sponsor. Their performance during their work experience impressed the employer sufficiently to offer the students employment.

The students’ perception of the value of this work experience was the provision of entry experience into the apparel retail sector. Most companies require experience before they will hire. The students gained more insight, knowledge and experience about the apparel industry through working in retail. Arranging work experience hours for after school and during weekends and holidays was a desirable feature of the retail placements. Therefore, they did not have to miss valuable days of school. Because there was often more than one student doing their retail work placement at the same time, there was a lot of exchanging of experiences and stories. They learned about how the store lost over $10,000.00 worth of merchandise due to a ‘grab and run’ theft operation, while Jay was on duty. A group of people swarmed into the store and grabbed large amounts of clothing and ran into the mall and out of the exits. The students knew about shop lifting, but they had never experienced it on such a large scale before. Consequently, working in retail allowed them to understand some of the reasons for high mark-ups in the retail sector.

Although the students enjoyed their retail experience, none of them felt their future lay in this sector of fashion. For them it is a bridge to better things, an experience that will allow them to seek other jobs. It is a job that will provide them with experience and funds to do other things.
A number of the students were rather apprehensive about doing retail experience because they did not feel comfortable working with people. Prior to her retail work experience, Lucy had begged me not to send her out to a retail store. She felt that it would be too difficult because of her English language skills and reserved nature. Lucy felt since her area of interest was in design and illustration and not in sales, it would be a waste of time and would create excess pressure to make her do retail sales. She tried to bargain with me to do two other weeks in manufacturing if I did not send her out to retail. Of all the students that I have sent to this retail store, Lucy had the highest evaluation. Her willingness to learn and work beyond the call of duty impressed the employer into writing an excellent evaluation report. Today, Lucy works part-time for the store where she did her work experience and is one of the best part-time workers on staff. Lucy still does not enjoy retail, because she feels many half-truth and white lies are told to customers in order to achieve sales. However, she has learnt the importance of interaction with people in order to further her future in the fashion industry. The ethics of the business world often in contradicts to the ethics of being good global citizens.

The students learnt about the competitive world of retail sales and interpersonal skills needed to work at this level of the apparel industry.

"We are told to achieve a certain amount of sales on each shift. The manager is very unhappy when we do not reach it", said Judi.

"Sometimes you are stuck in the back and cannot make any sales", commented Linda.

Wendy complained that, "Everyone tries to approach a customer first, before anyone else notices. There is so much completion!"
“Everyone is paid the minimum wage of $7.15. You make your money on commission sales”, Brittany added to the discussion.

“I’d rather do stock in the back because then you do not have to have a sales quota”, commented Wendy.

After some of the students were hired on as part-timers, they asked the manager to do visual changes as well as retail sales, stock and inventory, security, and cashiering to gain extra knowledge. The trend started with Judi and soon the other students soon saw the advantages of doing visual changes. The students had learned the value of gaining a wide assortment of skills, even when they had to go in earlier or stay later.

In one of our classroom sessions, Brittany complained about the way the manager of the store treated the workers. She felt that there was a lot of distrust and supervision on the part of management. “Why employ us if you do not trust us?” After working a few of months for the store, Brittany’s view point changed when money went missing from her wallet while she was working. She began to understand the need to have bags and parcels checked before employees can leave and why valuables were always under lock and key.

Judi and Wendy were the first to be hired as permanent part-time employees. They both valued their jobs because it kept them in touch with what is happening in retail and put into practice what they are now learning at the post-secondary level. Another reason they like their jobs is they are close to home and provide them with spending money.

Laura found a niche in retail, although not in sales and customer relations. Her supervisor found her to be of particular help in the back receiving and detailing stock. She is not very effective on the sales floor, but a real asset behind the scenes. Laura can work
at a specific task for a long time and still give the same amount of time and energy. Therefore, she was very valued in the stock room that involved repetitive work but required patience and care. Laura was very surprised and pleased that the store manager’s comments when I passed them on. The sponsoring companies often made positive comments to me about the students I sent and I try to pass on these messages of encouragement to the students.

Gains in knowledge, skill, and/or work habits resulting from work experience may not pay off in the short run if students do not keep working for their work experience placement because other employers cannot readily recognise these gains. Therefore, if their work experience employer does not give them a permanent job, the students may have no particular advantage over other students in the work market (School-to-work Research on programs in the United States, No date). The students who continued to work for the sponsoring company did grow and evolve in their skills and abilities. When the various students left the company’s employment at a later date, they took confidence as well as skills to their future jobs. Experience in retail merchandising is a transferable skill that can be used in the selling of products and services other than fashion, i.e. Judi now works for a well-known sewing machine company; her communication skills and organisational skills helped her to get this job. She is learning other skills and making contact in this job assets which will help in her future job opportunities.

The girls’ retail sponsor has worked with many students from marketing career preparation programs and other schools as well as my students. She says, “I enjoys having Central High’s students because they are more competent and knowledgeable about
fashion trends. The students’ have strong background knowledge and are able to tell customers how to alter garments etc.”

Retail work experience allows students to ‘develop an eye’ for quality. The placement allows students to develop an understanding of the expectations of the buying public and learn about what will and will not sell. This is considered to be an important aspect of the fashion industry. In order to design, manufacture and retail apparel, students must develop an understanding of consumer wants. Some post-secondary institutions will consider the students’ retail work experience as part of their program’s Fashion Retail Work Experience (Kwantlen, 1999). Retail work placements also provide students with experience that allows them to gain future employment in the area.

From retail experience, students learned the importance of communication skills, teamwork skills and occupational skills used in the retail sector of the fashion industry. The students learned the need to maintain a professional image of friendliness and helpfulness even when they may not feel the inclination. As a result, I would recommend placing more than one student at the same work site. Most establishments do not want to have more than one student at a time. Placing a number of students in the same retail establishment allows the students to compare their perspectives and discuss their anecdotes.
What was learned from apparel manufacturing?

None of the students enjoyed their work experience at the manufacturing level. The students felt that it was not an area that they would be working in. As soon as the word manufacturing was mentioned, the students thought of factory workers in sweatshop situations. The students went to four different companies for this work experience. Judi and Wendy did their work experience at a large well-known local manufacturing company that sells across Canada and to parts of the United States. The company produces medium to low price range garments targeted at the working women as well as specialises in a line for tall women. The company grosses about ten million dollars annually. Both Judi and Wendy worked in the designer room under the supervision of the head designer. They did simple “no brain” work of cutting and preparing sample sheets for buyers. The students found the work to be boring and repetitive. They felt that the work lacked challenge and did not use their talents. However, upon hindsight they felt that they learnt the importance for the precision and conciseness of presentation of their own work. This was evident in the presentation of their projects in their classroom assignments.

The students were encouraged to circulate around the complex and observe the employees at the various stations, during their break periods and off times. These opportunities allowed the students to observe the running and operation of a clothing factory. They found out about the variety of jobs available within the manufacturing sector of the apparel industry other than designing. Designing consists of only a very small of part of clothing production, but it is the most profiled jobs of the fashion industry.

The two students learned about the competitiveness of the design area. Being located within the design room, they were exposed to the everyday events of the
“creative” environment. They saw the tension and frustration of problems that delay or stop production. They experienced the in-fighting and competitiveness among the design staff.

Brittany, Lucy, Portia and Jo Jo all spent some or all of one work experience working at Eastern Trading, a contracting manufacturer that sews garments for local designers. The sponsor was especially impressed with the work of Lucy and Brittany. The owner found all the girls co-operative and willing to do what was asked of them. However, none of the girls experienced a desire to work in such an environment. Brittany found working at Eastern an eye opening experience. Although she followed directions willingly and completed required tasks, she found the work to be tiring, repetitive, and lacking challenge. She thought of work here as a dead-end job. However, it did show her that her ability in design and construction is very limited and that her decision to go into merchandising is a correct one. She did not have the time, patience or ability to function and work in the construction and manufacturing sectors of the apparel industry.

Four students went to Mumbo’s, where they were exposed to the workings of an independent designer and small manufacturing company. All the students enjoyed working for this sponsor. They felt that the company is an example of where they would like to be in the fashion industry. Designing for her own label, owning her own business and not having to work for someone else is the dream of most of the students. Mumbo’s is a small independent designer and manufacturer that employs about half a dozen sewers, a pattern maker and receptionist. The target market of the company is the young junior contemporary. The owner manages the whole company from design to production to marketing and retail sales. On the surface everything seems to run smoothly. However,
the company has undergone a number of name changes, moving of locations and partnerships since the first student went there.

None of the students cared for the manufacturing component of the work experience. All the students felt that they had superior construction skills until they came into contact with workers in the garment manufacturing companies. They then found that their skills were very limited compared with the skilled workers. One of the benefits of working in the factories for the students was that now they are willing to work with the industrial machines. Previous to these work placements the students were very reluctant to use the industrial machines, because they felt the machines were too fast and too hard to control.

The students observed that most of the workers in the garment factories were female and tended to be immigrants, especially from Asia. Although the students found the workers to be friendly, they were all very intent on their tasks and few would actually engage in conversation with them. Most of the students can understand and/or converse in a Chinese dialect. They found the workers' conversations focused on home and family matters. The speed of the workers remained consistent regardless of the topics of conversation. The students were impressed with the workers' ability to multi-task. When I questioned the students own lack of progress on their clothing projects in class when they stop to socialise, they defended their lack of productivity as being teenagers and were not being paid to do the work like the factory workers. I find it a paradox that the students admired the workers' efficiency, but were not necessarily willing to follow their example. However, I have observed that students, who were put to work at the
manufacturing level, worked more productively on their own school projects after this work experience.

Working at the manufacturing level allows the students to learn about some of the different types of jobs available in this sector of the fashion industry. The students learn that working in manufacturing did not mean working as sewers. There are many highly skilled jobs in this sector of the fashion industry such as pattern makers, graders, cutters and other specific jobs. Students often feel they are 'too good' for working in factories. Therefore, I believe that all students need to experience and see the possibilities of apparel manufacturing.

What was learned from designers?

Most of the students enrolled in Fashion Design and Merchandising aspire to become famous fashion designers. They are attracted to the glamour and hype of fashion that is presented by various media. However, after working in a design studio and/or small designer/manufacturing firm for a week, most of students started to re-define and re-search for their niche in the fashion industry. They soon realised the long hours of hard work, limited financial rewards, little if any recognition, and general uncertainties of the industry are very different from popular media images. The images they observe on fashion television programs and see in glossy magazines of famous designers walking down a runway were a far cry from reality. Oscar de la Renta stated the heart of the industry in a 1999 Paris Couture Show when he said that “Fashion is the business of passion. You have to be really passionate about what you do, otherwise you can’t do it”(Archer et al, videotape).
All the designers stressed the importance of having a passion and great love of design and the need for long hours of time and effort. The designer we visited during our 1997 New York fashion studies tour re-emphasised the same points. The local designers the students met during work experience also stressed the need for hard work and dedication for success in the business. The students commented about the designer avoiding telephone calls from dissatisfied clients. These independent designers have to deal with problems other than creative ones. Working independently allows a designer certain autonomy. However, it also means the individual will have to deal with all aspects of the industry from design to manufacturing to marketing and to delivery. Working for a large company does take away some of the stress of having to deal with the financial and labour part of producing a label. However, it does bring its own set of problems. The students observed verbal fights and snide remarks between the various designers and how the head designer lacks popularity among the other workers and must constantly strive to be better than the others. Through work experience, the students realised the need for business courses and people skills as part of the apparel industry.

Judi and Jay worked for an independent bridal wear designer. The students were criticised for their lack of experience and knowledge, their lack of speed and conciseness, and their unwillingness to remain after work hours to finish tasks. After their work experience week, both remained to work for him on a part-times basis for the rest of the summer. The students felt that they learnt a lot from the designer, but felt he definitely took advantage of their labour. The two students were paid below minimum wage. I questioned the students on this arrangement, they felt it was worth while because it was providing useful experience. The designer justified this by the fact that he was teaching
them valuable skills that they would not be able to get anywhere else. The two girls did not feel this sponsor would be a good one for future students to go to, even though they did learn from him. Working for this individual opened the students' eyes to the reality of working for oneself. The need to use all the resources, such as free labour, to the fullest in order to survive and make a profit in this industry. “He would not install an air conditioner because it was too expensive,” complained Jay. “He always wants us to come in early and leave late, and he gets mad when my boyfriend comes and picks me up on time,” added Judi. Upon the recommendation of the two students and my own observations, this particular sponsor was removed from the sponsoring companies suitable for work experience from the school board computer system.

Portia found that her summer job was not paid in cash, but in clothing. The designer was going through a very bad financial period and her regular employees quit due to not being paid. Portia worked for the designer in order to gain experience in marketing and merchandising as well as retail and cashier experiences. Therefore, being paid in kind rather than cash did not present a problem. Portia commented,

They like work experience students because we do not have to be paid and we do not complain. She asked if I was willing to come back and work after my week is finished and if I have any girlfriends that would like to have some experience. She is willing to give me some clothing.

Work experiences provide students with opportunities to experience paid work. However, these opportunities can also be potentials for exploitation. The three students decided to work for their sponsoring companies after their work placement week because they felt that even though the situations were not ideal they were gaining valuable skills and lessons. Portia summed it up this way, “I look at it as volunteering; I am gaining skills
and insights I would not have been able to get otherwise." "My hand sewing skills are much finer and faster now. I can use this experience on my resume," added Judi.

The students found working for the various designers to be very deflating experiences. The experiences were not what they had expected. They did not see any of the glamour and did not experience any of the excitement that they had expected. Most of them came away from their experiences with a better understanding of all the work that is involved with being a designer and running their own business. Although they still aspired to become designers, they started to explore other careers in the fashion industry. Lucy is the only student who is still determined to become a designer, although she does expect to take a long time to achieve this goal.

One of the designers that the students enjoyed going to said,

I have never had high school students before yours. Although the skills and knowledge level are not as strong as post-secondary students, they are willing to work and are more knowledgeable than the average teen. I am looking forward to working with more high school students.

Work experience placements with designers and in manufacturing allow students to gain better understanding of how the design process works and how the various jobs in manufacturing are interdependent. Students learn that design is just one of the first steps involved in garment production. Placing students with designers allow students to see beyond the glamour of being a designer. As a result of working for a designer, students learn that designers have to be able to design as well as have business skills, accounting skills, interpersonal skills and self-reliant skills in order to stay solvent.
What was learned from the New York Field Study Tour?

During Spring Break – March 14 - 22, 1997 – twelve students and four adult sponsors took the first fashion study tour to New York. All the New York arrangements were provided by the New York Field Studies Group, who specialises in student tour groups. Of the twelve students that went on the trip, six students were in the Career Preparation Program for Fashion Design and Merchandising. The other students were interested in the fashion and apparel industry, but did not expect to pursue further studies in the area. We attended fashion-related seminars given by designers, photographers and industry consultants. We visited famous retail outlets such as Takashimaya, Macy’s and Bloomingdales, toured the famous garment district where a large number of wholesalers and manufactures are located, as well as visited all the usual tourist attractions and attended a couple of Broadway shows. Each student kept a journal of their impressions of the various workshops and site visits. The students collected business cards and press releases when possible. They took numerous photographs of the places they visited. Most of the places we visited were very generous with photo opportunities, although some places were not as willing to share. There was no formal evaluation of the students’ work. We all shared our photos and impressions with each other when we returned to school. The students used a lot of the materials from the trip in their portfolios.

The students felt they got a lot of valuable insights out of the trip. The two designers we visited (head designers for Dana Buchman and Nicole Miller) stressed the need for long hours of hard work, the need for a passion for what you are doing. If you expect fame and fortune, the fashion industry is not for you. Very few people will become a Donna Karan or a Calvin Klein. The designer for Nicole Miller commented “I don’t
work under my own label because it costs too much. It is easier to work for someone else, even though you may not have personal recognition for your work.” Many designers work under well-known labels instead of for themselves to lessen the stress of the business end of the apparel industry.

Brittany said “Hey, both designers we visited said the same things that you have told us in class.”

Lucy felt that she still has a long way to go, if she wants to become a success in the industry. Lucy still wants to be a fashion designer, but not on such an elaborate scale anymore. “I still have so much to learn! I must work harder if I want to make something of myself.”

“I don’t know if I am really cut out for all this work. I like fashion, but it is not as easy as I thought,” commented Jay.

“I would like to be a buyer for a store on Fifth Avenue, but I will be happy with a less well known company,” remarked Judi. “I know that I do not have the creativity for designing a line of clothing.”

Portia feels that,

This trip has given me more possibilities for the future; I want to work in fashion, but not in design. I do not like construction. New York or Toronto would be the places to go to pursue a serious career in the fashion industry.

“There is really nothing new and innovative in fashion, it is just the recreating and remodelling of old ideas,” remarked Brittany.

Although the New York study tour was not a conventional work placement, it provided students with important insight into an industry where they might make their future careers. Classroom instructions are not always viewed by students as reality.
Having professionals voice the same information increases its validity among students.

Since Central High's initial trip, other high schools have followed our example and arranged trips to New York for the fashion experience. Future trips are planned for the present Fashion Design and Merchandising students. The New York trip did not count towards the students' work experience hours in any official capacity. However, it did help some students that were short of work placement hours such as Laura, Lucy and Brittany. These students' work placements in modelling and Skills Canada participation did not add up to the required number of hours.

Although the New York Field Study Tour was not officially considered to be a work experience placement, it provided valuable exposure for the students to professionals working in the 'fashion capital' of North America. The different seminars gave the students a brief insight into the various jobs within and related to the fashion apparel industry. Real experience does not always have to involve actual work. Field trips can be an important component of career preparation programs.

**What was learned from other types of work experience opportunities?**

Unique opportunities sometimes occur that can be used as work experience for the students. Depending on the window of opportunity and the ability of the students, some were able to participate in some interesting and often challenging experiences. Lucy and Brittany were able to participate as models in a gala fashion show. Both students found the experience to be very exciting and educational. The opportunity came from a newspaper advertisement seeking volunteers for backstage work. When I phoned in response, I was informed that they had more than enough volunteers, but were looking for
models. The students went to an open audition and were selected from about one hundred hopefuls.

Lucy and Brittany were able to experience all the backstage preparations of the Pacific Rim Fashion Show that featured the designs of a well-known Japanese designer. This placement only provided twenty-two hours of work experience; however, the students involved had hours from other events that contributed to the total number of required time. "I can't believe how boring it is to be a model. You sit around most of the time and wait." The total on stage glamour lasted for less than an hour for the students; they spent most of their time sitting around and waiting for directions while the show was choreographed and rehearsed. Lucy felt the experience was worth while because

Even though we didn't get to do very much, it was very interesting to see how a famous designer was able to bring together his garments and ideas, and work with people with little or no idea of what was happening.

The Skills Canada Competitions is a Federal government sponsored event which is held annually to promote various applied skills areas such as carpentry, auto repairs, internet web page designs and fashion design. The competitions have been a great opportunity for some of my students. The competitions allow students to work independently, under pressure, and fulfil a specific task, as well as come into contact with other students throughout the province and country. My involvement with Skills Canada started with the entry of the first British Columbia Fashion Design competition in 1997 when my students won the gold medal both provincially and nationally. I realised then that this was an excellent opportunity for students. In order to find out more about competitions and to involve teachers and students from other schools, I have since become the provincial technical chairperson for the Fashion Design competition. My students
have also been involved in the Job Interview and Job Demonstration Skills competitions as well.

All work experiences can be educational and productive, although some experiences tend to be more positive than others. The degree of fulfilment and achievement depends on the time and effort put in by the students. Unique situations can provide rare opportunities for work experience placements. Career preparation programs must not limit work experience opportunities to conventional placements.

**Students’ Overall Perspective of Work Experience**

“In today’s workforce, decision making and quality control are becoming part of job expectations at all levels, from the production floor to the executive suite” (Steinberg, 1998, p.125). Steinberg (1998) says students are rarely convinced by talk; they respond much better when they are invited to plan and carry out investigations. All nine students in the study found participation in work experience to be very beneficial for them. Some students found their work experiences more enjoyable and rewarding than others. No student regretted participating in them, even though as a direct result, they decided not to pursue further post-secondary education in the area of fashion.

**What students dislike about work experience?**

The amount of time work experience takes away from school and the resulting pre and post ‘catch-up’ work was the dominating negative factor among the students in this study. Although some of the students enjoyed the novelty of missing school for a few days, all of them felt the pressure of having to catch up with missed work during their
work experience. "I got behind in my school work, especially during Grade 12 when I had to go out for two weeks," complained Jay.

"I missed important lessons from Mr. Smith and he told me to find out for myself what I missed," added Jo Jo.

"I missed a fun fieldtrip with the Recreation 12 class," commented Brittany.

"I can’t miss another class! Miss Jordan does not accept work experience as an excused absence," exclaimed Linda.

These are just some of the comments about the conflict of work experience and schoolwork, especially when the students have academic courses that are provincially examinable.

Unfortunately, time available for work experience placements is not always the best time for students to miss school. In the fashion industry it is difficult to arrange quality work experience outside of the regular working hours. The retail sector is the only one that can be done after school, on weekends and during holidays. Factory and designer experiences need to be done when these places require extra help, and can give meaningful experiences. Spring Break and Christmas Vacation, ideal times for students to go out, is a down time for many factories and/or a very busy time for some companies when they do not want to have to take care of novice work experience students. April, May and June are good months for the industry, but this is also the time for the school’s annual fashion show and the Skills Canada competitions, as well as numerous other school activities. Students are also preparing for their provincial exams and completing projects and assignments for different subject teachers. Teachers get annoyed with the number of classes missed and students get stressed because of being behind in all their work.
Some students did develop better time management skills and learned to organise assignments and complete projects with less wasted time. With my permission, some students missed my classes to attend and/or make up classes for other teachers, before and/or after their work experience time. These students would then make up for my classes by coming in after school to work on their projects. This is a good solution for all, except that I have to remain after school and longer more often.

Because of the students' concerns, I have been arranging some work experiences during the summer months for my present students. This solution has difficulties as well. Some students are on holidays with their parents and/or attend summer school during the summer. Some sponsoring companies close for summer vacation for their employees, because it is a slow time of the year. Summer work placement also takes away my own vacation time. Phoning students, dropping off forms, arranging placements and visiting the students on site can be time consuming. Although the Vancouver School Board does have individuals that will do this work, I like to do it personally in order to be informed of the students' progress.

**What students like about work experience?**

The students give many positive points for participating in work experience. They range from personal self-satisfaction to future career enhancement. Prior to their work experience, only three of the nine students had part-time jobs. Of the three students that had worked before, none of them had worked in the area of fashion. The three students had jobs in the fast food and food service areas. For all the students it was first time working in some of the different areas of the fashion industry. Students found that they
gained occupation-specific skills, self-reliance skills and employability skills that will help them in their future careers.

The students found that they develop better work habits and stronger problem solving skills in juggling between the demands of school assignments and the requirements of work experience placement. Although some of the students did not always enjoy the tasks they were assigned and felt that their skills were not put to the best use, they learned the importance of individual jobs and how everything is connected and are significant for the end product.

Teamwork is a skill that is often difficult to learn and facilitate, especially in a fashion program where each student was afraid of other students stealing their design ideas and fabric choices. The 1997 Provincial Skills Canada competition for Fashion Design put together four students who did not usually work together. Each student contributed her strength to the team and won the gold medal. Judi and Wendy were the pattern drafters and sewers, Portia was the marketing expert, and Lucy did the fashion illustrations and technical sketches. With the success of the gold medal team as an example, students begin to work together and share their expertise with each other. Today there is more sharing of ideas and resources with each other in class.

Communication and leadership skills come with confidence and all the students agree that work experience has given them more self-assurance and self-reliance. There were six ESL students in the study, with the exception of Brittany they did not always feel comfortable conversing in English. Work experience provided them with opportunities to use and develop their language skills as well as use jargon unique to the fashion industry. Being placed in situations without familiar support forced the students to take the initiative
to ask questions and seek help from the people around them in order to complete the tasks assigned. Although the situations were often stressful at the time, the students are glad that they were given these opportunities. Some of these students now take a more active role in initiating ideas and provide leadership for younger students in the clothing and textiles classes.

The students were in favour of using local businesses and communities as classrooms for workbased learning experiences. The variety of work placements helps students exploring career opportunities, identifying goals, and learning how to reach those goals. Brittany felt that, “learning from textbooks and listening to the teacher is OK, but working with people in the industry makes it more realistic.”

“There are real consequences when things are not done correctly in business, large amounts of time and money could be lost when things go wrong” stated Portia as she recounts an incident that her sponsor told her.

Work experience provides the experience needed by employers. Although the lengths of the work placements are very limited, they provide prospective employers with a brief description of the abilities and knowledge of the students. They help to demonstrate the employability skills the students have. Many students obtained jobs through their work experience placements. The students also establish contacts that can help their networking in the future.

The students feel participation in work experience and career preparation program in general has provided them with an edge for post-secondary application. Most post-secondary institutions are not familiar with career programs. They do not take into account students’ participation in career preparation programs when they select applicants
(Balbale et al, 1999). However, they do value interpersonal skills and directional skills related to the area of study (Balbale et al, 1999). These students have impressive portfolios and industry insight provided through work experience, which allows them to communicate with confidence during the interview process for the limited number of placements at the post-secondary level.

**Researcher’s Thoughts**

I do not have to supervise the work experience component for the students in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. It is an added workload for me. Most of the Fashion Career Preparation teachers in the district do not like after their students’ work experience placements. The career preparation program co-ordinator of each school looks after their students’ work placements. Personally, I feel it is a very important part of the total package of this particular career preparation program. In order to provide the classroom knowledge for the students, I need to know the expectations of the industry. I need to interact with industry and business to better facilitate my students. Most of the time it is a very rewarding task to see students grow and develop their potentials through the knowledge and skills they gain on each work placement.

For many students, work experience is the first real job experience opportunity they have. Some students have done volunteering and/or work for their parents and relatives, but few had held a paying job. Many jobs require prior work experience; however, students are not able to get prior work experience unless they have an employment record. They can not have experience unless someone is willing to offer them a job first. Work experience provides this entry into the job market however brief the
experiences may be. These work experiences demonstrate to prospective employers that students have basic communication and interpersonal skills. Work experience allow students to put into action what they have learned in class and find out what skills and knowledge they still require in order to perform specific tasks.

Many students are able to get jobs in the retail sector; however, very few can gain experience in factories and/or designer studios without experience and connections. Although the length of the work placements are limited in duration and the students can only get a flavour of the work involved in specific jobs, they provide valuable exposures and contacts with the industry.

The students have developed many occupation-specific skills, self-reliance skills and employability skills through their work experience placements. They have all gained self-confidence and developed their self-worth.

**Moving On: Where are the Students Now?**

Of the nine students in the study, six entered further education in the fashion industry. The three students who did not pursue further education in this field retain a strong interest in fashion. Although they did not continue in the area of fashion, they did not regret participation in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program.

Linda, Jay and Jo Jo felt what they got out of the program, especially the work experience portion, was very worth while, even though there were times when they felt discouraged and directionless. Jay is attending the provincial university in the area of Home Economics. Jay still has a strong interest in the area of fashion, but feels that she
does not have the passion or dedication needed to work as a fashion designer, and does not wish to work in other areas of fashion. She loves to sew and follow fashion trends, but does not enjoy the rigor of the industry. Jay is keeping her options open with a General Home Economics Program, because she is also very interested in nutritional science. Jay did not keep in touch after the first year; however, some of the other students said that she is still at university and enjoys participating in fashion shows and other events put on by the Chinese community. I do not know how Jo Jo is doing. I was not as close to her as some of the other students. The last I heard through some of her friends is that she is back in Taiwan. Presently, Linda is attending the provincial university in the Faculty of Arts. Linda continues to visit the school and keeps me informed of her progress. She has completed two years of university in general arts and plans to enter the field of human kinetics.

The six students that continued into further education in the fashion apparel industry still keep in close contact with me. They visit the school and/or keep in touch through letters and email if they are not in the city. Through many casual conversations after graduation, they convey that being in the career preparation program helped them to deal with the challenges of post-secondary education and helped them focus their interests within the fashion industry. Participation in the various work experiences provided valuable work ethics and contacts. With time and hindsight, they perceive more benefits from participation in the program than they did at the time of the interviews and the gathering of data for this research.

Judi and Wendy recently completed a two-year diploma program in fashion and design. Both did very well in their studies, they received much recognition and praise
from their post-secondary instructors. Both students are continuing in their education.

Judi is entering the third year of a Bachelor of Applied Design in Fashion Design & Technology degree. Recently, the post-secondary institute that most of the students are attending has been granted a four year Applied Design in Fashion Design & Technology degree. Wendy is going to Toronto to further her studies in fashion marketing. She would like to study both the design and marketing aspects of the fashion industry.

Judi did very well in post-secondary, earning praise from her instructors. During these two years, she volunteered and participated in many extra-curricular fashion industry related activities. Judi did this because she said that she has learnt the value of being visible and involved in various aspects of the industry. “My work experiences in high school taught me the importance of making connections.” She feels that time and effort invested now will help her in her future endeavours in the fashion world. Although Judi would love to become a fashion designer, she is realistic in her own ability and talents. She feels that she can become an excellent draft’s person or pattern maker, or work in the retail end as a buyer or store manager. Judi returns to help with the school’s annual fashion show each year and often drops in during the year to give help and advice to students that are in the fashion program. We showcased Judi’s graduation collection in our school fashion show this year as a way of recognising her efforts and achievements. I was also able to get her involved in the technical end of the Skills Canada Fashion Design competitions. As a technical committee member, Judi’s input as a former contestant and winner, as well as a post-secondary student in fashion is well valued.

Wendy also volunteers and participates in much extra-curricular fashion industry related activities. Like Judi, she felt all the time and effort invested now will help her in
her future endeavours in the fashion world. Although Wendy’s first love is still design, she feels that realistically she will have a better chance of success in another venue of the fashion industry. The competitiveness and dedication required for a slim hope of recognition is more than she is willing to invest. Wendy plans to gain further education in this field after the completion of her present program. She returns often to help with students’ projects. She has taught mini-lessons for me in pattern drafting. Wendy’s ability in pattern drafting has surpassed mine in the last couple of years. Her daily contact with this type of skill is much more comprehensive. I showcased Wendy’s graduation collection with Judi’s during this year’s annual fashion show.

After high school, Portia completed a one-year course in Fashion Merchandising at the same post-secondary institution as Judi. At present, she is working in the retail sector and is applying to the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and other post-secondary institutes to further her studies. She willingly shares her knowledge and expertise with students whenever she comes to visit. She has also given me, to use in class with the students, many fashion resources such as expensive fashion magazines. Portia keeps me posted as to her activities with postcards and telephone calls.

Lucy is entering the second year of the same Fashion Design program as Judi and Wendy. She works at a number of jobs to secure funds for tuition and supplies. Her district scholarship for non-academic excellence helped towards this end. Lucy is a very determined young woman and she knows her own strength and weaknesses. “I know my weaknesses. I do not have the patience to finish things once I feel that I can do it, and once the excitement is over. I will overcome them.” Lucy’s future is in her own hands. She checks in with me every couple of months, keeping me informed of her progress at
school and her love life. Lucy was a great help at this year's regional Skills Canada competition and helped to prepare the students for the provincial and national competitions. She was also a valuable help back stage during the annual fashion show.

Brittany is in the same fashion design program as the others. She had hoped to go to Japan to pursue a modelling career, unfortunately it did not work out. Brittany had been undecided whether to go into fashion design or fashion merchandising. She has a love of designing and illustrating, but does not always have the ability to carry her ideas into fruition. Brittany decided to try fashion design and if it does not work out she will transfer to fashion merchandising. She is enjoying the challenges of post-secondary education, but misses the extra help she was able to get in high school. “You do not get as much individual help after high school, you are expected to work more independently.”

Brittany also came back to help with the annual fashion show.

Laura spent time grading and completing her high school requirements after leaving high school. After completing her secondary graduation requirements, she went to FIDM - Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles, USA. She is very happy and working diligently in her fashion studies. She visits the school when she is in town and keeps me informed with email messages. Laura has the ability and parental support needed to work in the fashion industry. However, she is also aware of the hard work ahead of her and the need to overcome her weakness in English and other shortcomings.

It has become almost a tradition now for past grads to come back and help with the annual school fashion show. They provide an invaluable source of help backstage with the dressing of models and the general direction and organisation. It is not easy to
organise over one hundred students in three hundred different outfits without these students' experience and knowledge.

Judi, Lucy and Brittany are planning to complete a degree in Fashion Design in British Columbia. Recently, the post-secondary institute that most of the students are attending has been granted a four-year Bachelor of Applied Design in Fashion Design & Technology degree by the provincial government. This is very good news for students interested in pursing further studies in fashion in British Columbia. This degree program has made it easier for my present and future students to seek post-secondary education in fashion. Some of my present career preparation students would not have been allowed post-secondary education in this area if British Columbia only had two-year diploma programs. Most of my students' parents still want their child to obtain a degree and not just a diploma, and some of the parents are not willing to allow their offspring to travel across the country to pursue their dream. These parents feel that a university degree provides status and monetary benefits. Stern et al. (1995) believe that one reason why so many high school students want bachelor's degrees is the monetary payoff, which recently has reached an all-time high. Having a degree will enhance the students' value as future employees for businesses.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

The students feel they have acquired many skills and insight from their participation in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program, especially the work experience component. Many of the benefits are not immediate and/or not as relevant right after they graduate from high school. Some benefits may take a while to become apparent. The full benefits of a career preparation program, especially the work experience component may not be felt until years after the students have graduated.

There was a fair amount of complaining during the work experience placements from the students. They complained about the type of work they had to do, the degree of difficulty of the tasks, the expectations of the sponsors and so forth. However, upon reflection after they had completed all their work experience requirements, the students felt the main thing they did not like about work experience is the amount of time it takes away from school work and lessons.

Today's students are more cognisant of the work world than their parents and grandparents. Students know that they need to enhance their chances for post-secondary admission and career choices in today's competitive markets. Participation in career preparation programs provides students with opportunities to interact with business and industry prior to leaving high school. This provides them with realistic insight and knowledge of the industry/profession of their choice before making a commitment to continue with post-secondary studies and/or pursue careers in the area. Although most post-secondary institutions do not give admission priority to students from career
preparation programs (Balbale et al, 1999), these students’ resumes and portfolios enhance their chances of admission. The work place of the 21st century requires technical knowledge and a strong academic foundation, because the best jobs belong to people who are both highly skilled and well educated.

Of the nine students that went through the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program three students decided against going into the fashion apparel industry. They realised through experiencing the reality of the industry that it was not an area they want to pursue further. The six students who are continuing with post-secondary education in fashion feel work experience provided them with a realistic glimpse of the fashion industry. These students feel that their participation in a career preparation program has helped them on their path to their future careers. Although, they are still not sure what aspects of the fashion industry they want to eventually work in, the brief glimpse into the industry provided through work experience placements has encouraged them to continue to further education. These students are the pioneers of Central High’s Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program; the students who follow them have been greatly encouraged by their examples.

**Students Perspectives of Work Experience Participation**

Education need to listen to what students themselves think, if we want to find out if career programs are producing effective results. We need to find out if business participation is accomplishing what we claim as they begin to play an increasing role in the socialisation of our students. Therefore, students’ perspectives of their work experiences
are an important source of information towards further development and upgrading of career preparation programs.

Let us now return to the research questions and discover what students perceive are the benefits of work experience.

**What motivates students to participate in career preparation programs?**

From the students' perspective, the main motivation to participate in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program is to see if this is the area they really want to pursue further post-secondary education. They feel the program provided them with knowledge of and insight into the fashion industry. Therefore, the students believe that they have an advantage over students who do not participate in similar career preparation programs. They also see participation in work experience as a way of gaining experience and entrance into paid work. Many students had never had a paying job prior to their work experience placements. For them, participation in the work experience component of career education represented their first opportunity to experience work in a business or industrial settings.

The students who initiated action to advance their skills and knowledge gained more than students that did not seek ways to further their learning. Judi learned how to do displays when she expressed an interest and willingness to learn. All the students feel participation in work experience does help them become better prepared for the work world. As they learn about the ever-increasing technological nature of the working world, they recognise the need for core subjects such as math and science. They understand the need for communications, work-readiness and occupation specific skills. As students
develop all the necessary skills and knowledge they can identify goals and learn the pathways that lead to these goals. The skills and knowledge the nine students gained through their work experience have helped them to gain part-time employment within the fashion industry. The students were motivated to participate in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program because they saw it as a way of advancing their knowledge and skills in their chosen career path.

**Do students feel work experience placements help them decide on future career goals?**

The students believe that one of the assets of participating in work experience is the opportunity to observe the various jobs available within the fashion industry. The students feel that they develop a better understanding of the job demands of the different types of jobs, which help them to clarify their career goals and focus their post-secondary needs. Most students are drawn to the glamorous media image of the fashion industry, few have a realistic understanding of the reality behind the allure. Three students decided not to pursue further education in fashion; however, they did not regret participating in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. Because of their participation in the program, they felt that they did not have the characteristics, determination and passion needed for the fashion industry. The other six students found their work experience increased their resolution to pursue further education in fashion.
Do students feel participation in work experience helps them to be better prepared for post-secondary challenges?

Because of the students' exposure to working professionals in the fashion industry, they feel they are more prepared to deal with the challenges of post-secondary expectations. The students learn the importance of commitment and work ethics. For example, Wendy learned the importance of showing up for work on time. Although it was a minor incident, it taught Wendy an important lesson on commitment and work ethics. The students feel that their work habits and interpersonal skills improved with participation in work experience. Judi feels that some of the connections that she made during her work experience placements have helped some of her projects for post-secondary courses. Making connections and contacts within the fashion industry has helped some of the students in their post-secondary pursuits.

Have the work experiences fulfilled the students' expectations, or were they disappointed by the reality they faced and why?

The students were often disappointed by the reality of their work experience placements. Prior to their work experience placements, the students' perception of work in the fashion industry was very different. They often entered work experience placements with preconceived notions of their own abilities and the type of work they would be doing. Many students expected to do interesting and high profile tasks; therefore, the type of tasks they were given during their placements often disappointed them. Some of the students in the study thought the sponsoring companies took advantage of them. The students felt that they were used as free labour only. They felt that they were given tasks
that the employees did not want to do. The students felt their talents were not well utilised. They were unable to see the whole picture at the time of the work experience. In hindsight, some of the students were able to see the tasks they did contributed to the smooth production of the final service and/or product.

Work experiences removed the glamorous image of the fashion industry for the students. Some of the students were disappointed by the realities of the industry, while other students became more determined to enter the industry. Although the reality of work experience is not always what they expect, work experience provides the necessary reality check that students need.

**What occupation-specific, self-reliance and employability skills do students think they gained from their work experience?**

The students feel work experience placements provide them with occupation-specific, self-reliance and employability skills. Some of the students were rather apprehensive about doing work experiences, especially the retail placement, because they felt a high degree of English competence is necessary. Fortunately, the students were able to overcome their fears. The different work experiences provided them with skills that enhance their ability to get future jobs. Although they did not become experts by the end of their work experiences, they learned the language of the fashion industry and had opportunities to study fashion trends and learn what consumers want. They became more articulate and knowledgeable of occupation-specific skills for the various sectors of the industry. They developed a more comprehensive understanding of the special requirements of the various sectors of the fashion industry by the end of their work
placements. From the students' perspective the skills they gained are the main benefit of the work experience component of the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program.

**Do students feel that they are better prepared for the world of work after participating in work experience?**

Work experience allowed the students to gain self-confidence and self-worth as well as skills. The students felt they were better prepared for the world of work after their exposure to paid work. The students with the best sponsor evaluations were not necessarily the most articulate in English. From their work experience, the students realised that they can only depend on themselves if they are to succeed. In the fashion industry, one does not wait for customers to come to you, you need to seek out customers and find out what they want. To be successful in the fashion industry, one must be knowledgeable in many areas, being good at sewing and illustration will not get you very far. Students learned the importance of making contacts and networking as well the need to have knowledge in business management and other pertinent skills.

Work experience provided opportunity for the students to work with each other and with complete strangers. Although the students have been in the same classroom for a number of years, they did not know each other very well. They tended to work with their friends or independently. The various work experience placements taught the students the importance of teamwork and getting along with others. Most of them developed better
personal management skills to deal with the requirements of work experience while maintaining their classroom assignments and projects.

**Topics for Further Study**

The Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program is an applied skills program. What skills and knowledge the students gained in work experience are easily transferable and will enhance their post-secondary education? However, the conclusions of this study may not be generally applicable. Will the results from academic career preparation programs be as relevant for the students that participate in them? From conversations with other career preparation teachers, they often find it difficult to find suitable and relevant work experience placements for their students. A similar study could be undertaken with students in more academic career preparation programs such as science.

An issue that is not covered in this study is the issue of gender representation in Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Programs. I do not have any male students in my program, and I know there are no male students in any of the other programs in the city, at the present time. All students are required to take Applied Skills 8, where they get a flavour of Home Economics courses and Technical Studies courses. However, after Grade 8, students have choices in the selection of their elective courses. Clothing and Textiles is not an elective choice for most male students. They see it as a girls' elective. Some male students may be interested in pursuing further studies in fashion, but they are generally steered away from them by their parents and peers. Therefore, male students often do not get opportunities to develop clothing construction
skills or to benefit from Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Programs. The irony is that males dominate the fashion industry. There are more male designers, pattern makers, drafts persons and cutters than female ones. Where are male students getting their training? How can high school fashion courses attract more male students into their courses? There are male students in fashion programs at the post-secondary level. They often have to work harder to makeup for their lack of preparation in their high school years. Why do male students not take advantage of fashion courses in high school?

Parents are an important part of career preparation programs. They need to be more actively involved in all aspects of students' career exploration and development. One thing that I noticed during my study is the importance of parental involvement. When students have the full support of their parents they tend to do better than students without parental support and encouragement. Many parents do not view programs that are applied skills based with the same importance as traditional academic programs. They still want their children to attend a “real” university, even though it is often more difficult to enter applied skill based programs such as fashion design. It will be interesting and beneficial to do a study on parental involvement on students’ success in career preparation programs.

Reflection

These nine students paved the way for future students in the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program. Their perspectives have influenced my educational practice in the delivery of in class curriculum and in the facilitation of future students’ work experience. My present career preparation students use this first group of
students as examples to aspire to and to exceed beyond, to challenge themselves and to do better because they see the benefits and rewards these past students enjoy. The quality and knowledge of the students have become richer and more varied with each succeeding year.

Central High and the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program are a home away from home for many of the graduated students. They feel comfortable to return and share their triumphs and failures. They proudly display their new knowledge and discuss their present projects. The students feel a sense of identity as part of Central High's fashion program. Many of the students return to help with the present high school students in their development and skills. They give talks about life in post-secondary learning and they stress the high expectations of post-secondary programs. The students bring with them the knowledge and skills gained in post-secondary and help future students to be better prepared.

One of the major reasons for taking so long in completing this thesis is my heavy involvement with the students' acquisition of knowledge and skills in the last few years. In order to facilitate their skills in the use of industrial equipment, I have acquired an industrial overcasting machine, blind hemmer and serger for the students to use alongside of the domestic sewing machines and sergers that regular clothing and textiles labs have. I am in the process of acquiring computer software that will enhance students' technical drawing and pattern drafting skills. All these things cost a lot of money. The career preparation funding alone can not get me the equipment and supplies needed. Therefore, a large amount of my time is used for fund raising.
I have been very fortunate to have the privilege of teaching and learning from these nine students. They were the inaugural group of Fashion Design and Merchandising students from Central High. They have set some exemplary examples for the future students to model after. They provided ideals and goals for future students to pursue and surpass. The high calibre of the students and their willingness to participate in the various activities that came their way helped them to develop into the successful people they are today. Because of these students my practice has evolved and changed over the period of the research. I have never been an extravert in my personality or my professional pursuits; I was never willing to initiate contacts with others, be involved in committees and start projects. Over the last few years I have started to interact and make contacts with businesses to further students’ opportunities for real life experiences. I actively seek ways to improve the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program curriculum in order to further student exposure to the fashion apparel industry. Balbale et al (1999) feel through high quality career preparation experiences, students gain an appreciation and practice both within the setting of the high school and through various SUBSTANTIVE activities that complement their academic studies outside their school environment and throughout their communities.

I am a great supporter of career preparation programs. I feel these programs provide essential skills and knowledge needed by students in today’s society. However, the career preparation programs must have focus and direction in order to provide quality support. Therefore the students will perceive purpose in the programs. Career preparation programs should not be used as a way of gaining funding from the government. Students should not be indiscriminately be put into career preparation
programs without careful consultation with the counsellor, career preparation teacher(s) and parents. Otherwise we are doing a dis-service to the students, the school, the sponsoring companies and the community. Work experience provided through career programs must be meaningful and of benefit to the students. They should not be selected at random just to fulfil the 100-120 hours of course requirement. Students must be well prepared with basic and specific skills for each work placement prior to them going out for the experience.

The more years I teach the Fashion Design and Merchandising Career Preparation Program the more inadequate I feel. When and where can I update my knowledge to this rapidly changing industry and market place? These students' knowledge of the industry has superseded mine. Making industry and post-secondary connections, attending workshops, classes and conferences, being involved in Skills Canada and etc. have helped to keep me informed of what is happening out there, however, I do not feel it is enough. However, is it really necessary for me to be that skilled in order to facilitate my students?

I see my role as more of the catalyst who sparks students' interests in the fashion industry. I try to provide opportunities for students to refine their skills and knowledge that will enable them to seek further study in the area of fashion. I prepare students to face the challenges of post-secondary education and the work world.
References


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Appendix A:

Glossary of Terms Relating to Work Experience

Career Development is an ongoing process through which learners integrate personal, family, school, work and community learning experiences to facilitate career and lifestyle choices.

Career Programs are defined as an educational program within a career sector combining related subjects with a work experience component. Career programs include Career Preparation Programs, Co-operative Education Programs and Secondary School Apprenticeship Programs.

Career Preparation Programs is a program that is designed to prepare a student for further study in a particular career in a post-secondary institution and to provide a student with some entry level skills for employment.

Placement (Educational) Supervisors are educational personnel charged with monitoring students' work experience placements. Based on District policy, this can be one person or a combined team of supervisors made up of” District co-ordinator; counsellor(s)’ teacher(s)’ teaching assistants(s)’ job coach or’ District specific personnel titles given to educators involved in Work Experience Programs.

Work Experience is a course, or component of a course that provides a variety of workplace experiences that will help proper students for the transition to a work environment.

Work Experience Placement is the supervised, on-the-job activities undertaken by the student during arranged times and at a pre-arranged work site.

Work Experience Program Agreement is the contract between the School District and all involved stakeholders in a Work Experience Placement: students; work site; parents or guardians; placement supervisor; classroom teacher, and District representative of the Board of Trustees, which outlines dates and times of placement, WCB coverage, and responsibilities as determined by Boards in consultation with legal representatives.

Work Site is the community-based location at which the student will be doing his work experience placement (workplace).

Work Site Sponsor (or work sponsor) refers to a community-based employer or employee(s) charged with the responsibility of supervising the student (workplace sponsor).

Work-Study refers to that part of a student's education, which prepares them for participation in the work world.
**Work Study/Work Experience Course** is a course, or component of a course, which involves study of employability skills and career development as well as a community-based opportunity to participate in work experience placements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formalized Alternating Sequence</th>
<th>Formalized Work Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>Articulation between Institutions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisory Committee</td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition on Transcript</td>
<td>α</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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**ADMINISTRATION**

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Job Descriptions/Workplace Approved</td>
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**REFLECTION**

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<tr>
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<th>Identified Learning Outcomes</th>
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<td>Institutional Training Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>Employer Evaluation of Student</td>
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**GENERAL**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Work Experience Criteria</th>
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<td>CFP</td>
<td>CFP</td>
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</table>
Appendix C:

Central High Course Selection and Program format for Career Preparation Program
application for Fashion Design and Merchandising 1997

PROGRAM NAME: Fashion Design and Merchandising       PROGRAM CODE: FDM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Course #1</th>
<th>Focus Course #2</th>
<th>Focus Course #3</th>
<th>Support Course #1</th>
<th>Support Course #2</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CT 11</td>
<td>2. CPFAM 12</td>
<td>3. CT 12B</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>6. CPWE 12A</td>
</tr>
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</table>

PROGRAM FORMAT

Career Preparation Program shall consist of:
- at least 3 focus course common for all students enrolled in the program in a specific school.
- 2 support courses directly related to the focus of the program, with up to eight options for each support course.
- Work Experience 12 A directly related to the focus of the program.

Staff are reminded that for the Career Preparation program, all students must have at least 2 Grade 11 courses (maximum 3), plus 3 or 4 Grade 12 courses including Work Experience to make a total of 6 courses.

Students will select ONE COURSE FROM EACH COLUMN to complete the program.

__________________________  _________________________  _________________________
Counsellor’s Signature      Parent’s Signature      Student’s Signature
Appendix D:

VSB Career Preparation Programs
Student Report on Worksite

(PRINT NEATLY IN INK)

Program(s): 
Name of Company: 
Address: Phone: 
Fax: 
Contact Person: 

Interview: Length of Time: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPICS COVERED: (please check [✓] those covered)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Work Education Agreement signed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dates and Time for Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Breaks and Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Name of Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On site work location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accident procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resume reviewed or submitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Others (list)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work Performed:

| • | 
| • | 
| • | 
| • | 

Equipment used:

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

New Skills and/or Information Learned:

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Language(s) Spoken on Worksite: 

VSB REC-DL-012 (Rev. 01, 06-98)
USUAL WORKTIMES:
Start: a.m. Lunch Break: minutes
A.M. Break: minutes P.M. Break: minutes
Finish: p.m.

Please respond to the following statements regarding your work placement: (✓)

NO
I was given clear instructions.  YES  NO
I was introduced to other workers.  NO  YES
My supervisor was helpful and available.  NO  YES
I was expected to work on my own.  NO  YES
I worked closely with others.  NO  YES
I got help when I needed it.  NO  YES
This job requires an outgoing personality.  NO  YES
My work was interesting.  NO  YES
I was given enough training to do my tasks.  NO  YES
The tasks I performed were related to my program.  NO  YES
I had a variety of tasks to do.  NO  YES
This is a safe worksite.  NO  YES
I learned skills that will help me in future employment and education.  NO  YES
I was exposed to information about careers in this field.  NO  YES
I was appreciated when I did a good job.  NO  YES
Other employees took an interest in me being there.  NO  YES
I felt comfortable working here.  NO  YES
(If no, please explain why not.)

Was the placement accessible by:  bus  car only:  other:
What was the average one-way travel time?  

My overall rating of this placement is: (✓)
Excellent:  Good:  Fair:  Poor:

Name:  School:
Date:  

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Appendix E:

VSB Career Preparation Programs
Student Work Journal

Each day, itemise the duties you perform and select from the following questions and note your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. These logs must be written in full sentences, with accurate spelling and proper grammar.

The following questions may be used to help get you started.

- What new skills did I learn?
- What did I learn which can be applied to other situations?
- What was the most challenging part of my day?
- What was the highlight of my day?
- What problems did I encounter?
- What did I learn about the work of this company?
- Was I able to practice an employability skill such as communication, teamwork and positive attitude?
- Did I see others practising this skill?
- Did anyone (parents, work supervisor, teacher supervisor) make a meaningful comment about work experience which I would like to record and remember?

Day 1

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Day 2

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix F:

Interview Questions

1. What stands out for you about your work experience(s)?
2. What is your perception of work/career in the fashion industry?
3. Where do you see yourself in this industry?
4. How did you find the work you did on your first, second and/or third work experience?
5. How did your work experience effect your perception of work/career in the fashion industry?
6. How did your work experience effect your perception of work/career in the fashion industry?
7. What technical knowledge do you think is needed for your work/career focus? How much of what you think you need to know did you learn about on your work experience?
8. What creative knowledge do you think is needed for your work/career focus? How much of what you think you need to know did you learn about on your work experience?
9. What work world expectation(s) do you think are needed for your work/career focus? How much of what you think you need to know did you learn about on your work experience?
10. Has work experience help you to focus on a specific area in the fashion industry?
11. What do you think are some of the advantages of participating in work experience?
12. What do you think are some of the disadvantages of participating in work experiences?
Some students participated in more than one required three weeks of work experience in order to broaden their experience and connections. Opportunities that were available to the students at the time of their work experience. OTHERS cover the various kinds. The table shows the different types and the time periods of work experience placement the students completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OTHERS</td>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
<td>May 96</td>
<td>March 97, Oct. 97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauer</td>
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<td>May 96</td>
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<td>May 96</td>
<td>June 96</td>
<td>6</td>
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</table>

Types and Time Periods of Work Experience done by the Students:

Appendix G: