Review of the Bluefield High School/Holland College Transitions Program

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Grant Canvin

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ABSTRACT

This thesis was designed to study the effects of the Bluefield High School/Holland College Transitions program and its affects on the career maturity of at-risk high school students. It followed the students' progress throughout the program and compared their career maturity, as measured by the Career Factors Inventory test both at the beginning of the program and at the end of the program. The work of this researcher has determined that an increase in career maturity could not be found, when using the Career Factors Inventory. However, the researcher believes that the program itself should be considered a success due to the number of students who successfully transitioned to post-secondary education upon completion of this program.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

I have been an administrator in two different high schools over the past 10 years. I have also taught Grade 12 general English courses in both of these high schools. I am very concerned about the large number of disengaged students that we have in the education system in PEI. Students who disengage from the system are, for the most part, in the general stream. These students lack motivation, have attendance problems, and have experienced failure far too many times. Many do just enough to reach their goal and graduate from high school the quickest and easiest way that they can. Choices made by these students during this period are often limiting in the long term. For these students, choices are usually oriented towards graduation rather than furthering their education (Bellamy, 1993). As educators, we have streamed some students out of academic paths and have created two groups of students in our system — those that can pursue postsecondary education and those who cannot. The streaming has effectively split school communities and is causing more and more students to disengage.

When teaching in the general stream, I witnessed a lack of motivation from my students. I started to ask questions and came to the realization that most of my students did not have goals and many had never been exposed to career options. Often they did not believe that they could go on to postsecondary institutions with general credentials. Many lost confidence in themselves. Our streamed high schools work exceptionally well at transitioning academic students to a university environment and this approach meets the needs of the majority of our students. However when the Bluefield Home and School Association tracked the graduating class of 2002 at Bluefield Senior High School to

better understand students' choices, it was alarming to see the number of students that were undecided about their future career plans (Canvin, 2002).

As a result, the Bluefield High School administration created a stream that prepares interested students to transition to a college environment or the labour market. At-risk Grade 11 students were targeted. These students were interviewed and encouraged to apply to a newly developed transition program created by Holland College and Bluefield High School. Students were given the opportunity to earn entrance to the Holland College Transitions Program (HCTP) and could then receive automatic acceptance to Holland College after graduation. The HCTP was designed to help students understand what skills and work habits they would need to be successful in a college environment. Expectations for students were high and the course content was rigorous.

Over the past three years more than 75 students have been enrolled in the transition program. I believe that this program has given students more information about career opportunities and about themselves. There is strong evidence that these graduates have been able to make more informed, meaningful decisions about their academic potential. This past year the Holland College program had 63 students involved in the Transitions Program. There were only 8 out of 63 students who were undecided about their future career plans (Diamond, 2006).

Topic and Purpose

In Prince Edward Island, I believe that our high school program is not meeting the needs of students who are not university bound. Academic programs are clearly defined

and are connected to university standards. Students in the academic stream are well prepared when they reach university due to the course content they experienced in secondary school. However, students who have been placed in the general stream experience problems when making the transition to postsecondary institutions because general programs are not clearly defined and are not connected to a postsecondary standard. "As it now stands, our education system divides students into 'university bound' and 'other' tracks; one with standards, the other without" (Haycock, 1999, p. 5). "Closing the achievement gap depends on educating all students in the same manner" (p. 2). We can no longer afford to marginalize selected students. In order to keep up with the future labour demands for highly skilled and trained people, it will be imperative for the education system to educate and train all students in unique and exciting ways. Here, I explore how the HCTP does this.

In 1998, the Senior High School Transitions Initiative was established in Prince Edward Island. The committee's report noted, "there has not been a comprehensive revitalization of the non-university preparatory program or track for students since the introduction of the General Program in the 1960's" (Prince Edward Island Department of Education, 1998, pp. 3-4). Moreover, it is expressed that, "many of these courses were and are in dire need of being updated and made more relevant to student needs, the modern labor market and societal demands" (p. 2). The committee came to the conclusion that this stream would need,

> a better and more relevant curriculum, a greater focus on school to work transition skills, more information and support personnel to help with employment options and opportunities, more inclusion in the school community, and a greater respect

> for those students who, for whatever reason, decide to join the workforce sooner rather than later. (p. 3)

Students who are placed in general programs for the most part have not had a positive experience in traditional classroom settings. The general students quite often disengage from school because they are not challenged and see no connection between their lives and what they are learning. Students in this stream often do not receive career counseling and do not have clear goals. What is even more alarming is the number of high school graduates who do not transition to postsecondary institutions or to the workforce as a result of not having the necessary credentials. The *National Youth in Transition Survey* (*YITS*) was conducted in 2003 to assess what youth did after they left high school. The data were collected in the year 2000. They found that, "50% of Island high school graduates aged 20 had gone straight to post-secondary from high school - the third lowest share in Canada" (Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 39). Moreover, "a further 20% had gone after a delay of at least a year. Accordingly, 30% percent had not proceeded to post-secondary by age 20, tied with Saskatchewan and British Columbia for worst in Canada" Statistics Canada, 2004, p. 39). Nationally, 62 percent attended postsecondary education right away, twenty percent after a delay, and 18 percent did not attend at all (by age 20). It is interesting to note that youth in PEI tend not to take career planning courses. The national average for taking a course like this is 69 percent. "Only 39 percent of Island youth in this study had taken a career planning course" (p. 30). The fact that PEI has the largest number of students who do not transition to postsecondary institutions leads one to believe that if these students had had a positive high school experience they might have transitioned more successfully.

This situation represents a challenge for PEI educators. We are turning out a large percentage of graduates who do not feel qualified to pursue postsecondary opportunities or lack the credentials required for postsecondary admittance as a result of being streamed out of an academic pathway. As a result, Bluefield teachers, administrators, and Home and School Association worked closely with Holland College officials to see if a program could be developed that would prepare at-risk students for a postsecondary transition. There was a determination to do something different for these students. Those involved recognized that a new approach was needed requiring alternative teaching strategies, curriculum goals and objectives to meet the needs of these students.

Most education and training institutions continue to emphasize cognitive learning and employ direct instruction methods in classroom settings. The emphasis on classroom learning and its separation from the workplace means that much of the learning is decontextualized and only indirectly related to the outside world (Schuetze & Sweet, 2003). Workplace based learning, and in particular, forms of instruction that combine experiential and cognitive learning, represent a promising alternative to acquire relevant skills and develop successful pathways from school to work. This process, where classroom and workplace learning are combined, is often called alternation (Schuetze, 2000).

The Holland College component of this program exposed students to career options in the trades. Holland College's curriculum is developed by a process in which industry and educators work together to establish the outcomes that students need in order to be successful in all program areas. This connection to industry makes the students' learning real and relevant.

The initiative that was first developed was called The Holland College Transitions Program. It began as a pilot in the 2002/2003 school year as a joint venture between Bluefield High School, Holland College, the Prince Edward Island Department of Education, and the Eastern School District. The program was designed to address the issue of students lacking the necessary motivation and work habits to make a successful transition from secondary to postsecondary education or to the labour market. The Canada/Prince Edward Island Labour Market Development Agreement and Human Resources Development Canada provided funding for the first two years of the program. In 2003, the HCTP started with 16 students from Bluefield High School. By 2004, the program had grown to a total of 35 students, 20 from Bluefield and 15 from Kensington Intermediate High School.[1]

The overall goal of the HCTP is to give PEI high school students the opportunity to experience many different career possibilities. Expectations for professional behaviour are high. One of the priorities of the program is to create a student-centred learning environment. Learners are mentored rather than taught, guided and supported, rather than directed. In this student-centred environment, the goal is that many learners who may have struggled in the traditional high school classroom will become motivated.

John Dewey spent much of his career studying the effects of experiential learning. Dewey's supposition was that in traditional education, knowledge consists of bodies of information and skills that have been worked out in the past. The role of the school is to pass this knowledge to children. One such method is learning by acquisition, usually books. In this model of instruction, the life experiences of students are irrelevant to the acquisition of knowledge (Roberts, 2003). Dewey believed that this is not the way to

[1] The program has expanded and now includes a total of five schools.

connect with learners. Dewey's experiential learning theory looks at the teaching learning process from a completely different perspective. A central theme in Dewey's work is that the role of the educator is to facilitate appropriate experiences that engage students. In experiential learning, "the teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator, but takes on that of a leader of group activities" (p. 5).

One of the most important components of contextual learning theory is that learning is contextual; we do not learn isolated facts and theories in a part of our brain and the separate this information for the rest of our lives; we learn in relationship to what else we know, what we believe, our prejudices and our fear. We cannot divorce our learning from our lives (Hein, 1991).

In experiential learning, it is vital that the teacher be responsible for both knowledge of the subject matter and the individual learners. Knowledge of individual learners is important to determine the environment in which experiences take place so that teachers are within the capacities and range of previous experiences of their learners (Roberts, 2003).

It is my opinion that the Bluefield High School/Holland College Transitions Program is providing the opportunity for all students to ladder to a college environment or the world of work and that it is meeting the needs of disengaged students.

Research Question

The transition program is entering its third year and I, as well as many others involved with the program, am interested in its evaluation. The main research question is a simple one. Does involvement in the Holland College Transition Program affect the

career maturity of participants as measured by the Career Factors Inventory? This was achieved by administering a pre-test to the Career Futures class at Bluefield High School in September 2004 and administering a post-test to the same class in June 2005. The Career Factors Inventory examines four constructs that affect career decision making. They are: need for career information, the need for self-knowledge, career choice anxiety and generalized indecisiveness. Effectively engaging in career planning and successfully making a career decision comprise an important process that requires a person to expend some effort in determining his or her best career path. Difficulties with this process can occur in either or both of two ways:

1. "People need more information about themselves, and/or
2. People approach decision making in a problematic fashion, either prematurely rushing into decisions or avoiding decisions at all costs" (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997, p. 1).

This can result in career indecisions; the uncertainty that prevents a person from making a career selection or implementing a career plan (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997). A certain amount of uncertainty is natural, but when it hinders a person's ability to act or precludes him or her from making a sound career decision, then uncertainty becomes a problem.

I was interested in the outcomes of the program which leads me to explore a second question. Does the program affect decision making with regard to post-secondary programs? The students participation in the program was tracked and at the end of June 2005 they were asked what their career plans were for the following years.

The intent of this study was to examine whether this program met the needs of students labeled at-risk. If it is deemed successful then it would be in the best interest of

Island school boards and Holland College to create a Transitionatory Program that will meet the needs of all students.

In order to adequately address these questions a literature review on transitions programs was conducted.

CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to meet the demands of today's marketplace, our educational system should prepare all students for some type of postsecondary education. It seems clear that it is no longer enough to educate and train a select group of students. As the demand for highly skilled workers increases, it will become essential for our economy and our citizenry that all students are challenged to maximize their potential. In this literature review, I examine specific aspects of the transition process. Moreover, I focus on why some students do not transition to postsecondary education, how present high school structures affect student decision-making, and how various transition programs in North America attempt to help students.

The research reveals some reasons as to why students do not transition to postsecondary education after high school. Butlin (1999) used data from the 1995 *School Leavers Follow-up Survey* to explore the ways in which several factors affect youth attendance of postsecondary institutions. Based on this research, "the socio-demographic characteristic that most affected the decision to embark upon postsecondary education, after controlling for socioeconomic status, is parental level of education" (pp. 14-20). Furthermore, the *value* that parents place on education also influences youth's decisions. Lambert, Zeman, Allen, & Bussiere (2004) explain that "more than twice as many youth whose parents thought postsecondary education was important went on to college or university compared to those whose parents thought postsecondary education was not important" (p. 10).

Brunson, Butt, & Deziel (2001) were commissioned by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation to conduct a qualitative study involving 62 participants living in

various city centres across Canada, who did not have any postsecondary education. The purpose of this research was to determine why these individuals had not gone on to pursue postsecondary education (PSE). The factors which deterred participants from beginning postsecondary studies were divided into two distinct categories. "First, 'barriers' were cited and defined as external factors that were beyond the participants' control. Second, 'reasons' were identified as factors which resulted in participants choosing not to attend postsecondary institutions, even though, theoretically, they had the means to do so" (pp. 6-22). Brunson, et al. summarized these as follows:

> The principal *barriers* identified by interviewees were:
>
> - lack of awareness of PSE as an available educational option,
> - lack of financial resources,
> - lack of academic ability or academic credentials needed to gain admittance to PSE, and
> - unexpected disruptions which changed plans to attend PSE
>
> The following *reasons* were mentioned most often:
>
> - other personal priorities were seen as incompatible with attending PSE;
> - the potential benefits of PSE were not seen as relevant to participants' own career goals;
> - work experience was perceived as providing advantages in the job market that would be equal to or greater than the advantages that could be obtained from PSE;
> - PSE was perceived as being of limited benefit because of job market trends

- lack of readiness for PSE because of a lack of goals, discipline, drive, focus, etc.; and
- the costs of PSE (financial and otherwise) were felt to be too high relative to the perceived benefits. (pp. 6-7)

Upon closer examination of their work, there is evidence to conclude that our present system is not providing the necessary guidance and career planning programs that students need in order to transition to postsecondary institutions successfully.

Foley (2001), also commissioned by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, explored the issue of why students who are eligible to attend a postsecondary institution choose not to do so. The salient reasons are outlined in Figure 1. The results show that almost a quarter of young Canadians who graduated from high school believed that not having enough money was the most important reason that they did not pursue PSE. Many students also listed non-financial reasons for not attending postsecondary education programs. Although, "did not have enough money to continue" (23%) was the most commonly cited individual reason, others frequently mentioned were, "wanted to take some time off from studying" (19%), "couldn't decide what to do" (13%) and "had no interest in pursuing further education" (10%) (p. 8).

Figure 1 Reasons given for not pursuing postsecondary education

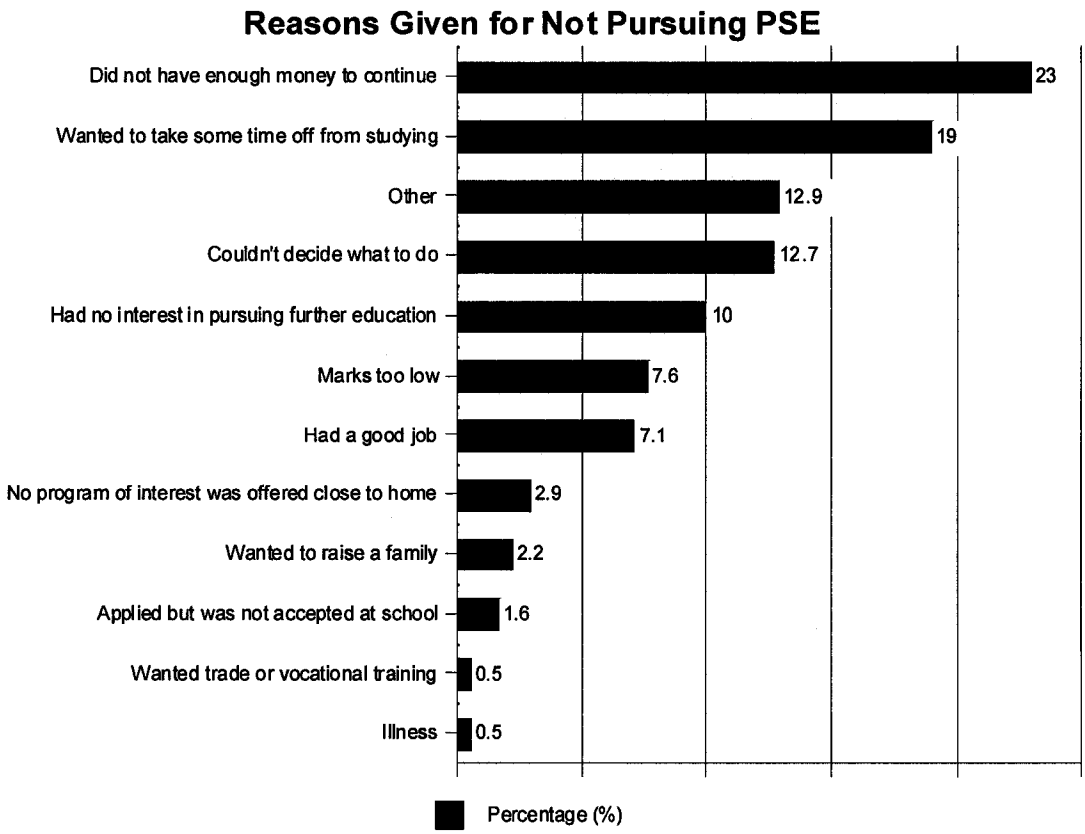


Table 1 further illustrates, by province, the proportion for whom not having enough money was the most important factor when deciding about postsecondary education. It is interesting to note that PEI had one of the lowest percentages of students who felt that money was the most important reason for not attending postsecondary education (Foley, 2001). These findings provide evidence that many young people believe that non-financial reasons such as indecision, wanting to take time off, and having no interest in postsecondary education are, when taken as a whole, barriers to postsecondary education. This does not mean that these individuals did not also face financial barriers, but rather that they viewed other barriers as more important (Foley, 2001; Looker, 2001).

Table 1

Proportion for Which Not Having Enough Money Was the Most Important Reason for Pursuing PSE, by Province

	Percentage
Province of Study	
Newfoundland	26.1'
Prince Edward Island	19.3
Nova Scotia	26.2
New Brunswick	26.9
Quebec	13.2***
Ontario	23.3
Manitoba	26.5
Saskatchewan	23.3
Alberta	20.5
British Columbia	32.4***
Sample Size	191,201

The Chi-Square statistic was used to test for differences.

*Statistical significance levels are indicated as: * = 10%; ** = 5%; *** = 1%.*

Notes:' In this table, statistical significance levels reflect a difference between the province and the rest of Canada and do not necessarily reflect differences between two or more specific provinces.

Not surprisingly others have found that school-related variables such as "whether or not one has failed a grade, student participation in class, and participation in extra-curricular activities" also impact on this decision (Looker, 2001, p. 2).

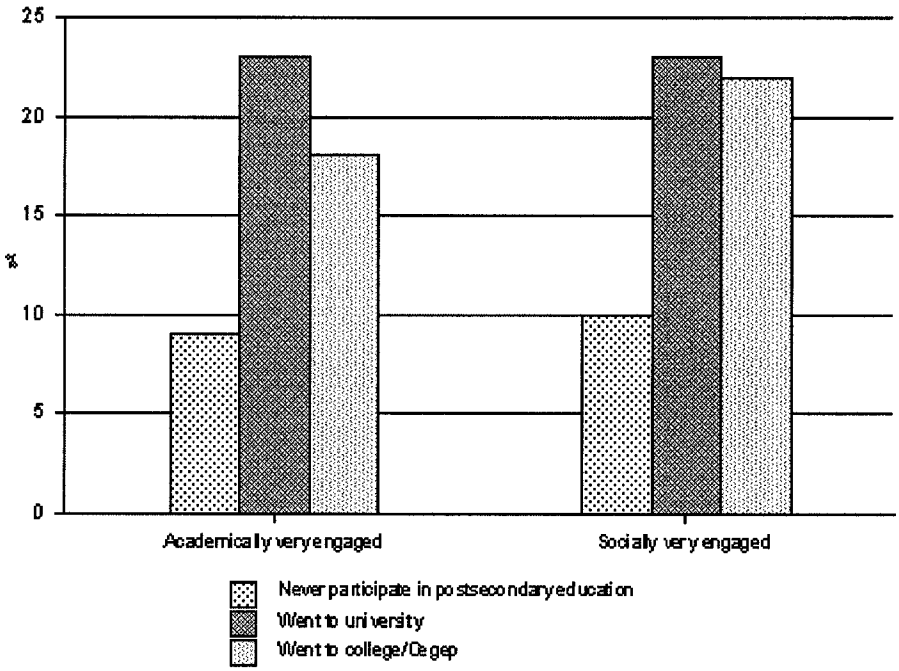
As noted, *YITS* (2003), is a longitudinal survey sponsored by Human Resources Development Canada, which was created to better recognize how young people transition to training, work or postsecondary education (Statistics Canada, 2004). Bushnik (2003)

explains that *YITS* results, "provide a deeper understanding of the nature and causes of challenges young people face as they manage these transitions" (p. 7). Two different age groups participated in *YITS* – the 15-year-old cohort (who also participated in the *Programme for International Student Assessment*) and the 18 to 20-year-old cohort.

YITS (Statistics Canada, 2004) underscores how important it is for students to be engaged in high school activities. Lambert, et al. (2004) found that, "positive interactions in high school, both academically and socially, are related to participation in education at the postsecondary level" (p. 10). This research measures school engagement by looking at factors in students' academic and social lives. Some examples of academic measures include -- how much time they spend on homework, how well they do on their work, and their attitudes toward the value of their education. "Measures of social life entails trying to determine how well students feel that they fit in and belong at their school, how well they make friends, and how much of a support group of friends they have" (p. 10).

Figure 2 shows the importance of engaging students in high school education and the impact that this has on their postsecondary success.

Figure 2 – Postsecondary participation status for youth who were very engaged in high school.



The results indicate that those youth who did pursue postsecondary education were most often academically and socially engaged at the high school level (Lambert, et al., 2004). The authors explain that, "20% of youth who participated in postsecondary education reported being very engaged in high school compared to 9% who did not pursue postsecondary studies" (p. 11).

It is important to examine the psychological characteristics of students who have been streamed into general programs. A school leaving study released in 1993 recognized that schools are not providing an adequate instructional environment or emotional environment for students who find learning a challenge. When students realize that they are unable to perform academically in a manner similar to their peers, they

become frustrated which in turn leads to poor self esteem (MacDonald, 2001). MacDonald recognized students who have behavioral problems can feel that the curriculum does not meet their needs and as a result separate themselves from the school culture.

MacDonald (2001) interviewed high school students who were labeled at-risk. The emerging theme from his work was that engaged students were part of the academic stream and the disengaged students were in the general and practical programs. MacDonald examined how students perceived the streaming process that is an operational practice in the PEI school system.

"Most engaged students indicated that there was a clear distinction between academic students and others and that there are different expectations for academic students as compared to general and practical students" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 97).

The non-academic participants in MacDonald (2001) were concerned about grouping as well. MacDonald states that without exception those students who were placed in a non-academic placement showed little enthusiasm for their placement. A number talked of being "just in general" while almost all reported that there was a distinction between academic and general students. The majority of the non-academic students were concerned at the disadvantage at which a general program placed them compared to the academic students. Some spoke of the difficulty in accessing postsecondary training and/or the labor market after graduation.

There is evidence that schools and teachers often provide information and guidance but do not serve as role models or provide expectations. Brunson, et al. (2001) surveyed participants asking how high schools could have better prepared them for entry

into a postsecondary educational environment. The following ideas emerged as themes in this research:

- Most participants felt that both financial aid and informational programs were important strategies for encouraging PSE participation. When asked to choose which would have been more important in their decision-making about PSE, a few said financial aid programs would have been more important, but the majority stressed the importance of awareness and other types of programs.

- A number of participants offered specific program ideas, including offering programs to help students find direction for their educational pursuits, providing career and educational information earlier in students' school careers, and making this type of information more accessible in and outside of school.

- A few participants suggested that extra efforts should be made to promote trade and technical schools and community colleges.

Additional ideas that surfaced included a desire to see an increase in resources for at-risk students, more programs about career seeking, enabling older students to feel more welcome to return to school, and ensuring that the transition periods to and from high school are recognized as "opportune times" for interventions (Brunson et al., 2001, p. 2).

Programs

A close examination of the research indicates that a number of approaches have been developed to attempt to help students face the challenges of transitioning from high school. Six types of credit-based transition programs are commonly being used to enable students to successfully transition. "These include Middle College High Schools (MCHS), Tech Prep, Dual Enrollment, the Advanced Placement program, International Baccalaureate program, and Career Academies" (Bailey & Karp, 2003, p. 2).

Middle College High Schools, also known as Early College High Schools (ECHS), were developed to help and encourage at-risk students to graduate and move on to college or university (Bailey & Karp, 2003). The authors explain that "they are usually located on college campuses and provide both high school and college curricula" (p. 8). Further, Baily and Karp state, "students take high school courses and, when they are ready, begin to take college courses for dual credit as part of their MCHS course work" (p. 8).

"Early College High Schools (ECHS) have been created throughout the United States as a result of School To Work Opportunities Act (STOWA) which was created by President Clinton in 1994" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 24). The concept of ECHS was designed as a structure to provide the middle to low achieving students a program that would better prepare them for college and university. Hoffman contends that the program was built on the premise that our traditional educational system does not meet the needs of marginalized students for the following reasons:

- The comprehensive high school, our default institution, is designed for the traditional college bound student.

- States and districts lack educational choices that meet varied developmental and economic needs of older adolescents.

- Misaligned and complex systems of transition from high school to postsecondary education shut out many older adolescents.

- The transition is lengthened -- through remediation and repetition -- rather than compressed for youth who need access to careers quickly. (p. 24)

ECHS, as well as MCHS, attempt to overcome these. Hoffman (2003) maintains that "at middle colleges, 'the power of the site' is the key to eliciting adult behavior and serious learning from adolescents at risk of school failure" (p. 26). The author examined the Middle College High School National Consortium (in the US) and found that in "1999-2000, of the 4,500 students enrolled in Consortium schools, 41 percent took college classes, with a 97 percent pass rate" (p. 26).

Another type of transition program is Tech Prep. Bailey and Karp (2003) describe it as "a highly diverse program established by the 1990 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act" (p. 8). With this program, high schools and colleges work together and focus on helping students transition into technical or occupational fields. The authors note that,

> College credit work in high school is not necessarily a part of this strategy, although in some cases, students earn credit "in escrow" in the sense that they are

given college credit for a course taken in high school if they complete one or more specified courses in college. (p. 9)

Tech Prep and 2+2+2 programs are transition initiatives that seem to be gaining in popularity. More specifically, Schuetz (2000) explains that Tech Prep can provide students with, "a well articulated, rigorous course of study from the last two years of high school through a two-year (2+2) or sometimes four-year (2+2+2) college degree, directed toward learning for and about technologically focused careers" (p. 3). There are six aspects of the program that according to Schuetz, are essential. These include:

1. formal articulation strategies,
2. rigorous engaged learning ,
3. meaningful linkages between theory and practice,
4. outcomes-focused curriculum,
5. access and opportunity for all students , and
6. longevity through collaboration. (p. 4)

Bragg (2001) conducted and facilitated a four year longitudinal causal-comparative study of eight consortia. The purpose was to study the influence of Tech Prep programs on student outcomes. A mixed-method approach was used which included short and long interviews, classroom observations, and document review and analysis. In total, there were roughly 4,700 Tech Prep and non-Tech Prep participants. They were selected to be a part of, what was described as,

> a causal-comparative study of students' educational and employment outcomes, with two or three panels of high school graduates selected from the 1994-95,

> 1995-96, 1996-97, or 1997-98 academic years per consortium. Within each consortium about 600 high school graduates were selected, with about half of these being Tech Prep participants and the remaining being non-participants. (p. vii)

Transcript data from high school and community college were accumulated. Of the participants involved, more than 95 percent were able to supply high school transcripts and 40 percent supplied their community college transcripts. The author explains that a follow-up survey was also implemented and administered in order to "identify attitudes toward high school, transition to college plans and actual experiences, and employment during and after high school" (vii).

One of the most important findings that emerged from this study concerned participants' academic progress. Bragg (2001) summarizes as follows,

> In half of the consortia, well over one-half of the Tech Prep participants started high school below Algebra I ... By high school graduation, nearly all had completed Algebra I and some finished more advanced math courses. In two consortia where the majority of Tech Prep participants started below Algebra I, the majority had completed Algebra II or above by high school graduation, which is an impressive accomplishment. In the remaining half of consortia where most students began high school by taking Algebra I, these students were highly likely to complete math at the Algebra II or more advanced level by high school graduation. (p. viii)

This is a very important finding as it illustrates that high school students who have performed poorly in mathematics can improve in this area if programs and expectations are clearly stated.

Dual enrollment is another type of transition program. The intent is to increase the expectations for the high school program. Dual Enrollment, "is a system of cooperation between a high school and a university or community college that allows a student to attain a college credit while pursuing a high school diploma" (Burns & Lewis, 2002). The programs are supposed to challenge students and enable them to experience a college course, with the hopes that this will motivate them to attend, and do well in, college (Bailey, et al., 2003). Furthermore, Burns and Lewis (2002) explain that "a high school student who is co-enrolled in college classes is likely to attend that community college after high school graduation" (p. 3)

It has been the tradition that dual enrollment has better suited the academically gifted, however, research also suggests that the principles of dual credit implementation between the college and high school can also be very effective for the middle and low achieving students (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Burns & Lewis, 2002). The programs aimed at at-risk students are premised on the belief that they can be successful when helped with their transition into postsecondary studies (Burns & Lewis, 2002). Bailey and Karp (2003) support this idea. They assert that,

> The relationship between a rigorous high school course-load and success in postsecondary education argues for the inclusion of middle and low-achieving high school students in dual enrollment programs. Since dual enrollment can increase the intensity and rigor of the high school curriculum, challenging

students through these programs could lead to high levels of college success. (p. 1)

Credit programs have also been employed to help students make the transition from secondary school to the postsecondary period. Three broad categories of intensity have been described in the literature when researchers examine credit-based programs. These three categories are:

- ***Singleton programs***, which refer to stand-alone college-level courses;
- ***Comprehensive programs***, which subsume most of a student's academic experience; and
- ***Enhanced Comprehensive programs***, which offer students college coursework coupled with guidance and support to ensure their success in postsecondary education. (p. 13)

The Advanced Placement program is an example of a *singleton program* (Bailey & Karp, 2003). The authors explain that "the goal of singleton programs is not to recreate the college experience or to accustom high school students to the expectations of postsecondary education; rather, the programs aim to enrich the high school curriculum" (p. 13). One of the drawbacks of singleton programs is that they often do not meet the needs of learners who are challenged by the educational system but usually, "provide already high-performing students with the opportunity to challenge themselves and further prepare for college-level work" (p. 15).

Comprehensive programs, unfortunately, also tend to focus too little on the "social-psychological" aspect of transitioning to postsecondary studies (Bailey & Karp,

2003). The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is an example of a comprehensive program that transitions students to college or university. Students who enroll in the IB route take all of their courses within this program. Thus, the, "rigorous academic expectations" of the program characterizes the entire junior and senior years (p. 16).

Enhanced comprehensive programs move beyond the drawbacks of the previous two. Bailey and Karp (2003) explain that these programs address all elements of the secondary-postsecondary transition and that they rely on strong student-teacher relationships. Enhanced comprehensive programs are intended to prepare students for college, not only through rigorous academic instruction, but also by offering a wide-range of activities such as counseling, assistance with applications, mentoring, and general personal support. They are also more inclusive regarding different types of learners. Enhanced comprehensive programs vary concerning academic components, the transition process, the degree students are integrated into a college environment, and the amount of formal assistance they receive with their transition to college.

The final type of transition program described in the literature is Career Academies. According to Kemple (2001), they are one of the oldest and most common type of transition program. These academies have three unique components:

- they are organized as a school-within-a-school to create a more supportive, personalized learning environment;
- they combine academic and career and technical curricula around a career theme to enrich teaching and learning; and
- they establish partnerships with local employers to provide career awareness and work-based learning opportunities for students. (p. 1)

They were originally established to help at-risk students graduate from high school and then acquire employment.

With Career Academies, students have the same teachers over an extended period of time (usually three to four years). Kemple (2001) explains that this is done, "to create a more personalized, supportive learning environment for students and teachers" (p. 2). The focus of the curriculum is on both academic achievement and learning how to prepare oneself for a career. This latter aspect of the curriculum is enhanced by involving local employers in the program. The author notes that this can provide students with a range of career development and work-based learning opportunities. This high school program is now regarded as an initiative that should not be just for at-risk students. The Academies are part of, "several high school reform movements including efforts to build school-to-work systems, to reconstitute vocational and technical education, to effect comprehensive school change, and to break large high schools into smaller learning communities" (p. 1). In the past decade this approach has grown in popularity.

Summation

It is evident from the literature review that successful high school transitional programs have similar characteristics. First, behavioral and academic expectations must be high. Where expectations are low, there is evidence that students view the program as having little or no value when compared to the "regular academic program." Many transitions programs throughout Canada and the US are also connected to postsecondary institutions. There are many of these programs that have targeted the gifted learner, however, there is much evidence that this approach is also effective in preparing at-risk

students for transition to postsecondary institutions. There are also numerous programs targeting students at-risk. The emerging theme in the literature is that students need to know that the learning they are doing in high school is connected to a postsecondary institution. Successful programs make clear the relationship between the students' present secondary course of studies, the labour market, and postsecondary programs.

In terms of content, students in transitions programs need to learn about themselves, their interests, aptitudes, and work habits, as well as where they fit into the postsecondary community or labour market. Students have to prepare themselves to transition to the labour market or postsecondary education. Students must understand what opportunities are out there for them and what education they need in order to be successful in the future. To this end, effective transition programs also provide students with career awareness and counseling.

The 2005 *PEI Task Force on Student Achievement* reiterates the importance of collaborative transition programs for, "preparing Island youth for full labour market and civic participation" (Noonan, 2006, p. 3). Kurial (2005) stresses that in order to, "engage students adequately, there should be systems in place to address the wide-ranging needs and interests of students" (p. 25). Further, this especially involves ensuring that the underachieving students are included and are encouraged to work hard. Noonan also expresses this concern. She explains that "the students who are not reached and who do not graduate high school will struggle both economically and socially in their future" (p. 5). Likewise, she pushes for collaborative transition programs in PEI schools. Noonan indicates that the,

> trend toward higher levels of educational attainment is not an aberration, nor a short-term adjustment; training will be the key factor in human capital development that impacts employment prospects for the foreseeable future. The magnitude of the impact of the new economy on job prospects for those without relevant education is tremendous. Put simply, employment opportunities for labour market participants without some form of recognized skill development and knowledge attainment are poor and deteriorating. It will require a strategically focused and collaborative model among educational institutions to ensure the development needs of young Islanders are effectively addressed. Not only will this have a profound impact on the personal opportunities for individual youth, but it will also contribute meaningfully to the economic prosperity of the province. (pp. 5-6)

Although some debate remains, the bulk of the reviewed research supports the utility of transition programs in assisting students efficiently, effectively and satisfyingly shift from secondary to postsecondary institutions. However, little research of this type exists within the context of PEI and marginalized learners. As such, this research was designed to address the effectiveness of such programs in this context.

CHAPTER III - RESEARCH METHODS

The Bluefield High School program was created to meet the needs of students who were not succeeding in their high school careers. The Holland College/Bluefield Transitions Program (HCTP) was supported by the PEI Department of Education. The Bluefield High School/Holland College Transitions program was granted pilot status by the PEI Department of Education in the fall of 2003. The Department of Education played an active role in supporting and developing this program. This transition program was also supported by the Eastern School District and provided a full-time staff member outside of the standard ratios to launch this program.

Teachers in the high school had also voiced many concerns over the number of students who were disengaging in the school system. There was a strong consensus among staff that the general courses were not meeting the needs of the students. There were serious attendance problems in these courses and the perception was that these students were not motivated. Teachers had also recognized that students in the general program were not working hard, not doing homework, and speeding through class tests and exams. The perception was that there were too many students coasting through the system and doing a minimal amount of work.

Bluefield High School/Holland College educators designed a program route that had high expectations for students and educators. The program required that students commit to three full credits in one calendar year. From a school level this program caused some concerns. Staff was not interested in investing time in a group of disengaged students if the staff allocation was affected. Teachers wanted to make sure that this transition program was indeed effective and did meet the needs of disengaged

students. In order to facilitate this program the school board designated one full time teacher to this project outside the teaching ratio. The school board also agreed to cover transportation costs associated with this program.

More specifically, the program was developed to help at-risk students transition to a postsecondary environment. Students who wished to enter the program were first required to complete the Career Futures course in Grade 11 or 12. Career Futures 801A emphasizes the development of an essential skills portfolio. Upon completion of this course, students had the option to register in the HCTP program where the emphasis was placed on postsecondary education and career exploration. Those who completed the college component were given advanced standing upon application into any Holland College program. To facilitate the high school graduates' entrance to Holland College, the college also reserved 20 percent of the seats in each program for students applying from high school.

In preparation for their experience at Holland College, the students received 110 hours of career skills instruction at Bluefield High School. The first two weeks of the course were spent teaching students to learn about themselves. They completed learning styles inventories and personality measures. Once the students identified how they learned and what their strengths were they began to work on the career paths that were available to them. The students received instruction in employability skills, portfolio development, technology, and communication skills. It was felt that the development of strong writing/speaking skills was essential as was the experience of working in groups. Attendance was mandatory. Students understood that they had to work hard in order to prepare themselves for the Holland College experience. The classroom environment

created at Bluefield High School was one where students' opinions were valued and the teacher acted as a facilitator and encouraged students to work independently.

This program chose a delivery model that was very much student-centred in its teaching practices. The program encouraged self-directed learning and took the emphasis away from results and concentrated on the process of learning. This part of the program was delivered at Holland College and the students were given a first-hand experience at a self-directed teaching model that was connected towards different occupational profiles. The low student-teacher ratio allowed students to immediately engage in many activities. Students could not, "fade away into the woodwork" and each student had to carry his or her own part of the group workload. Students were given the opportunity to showcase their learning at the end of each cycle in the form of a presentation to their peers, mentors, and industry people. Utilizing Microsoft PowerPoint™ presentation software, the students learned how to be creative in the delivery of presentations. As they moved on to the different cycles, they gained more and more confidence in their speaking abilities. After each round of presentations, an audience of their peers evaluated the students. The mentors and the audience participants were given evaluation forms and the students were given a rating based on the results. The students were then sent individual e-mails from their mentors, which consisted of a short synopsis of feedback from the presentations and also suggestions for how they might be improved upon for next time. The students in this program received continuous feedback and support from the program mentors and as result the students were always experiencing success in all parts of the program.

An interesting dimension to this program was that all of the students had to experience and participate in all program areas. Students, at first, were reluctant to participate in all program areas because many of the students had preconceived ideas about certain professions and were convinced that they did not have the ability or interest in certain trade areas. These barriers were quickly put to rest as the students adapted to the structure of the program and willingly participated in all program areas.

The students who participated in this study were from Bluefield High School. Students were enrolled in a career futures program with the understanding that upon completion of this 110-hour course that they would participate in the HCTP. The cohort of the transition students program started with 22 students with 20 students completing.

At the Holland College Charlottetown campus, learners explored five different program areas: Business, Journalism/Photography, Culinary, Trades and Technology, and Health and Community Service. The HCTP provided a learning environment, a teacher, and four college mentors to work with these students on a daily basis. The students were exposed to all five program areas and spent three intensive weeks studying and learning in each of the five areas.

More specifically, there were two components to the program. First, the students had to complete a 110-hour course in career futures at Bluefield High School. Career Futures focused on examining career directions, making choices, exploring the workplace, and developing employability skills. This course developed a broad-based foundation for job, occupation, and career planning. Students had an opportunity to complete interest inventories, access workplace skills, and explore post-secondary opportunities and/or an occupation of interest. The students were involved in individual

and group work aimed at helping them to better understand themselves and their interactions with others. The course also focused on recognizing and exploring their personal skills, motivations, and attitudes, as well as, the manner that these factors impact their academic efforts and future educational/vocational interests and goals.

The second component of the program took place at Holland College. Students focused directly on the career-exploration component while attending Holland College on a half-day basis. Each student spent a half-day for 14 days in a cycle rotation in five postsecondary areas: (a) Business Administration, (b) Community Health, (c) Information Technology, (d) Trades and Technology, and (e) Culinary and Tourism. Students were divided into groups with a Program Mentor, and after each 14 day period, the groups were rotated. Program Mentors, employed specifically from that occupational field, supported the students in all components of this project. During this project Bluefield students participated like other Holland College students and completed the necessary aspects of the project in the college's labs/classrooms. At the end of the semester, each student had "hands on" experience in each of five areas, as well as experience in the development and presentation of five related projects.

Participants

Twenty-two Grade 12 students participated in this study of the HCTP. The students ranged in age from 17 to 18 years old, with 12 females and 10 males. Participants in this program were from a rural high school and were a mixture of academic and general students. Of the 22 students, four were categorized as severely at-risk. The participants in the program were identified by the school administration and

teachers as students that needed some guidance and attention in order to transition to postsecondary education. To participate in this study, the students were required to sign a consent form (see Appendixes A, B, and C) that guaranteed them anonymity in this project (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997).

Instruments

To better understand how students transitioned the Career Factors Inventory was utilized. (See Appendix E) D'Costa (2001) explains that, "the Career Factors Inventory (CFI) is designed to help people to determine whether they are ready to engage in the career decision-making process'" (p. 219). Additionally, Chartrand and Robbins (1997) describe that it, "is based on the belief that most people can rapidly determine the source of any barriers or obstacles to their career decision making by assessing four factors" (p. 2) that were developed by the CFI. These constructs are divided into two categories -- information and decision needs.

Both categories are explained with excerpts from Chartrand and Robbins (1997, p. 2). The first category – "information needs" -- includes two distinct factors which can be measured by the CFI:

1. *Need for Career Information:* the perceived need to acquire specific information about or experience in various occupations before making a career decision ....

2. *Need for Self-Knowledge:* the desire to have greater self-understanding before making a career decision. Some people may need to answer questions such

as, Who am I? or What are my values? before they will be able to choose a satisfying career. A strong need for self-knowledge may reflect a desire for a clearer vocational identity. In such cases, gathering information about capabilities, interests, values, and other personal qualities is an important element of career exploration.

"Decision needs" also has two factors which are measured by the CFI. These are:

1. *Career Choice Anxiety:* the level of nervousness one feels when faced with making a career decision. Anxiety is an important issue in career counseling, particularly for those who are afraid of or are forced into making career choices ....

2. *Generalized Indecisiveness:* the general tendency to have difficulty making decisions. High generalized indecisiveness reflects inability to plan or act on decisions in several areas of life, even when all the information necessary to take action is available. People with high levels of generalized indecisiveness often prefer individual career assistance. (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997, p. 2)

The CFI is a self-directed measure. D'Costa (2001) describes it as having "21 items requiring Likert-type response, using five rating levels ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)" (p. 219). The guide indicates that five constructs associated with career decision-making were initially developed -- but this was ultimately reduced to four. Factor analyses, including confirmatory factor analyses, were utilized to decide on the current four constructs which are, as noted, Need for Career Information,

Need for Self-Knowledge, Career Choice Anxiety, and Generalized Indecisiveness (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997, pp. 5-6). D'Costa indicates that the "test/re-test (2-week and 3-month administration intervals) and internal consistency reliability indexes ranges in the .60s to .80s" (p. 220). "Furthermore, for a high school sample, reported test-retest for each of the scales is .57, .63, .62 and .66 respectively" (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997, p. 9). It would be predicted that the CFI scores for this group should be decreasing in the post-test analysis. In general, accumulated evidence suggests that this instrument is an adequate measure of career awareness and is a suitable research tool.

Data Collection and Analysis

The assessment was group administered by the researcher. Students were administered the pre-test during the first week of their first 110 hour course at Bluefield High School, in September 2004. Upon completion of the second component of the program at Holland College, the students were administered a post-test in June of 2005. The data that was collected for this thesis was accumulated using two different processes. The pre-test data used for this study was administered by Holland College. The post-test data that was used received UPEI Ethics Board approval. The results were recorded and matched by assigning each student a number to maintain confidentiality of the participant (See Appendixes D and F). Scoring of the test was conducted as outlined in the technical manual. To help ensure non-bias tests were scored by an independent person from the Holland College Assessment Services to ensure quality.

The data collected were entered into a SPSS 11.0 computer file for analysis. Then, comparisons were made using dependant t-tests for each of the four CFI constructs.

Since we were measuring the difference between pre- and post-test mean scores on each of the four factors, a t-test for dependent means was employed. All occasions of statistical significance of the findings were based upon a minimum alpha of 95% confidence level. Lastly, the transition data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

CHAPTER IV - RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data were analyzed in order to determine 1) the presence of change occurring from pre- to post-test in career understanding using the four constructs of the CFI, and 2) the percentage of participants that made the transition from high school to postsecondary institutions. Trends in the CFI data were also explored for heuristic purposes. Descriptive statistics are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

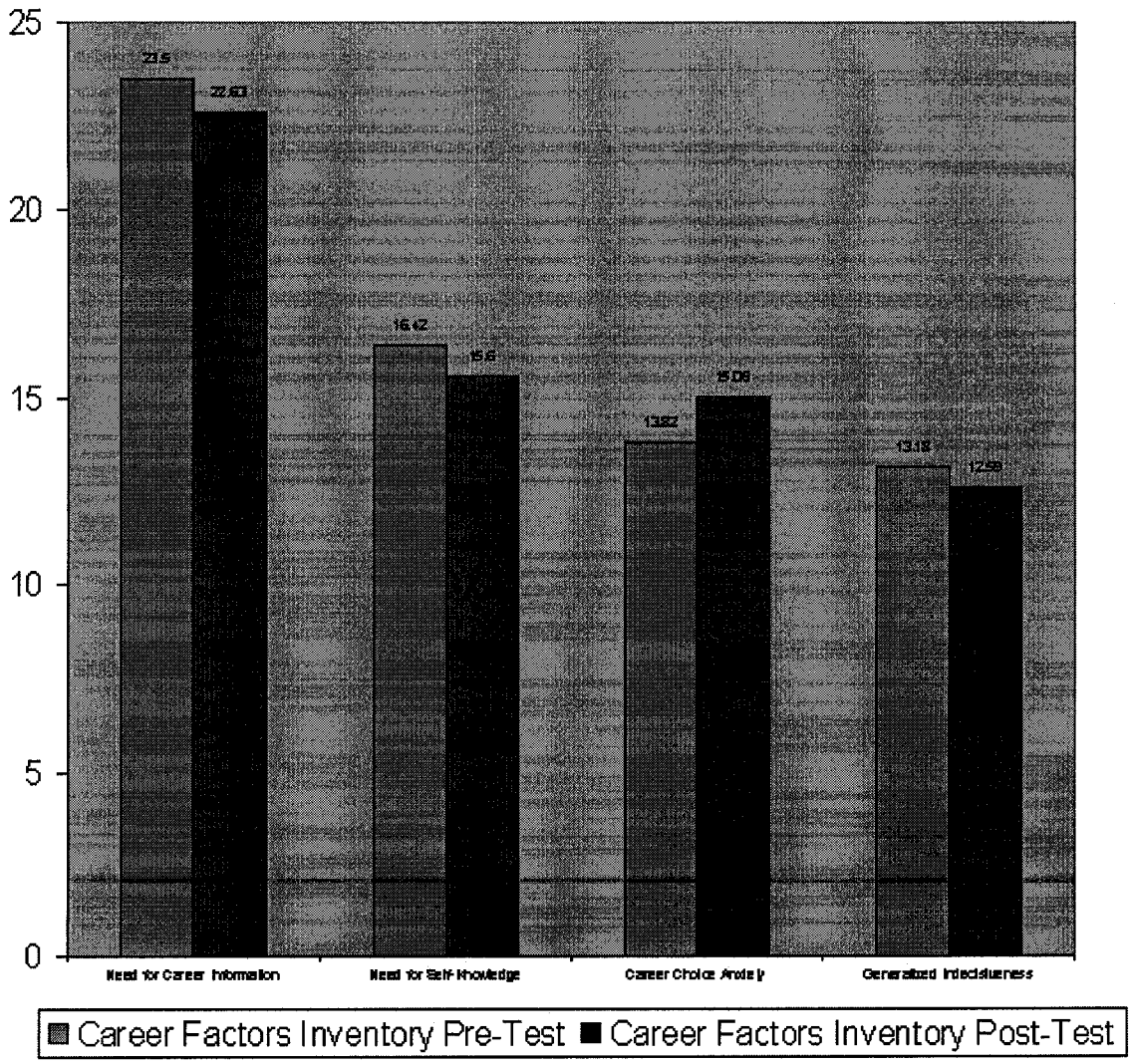
	Career Info	Self-knowledge	Career Choice Anxiety	General Indecisiveness	CINFO POS	SKNOW POS	CCANX POS	GINDEC POS
N Valid	19	19	17	17	19	19	19	19
Missing	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Mean	23.526	16.42	13.8325	13.1765	22.6316	15.5263	15.6316	13.1053
Std Deviation	5.5113	3.920	5.30607	4.94008	4.17945	3.54915	4.89002	3.55738
Range	22.00	15.00	20.00	16.00	13.00	10.00	16.00	13.00

Major Findings

It was predicted that the individual scores would decrease in each of the four categories. T-tests for each category indicated no significant change occurred from pre-

test to post-test, for any of the factors as noted in Figure 3. However, in three of the categories the change was in the expected direction.

Figure 3 – Career constructs – Mean student responses pre-test vs mean student responses post test



The "Need for Career Information" scale was created to allow students the opportunity to determine how important they felt it was that they receive information on, or experience, many job opportunities before making career decisions. The data suggested that the program has lead to some change in the need for career information. The t-test results were as follows: $t(18)= -0.81 > 0.05$. However no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores were found for this factor.

The "Need for Self-Knowledge" scale was used to show students how much they desired a greater understanding of themselves; the focus being on making a career decision. Data outlined in *Figure 3* suggests some progress in acquiring self knowledge. In the second construct, "Need for Self-knowledge," the t-test results were $t(18)=1.42>0.05$. Again, no significant difference was found between pre- and post-test scores on this factor.

The "Career Choice Anxiety" scale was used to determine how nervous students were when confronting career decisions. In this construct, students appeared to be more anxious upon completion of this program about career choices than they were when they started the program. This could be attributed to the fact that the students were aware of more opportunities that were available to them. With this third construct, the t-test results were $t(16)= -1.24 > 0.05$. Again, no significant difference was found between pre- and post-test scores on this factor.

The fourth construct examined is the "Generalized Indecisiveness" scale which measures the difficulty students face in making decisions. The t-test results were $t(16)= -0.50>0.05$ for this scale. Although the differences in scores were in the expected directions, no significant differences were found on this factor.

The second part of this study examined how many students transitioned successfully to postsecondary institutions. By June 1, 2005, Holland College will have had 70 students enrolled in the transition program. The college has tracked these students over the past three years. This tracking information is very important in indicating which types of decisions were made on graduation.

Table 3

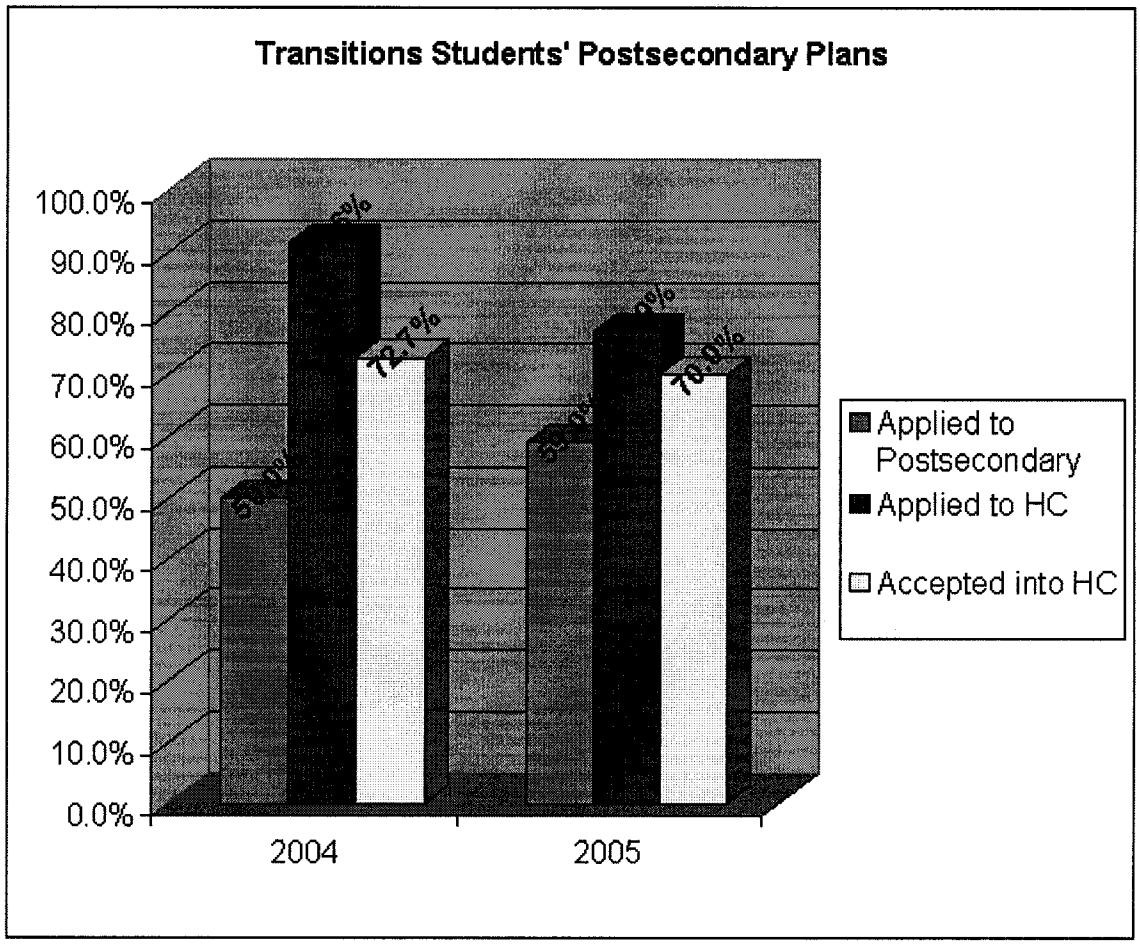
2004/2005 HCTP Student Applications

	2004/2005	
Student 1	UPEI	Accepted
Student 2	Plumbing	Accepted
Student 3	Graphic Design	Applied
Student 4	Plans to attend Early Childhood in 2006	
Student 5	Undecided	
Student 6	CET	Accepted
Student 7	Culinary	Accepted
Student 8	Undecided	
Student 9	UPEI fall 2006	
Student 10	Early Childhood	Accepted
Student 11	Hair Design	Accepted
Student 12	Resident Care Worker	Applied
Student 13	Hotel Restaurant	Applied
Student 14	Medical Support Services	On waiting list
Student 15	Culinary	2006
Student 16	University of Alberta	Accepted 2005
Student 17	Automotive	Applied
Student 18	Golf Club Management	Accepted 2005
Student 19	Undecided	
Student 20	Travel and Tourism	Accepted
Student 21	Did not finish program	
Student 22	Did not finish program	

Table 3, outlines student applications to post-secondary institutions for those included in this research. In 2005 there were 22 students who enrolled in the program. There were

two students who did not complete the program. There were 20 students who completed the program and earned three credits towards their high school graduation certificate.

Figure 4 – Transition students postsecondary plans.



More importantly, 17 out of 20 students transitioned to postsecondary institutions. The three students who did not were still undecided about doing a postsecondary option.

By way of comparison, in 2004, there were 24 students who enrolled in the transition program and all 24 completed the program and earned three credits towards their high school graduate certificate. In this group 16 out of 24 students transitioned to post secondary institutions. There were eight students who were unclear about choosing a postsecondary option.

The research question being examined in this study is -- "Does involvement in the HCTP affect career maturity of participants as measured by the four constructs in the Career Factors Inventory? Based on the research tool, the test results indicate that there was no significant change in the career maturity of the participants as a result of taking this program. However, it seems clear that the program had a profound impact on students' postsecondary educational planning as measured by the rate of postsecondary placements by the students who participated in this program.

CHAPTER V - SUMMARY

The Bluefield High School program was developed with the intent to expose at-risk students to various career options. A secondary objective was to allow the students to explore and understand their own learning styles so that they could pursue postsecondary opportunities in areas that supported their strengths. The Career Factors Inventory was used to determine if this program gave students more information about careers so that they could make better decisions about future educational opportunities. It was anticipated that students would show significant change on the post-tests as compared to the pre-tests with students scoring significantly lower in each of the four career constructs on the post-test. However, each of the analyses indicates that there were no statistically significant changes in career knowledge from pre- to post-testing. There were only slight changes in the predicted direction. From pre- to post-test, the variance decreased in all four of the career constructs. This indicates that the participating students were beginning to score at similar levels.

As the program continues, there will be a greater opportunity to study the results of the program, as the number of student participants increases, trends will form making the description of results much clearer. It should be noted that the sample size in this study was very small, thus the statistical power for rejecting null hypothesis is low. Descriptive statistics suggest that the program has built a foundation from which to grow.

A clearer examination of the data sheds some light on the students' transition experience. The first construct examined the need for more career information. The fact that this construct did not change significantly after the 10-month program that started in September 2004 and ended in June 2005 indicates perhaps that students have career

knowledge and that career information was available to them. It appears that the students are comfortable with their knowledge of the labour market and careers. This could be due, at least in part, to an internal advertising campaign recently launched by the PEI Government. Over the past two years the government has spent one million dollars marketing and promoting various trade opportunities (Baker Consulting, personal communication, Sept. 18, 2006). The information has perhaps affected the students' need for career information.

The second construct was the need for self knowledge. The need for self-knowledge indicates that the transition program has started to meet students' needs in the area of self-knowledge. Further examination indicates that students have started to identify who they are, what they value, and what type of person they would like to be. Students learned a lot about themselves and explored many career opportunities; it would not be surprising if students found themselves reexamining what they find important. It may be that no significant differences were found in the area because the students' believe, after their experiences in this program, that they are comfortable with their level of knowledge, regarding postsecondary programs as a result of taking the career futures component of this program.

The third construct "career choice anxiety" was a difficult area to analyze. Many of the students participating in the program were realizing that there were many options available to them. Some of the students who participated may have had preconceived notions that they were stuck on the path which had been laid out for them as a result of being placed in the general high school stream. Allowing them to consider, for the first time, a future with a career, may have contributed to the increase in scores from the post-

test to the pre-test. The other variable that was present in this program was that the last four weeks of their Holland College experience was spent exploring all of the programs at the college. These students explored the Marine Centre, the Police Academy and the Aerospace and trade centres in Summerside. Students were exposed to career areas that were new to them and this could have created second and third choices for students. As the students became aware of more and more opportunities that were available to them "career choice anxiety" started to rise.

The fourth construct "generalized indecisiveness" showed a slight decrease from the pre-test. This is not surprising given that the students' anxiety level did not decrease either. The goal of the program was to transition students to postsecondary opportunities. When examining the transition data, students did make good decisions, which seems counter intuitive. While they made seemingly good decisions, their decisiveness, as measured by the test did not improve. Clearly, the test results were inconsistent with the student's decisive decision-making.

The Bluefield 2004/2005 project had a 90 percent completion rate and to date a significant number of the previous two cohorts have transitioned to postsecondary institutions successfully. It appears as if this third cohort will do likewise. By all accounts, this project has been very successful. Since its inception in 2002, a total of 130 students will have participated in this program. The transition programs are now divided equally between Holland College's Summerside and Charlottetown campuses.

I have worked in two Island high schools as a principal. The Bluefield /Holland College program started in my second year at Bluefield High School. This program has

had a positive impact on students right from the start. The program's success was measured by the number of students who transitioned to postsecondary successfully.

I am going to reflect on three areas that I believe have had a profound influence on these students. The first factor is the support that the program received from administrators, teachers, and parents. The second factor is the relationships that were fostered among the students, and the positive interactions between the students' teachers and mentors. The third and final factor to reflect on is how the program curriculum was developed and taught at Holland College.

The program was developed with the premise that if you have high expectations for students and you create a program that connects curriculum to real and relevant outcomes, then the students will respond by working hard. Students had to apply for this program, as well as go through an interview. Once they were interviewed and had been accepted to the transition program, the participants then had to bring their parents or guardians in for a second interview so that everyone involved understood the goals of the program. Students were told in their Grade 11 year that if they wished to enter into the transition program in Grade 12 that they had to demonstrate a change in their work habits, for instance, by consistently attending classes and working hard. The students received immediate acceptance to Holland College (upon full completion of the transition program) and earned three grade twelve credits towards their graduation requirements. The developers of the program built it around the centralized theme of allowing these students to set a goal, work hard to achieve this goal, and then be rewarded for their efforts by earning acceptance to a postsecondary institution.

We did not foresee the central role that relationships would play in the program. We underestimated the influence that this group of students would have on each other. The group was a mixture of general and academic students. There were four students who were in crisis and on the verge of dropping out of school. For the first time, students were not categorized or streamed into a grouping. There was also a good balance between male and female students. As was mentioned previously, a full time teacher was assigned to this project. The school provided a classroom, which was located beside the guidance office. The room was modified to meet the needs of students. Twenty computers were purchased for this program and an area was designed for Microsoft PowerPoint™ presentations. The teacher's office was located in the classroom and the classroom was left open for the students. This classroom space became a meeting area for the transition students.

The teacher was available at all times. During the early part of the program the teacher concentrated on building team skills and the students started to work on portfolio development. The students bonded quite quickly and developed a strong and trusting relationship with the teacher. It seems clear that these relationships, with both peers and adults helped the students develop a network of personal connections which, in turn, helped convey expectations and behavioral norms. Clearly, many students have a hard time trying to fit into school cultures and have difficulties with finding a sense of belonging. Certainly a major variable was the positive effect that the teacher at Bluefield High School had on these students. A major theme that emerged from student interviews in Harper's (2004) work was that these students developed a new and positive outlook towards their school. Students indicated that they felt that they belonged and that they

really enjoyed their teacher -- Mr. Cotton. This sense of belonging and connectedness to their school was very important to the students. Mr. Cotton made them feel that they were all part of something very special. These students used the transition room as their home base and connected with each other on a daily basis.

The HCTP was successful because the teacher worked hard at overcoming individuals' barriers and fostered positive relationships between and among his students. The teacher made it a point of being in his classroom first thing in the morning and at lunch time thus allowing the students to use this area to easily connect. In turn, the students felt that they were a part of something good and were proud of their learning environment.

When the students started the Holland College component of the program, they were assigned a mentor who worked with five students at a time and circulated with them as they rotated through the curriculum areas. The relationships that developed between the students and the mentors were strong and very positive. The students were put into situations where they had to perform at a high level. It was difficult for a student not to engage. As was previously explained, at the end of each cycle the students were required to prepare a Microsoft PowerPoint™ presentation in teams and do their presentations to an audience of their peers in a lecture theatre. The guidance and direction that these students received from the mentors cannot be overlooked. Students who had previously faded into the woodwork in their traditional classroom settings were now doing oral presentations and leading groups because of the confidence that they had gained.

The third reason that this program was successful was that the curriculum was restructured and the students were introduced to a college-learning environment. The

teaching practices previously employed were not reaching these students. In fact the curriculum was so predictable that the teaching staff was looking for new ways to reach and motivate their kids. Our schools are not structured to meet the needs of students who are disengaging. The high school curriculum is delivered in four 80-minute periods on a daily basis. The class length time is simply too long for many learners and in many cases teachers have not adapted or modified their teaching strategies to meet the needs of the disengaged learners. The trend has been to place disengaged learners in general programs, which often results in lowered expectations. Far too often teachers rely on text teaching and on chapter questions to check for understanding and students are not experiencing success.

The HCTP also showed that students in high schools were not getting enough information about trades and vocational education. Schuetze and Sweet (2003) also address this issue. They explain that "The disinterest of high school graduates in a vocational career, especially one involving apprenticeship training" is an issue that arises in the research" (p. 16). They further elucidate that these findings indicate,

> that the unfavourable reaction to an apprenticeship option can, in part, be attributed to the influence that high school teachers and counsellors on students' educational career choices. It is reasonable to assume that the tendency of these critical "gate keepers" to encourage students to enroll in academic and school-based programs reflects their own academic background and their lack of familiarity with alternation-based education and training programs. (p. 16)

Given the research and my own experiences, I am not at all surprised at the success of the program. I have always taught in the general program and was always

alarmed by the amount of apathy that my students demonstrated towards their learning. In class, they would quite often sit quietly and not participate in class discussions. They would write exams quickly and frequently leave before required time limits. Attendance was always an issue. The students who participated in this program changed their attitudes towards education and became much more positive towards school.

As educators, in my opinion, we placed far too much value on the fact that students could earn acceptance to Holland College. We thought that this would be the main motivator for all of the students who participated in the program. This value added component would help students see that their high school diploma was not terminal because of their general program credentials. However, what was even more important was that these students enjoyed a newfound profile that they now had in their school. We did not fully understand the impact that being a general student had on students' self-image.

One important variable that should not be overlooked in this transition program is the "power of the site" (Hoffman, 2003, p. 26) or the influence that the physical premises of the college had on the high school learners. The high school students blended into the college culture and very much appreciated being part of a college environment. They clearly enjoyed their experience. The students appreciated working with college students in a different environment from what they were used to experiencing in high school. They enjoyed the freedom of working in self-directed programs and welcomed new teaching strategies to which they were not previously accustomed. Students developed a newfound confidence in themselves. Many people throughout the college noted the improvement that these students made regarding their public speaking and the creativity

that they exhibited in their presentations. The relationship between the high school and the college was critical in this regard.

Certainly one of the main attributes of this program was that it also provided a new curriculum route for students. This is important since as Bailey and Karp (2003) note in their assessment of transition programs, "many students are bored in class and do not see the relevance of their high school course work for their future success" (p. 5). Improving motivation through high expectations is the emerging theme throughout the literature -- which indicates that underachieving students perform best when met with high expectations.

This program is in its third year of operation and Holland College is now in the process of implementing an English course into the public school system. Business communications is a compulsory writing course that all students must take at Holland College. The student outcomes are explicit and the college will be giving credit to high school students who complete this program to the expected standards. This integration of curriculum into the high school program will be the first step to show the students what the expectations are in the college and to give them a clear idea of what they have to accomplish in order to be a successful college student.

When reflecting upon the research questions that are examined in this paper, the evidence indicates that the program was successful at transitioning students to postsecondary institutions but did not affect career awareness. I question whether the concept of career maturity can be measured. Career awareness is constantly changing and changes even throughout adulthood. The pressure for students to decide career paths in high school is, in my opinion, not realistic. The most important decision that high

school students have to make is to stay in school and to pursue some form of postsecondary training in order to meet the employment needs of our economy and to be self-actualized. This program measured career decision-making and allowed students to see and experience the many areas that could influence decision-making. The skills that will be required in the workforce of the future are the basic employability skills that are outlined by HRSDC (Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, 2003). Students will have to be able to work in teams, problem solve, and be able to accept change. We can no longer marginalize a select group of students and then stream them out of any opportunity to transition to postsecondary training.

Discussion

It is my opinion that the problem of disengaged students lies chiefly in the nature of the relationship between themselves, teachers, counselors and administrators. Stanton-Salazar (as cited in MacDonald, 2001), writes that for many students, "the construction of interpersonal trust, solidarity, and shared meaning is secondary to institutional policies and practices" (p. 17). Further, other researchers examined how school culture affects the disengaged learner. Wehlage and Rutter (as cited in MacDonald, 2001),

> proposed that four barriers to school membership prevent many students from developing a sense of identification with school. These include difficulty with academic tasks, problems adjusting to the impersonality of the junior or senior high school, a poor personal and social match between the students and the school, and a sense of isolation within the school or program. (p. 23)

MacDonald (2001) further explains that there are possibly three main learning impediments that disengaged students quite often experience in school. These are: "the lack of a clear relationship between achievement and an explicit and valued goal, the dominance of a narrow learning process, and the teachers' obsession with covering the subject matter." He conveys that these processes, "educational engagement (involvement) and school membership (social bonding) -- are instrumental in determining educational outcomes" (p. 63). Thus, students who connect to their school will in all likelihood transition successfully. Schools have the ability to adapt and modify programs to meet the needs of disengaged students and getting students to connect to their school environment is a priority.

Clearly, students want to belong and want to achieve success. Schools must recognize that not all students learn in the same way. High schools have to make their curriculum real and relevant and connect it to postsecondary institutions. As educators we must recognize that we often do not engage our students. Teachers need to hear that they can try new teaching strategies and that they will be supported when doing so. This means that they can also measure student outcomes differently. For example, students in the transitions program were evaluated on how well they worked in teams, how well they spoke, and how they worked with technology.

There is also research evidence that quite often the students who need guidance and strong relationships with teachers the most are the ones that do not receive it (MacDonald, 2001). MacDonald refers to this communication breakdown as a, "poorness of fit" between the individual students and their institution (p. 34). He argues that many schools, "through [their] codes of behavior and organized activities, [inhibit]

the expression of strong but normal and adaptive social, physical, and psychological needs of children and young adolescents" (p. 34). This awareness (though it is quite under-researched) indicates that we are not reaching the needs of general students. MacDonald states that it, "speaks to the importance of developing educational and school guidance programs that take into consideration" these needs (p. 34).

Information about careers and training is not as readily available to students as we tend to believe. The role of today's guidance counselors centres on crisis management first and career awareness second. Many guidance counselors understand that they are not reaching the needs of most students and would welcome as much support as possible in the area of career guidance. The students who need guidance the most are getting it the least. This program or educational pathway enabled educational administrators to take a second look at educational programming and to look at new ways of meeting the needs of students who are disengaging from the system.

Many students also want their learning to be real and relevant and connected to postsecondary institutions. This program has shown that high school students need to know more about their own strengths and weaknesses so that they have a clear understanding of the options that are available to them. As educators, we have to connect the curriculum in the high school to our postsecondary institutions. Credit transfer from high school to postsecondary institutions has to be seen as a clear and simple process. The transition program is a first step towards securing a laddering agreement between the high school public system and the college system. However, colleges have work to do in the area of recognizing courses taught in high school and giving credit recognition towards a diploma. We have the opportunity to connect college curriculum to our local

high schools so that students will be successful in transitioning to postsecondary institutions.

Chapter VI - Suggestions for Future Research

For the first time a college's curriculum outcomes and goals will be embedded into a high school course so that students will have a clear picture of what is expected of them when they transition to college. The Eastern School District and Holland College should examine ways that the college can increase capacity so that the college can handle larger numbers of transitioning students.

Unfortunately, we know little that is definitive about the overall characteristics and effects of these programs. A handful of studies have tried to measure effects but most of these do not take the statistical step of controlling prior academic achievement or other possible individual characteristics that might influence student outcomes. Experience and logic for the most part have fueled the continued development of the programs. This might be a fertile area of study.

For future development of this program, it would be prudent to ensure that the outcomes are continually being evaluated. Bailey and Karp (2003) sum up that, "overall, the studies that we have reviewed come to positive conclusions: students in transition programs do as well or better than other students. But conclusions from this research can only be considered tentative" (p. 34). They describe that only a limited number, "of studies make any attempt to construct an appropriate comparison group. Only two studies used statistical techniques that control for academic ability and other personal characteristics" (p. 34).

This study could be replicated in the future and would have the advantage of having a larger group of students enrolled in the program. For example, the 2006/2007

Holland College Transitions program has 75 students enrolled. I would also use a different assessment tool.

Research Limitations

The CFI inventory was limiting in that many of the outcomes that it was designed to measure were global in nature and quite often promoted ceiling effects among the respondents. Goldenson (1984) defines ceiling effects as "the inability of a test to measure or discriminate above a certain point, usually because its items are too easy" (p. 130). Although it has support as a research tool, it appears it has limitations even in this role.

The program was designed to give the students a comprehensive overview of college programs. However, near the end of the program, these students were exposed to the Aerospace centre, the Marine centre and the new "state of the art" Georgetown welding centre. Very late in their programs, the students experienced new and exciting career areas. It appears that students who believed that they were going in the right direction as far as pursuing postsecondary opportunities experienced anxiety as they explored these new opportunities. Certainly, this anxiety impacted on their performance on the CFI post-test.

This study has not examined how well students transitioned to an educational postsecondary experience. This would be an important piece of research to see how well they adjusted in the postsecondary setting.

Conclusion

The HCTP has been a success. It has grown over the years with the help of the outstanding co-operation by high school administrators. Administrators have seen the void that general students experience in their schools and have seen far too many students that are not motivated. High school administrators and teachers want to establish routes so that all students transition successfully to postsecondary institutions. This program is an initial step in creating a route or career path that is achievable for all students.

I believe we should redefine a college preparatory route for high school students in Prince Edward Island. It is time to establish credit based transition programs between high schools and colleges. High school students who want to transition to postsecondary institutions must understand the relevance of their existing high school curriculum. English writing programs and computer-based courses are courses that are offered in all Island High Schools. At Holland College these two courses are recognized as essential curriculum in every college program. It would not be a large task to modify the high school curriculum to meet the outcomes that are required by Holland College in these two specific subject areas. This would allow high school students to earn credits in high school that are also recognized at the college level. It is possible to raise the bar for students in these areas and this program has shown that students will perform and work harder once they see that their learning in high school is connected to postsecondary institutions.

High schools have a role to play in how they disseminate information about careers and also have to take on a leadership role in explaining to students how to finance

postsecondary education. Understanding how to finance postsecondary credentials is a major barrier for many students. Further, our non-university bound students have not received enough information about careers or how to prepare for careers. Students who have been streamed out of academic pathways are not being encouraged to pursue other forms of postsecondary educational opportunities. We have catered to a select group of university bound students at the expense of a group of other non-university bound students. All high school students should have the ability to ladder to some form of postsecondary training.

High school teachers have a very important role to play in this process. Today's guidance counselors cannot meet the needs of all students. High school teachers have the ability to connect with students through the homeroom structures that we are all very familiar with. However, we have to be more strategic in how we implement guidance programs for students in crisis. We have information at our disposal that shows us what students are at-risk when starting Grade 10. Our best high school teachers should be assigned a case load of five to ten students who have been labeled at-risk and it should be their job to mentor and follow these students throughout their high school career. These students would have a mentor that could coach, motivate, and give direction to students who could have the potential to disengage from the learning process. Developing positive relationships between teachers and students is important for all students but can have a profound effect on students at-risk.

This program was successful because of the attention that we brought to the learners. This transition program was an intense career awareness program that brought students together and gave them a positive identity in their school. This program has

shown that student's attitudes can change if we take the time to deliver curriculum differently and mentor these students with teachers and other learners.

I used a positivist approach which tends to be very scientific and requires the observer to be objective. It is a very scientific approach to the study human and social phenomena. This created three problems for me. The first is that you lose the context. The second is the overdependence on formal quantitative measures. The third challenge is that it prevents the researcher from looking at other ways of exploring these phenomena. If I were to do this group again I would use more of a constructionist approach which would examine the experiences of the students who participated in this program.

From a personal point of view, it has been extremely gratifying to be part of this project. Far too often high school administrators act as managers and get caught up in the day-to-day operations of the school. This was an opportunity for me to become proactive and to act as an agent of change.

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Appendix A – Letter to Student

May 16, 2004

Dear Student,

You have been invited to participate in a research project on High School Transitions Program and How it Affects Career Maturity, conducted by Grant Canvin under the supervision of Dr. Alexander MacDonald in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. This study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Master of Education.

This research project aims to evaluate the Transitions program and its effects on Career maturity.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You may stop your participation in the research project at any time, without penalty or prejudice. All information collected in the course of this project will remain confidential and anonymous and you will not be able to be identified from any of your responses. Only Grant Canvin, Dr. Alexander MacDonald, and those evaluating the thesis will have access to the data resulting from this research project. All data resulting from the research project will be retained for a period of five years from the date of completion of the project (June, 2006), after which time it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, you may consult with Dr. Alexander MacDonald, Superintendent of the Eastern School District, Holland College, 566-9684. If any issues arise for you during the course of this research project, please contact Dr. Alexander MacDonald, who can then refer you to an appropriate professional in the area. For access to the full results of the research project once these are available, please contact Grant Canvin at 894-6896 or

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Grant Canvin

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island. I understand that I can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902)-566-0637 or by email at lmacphee@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Appendix B – Letter to Superintendent

Dr. Alexander MacDonald
Superintendent
Eastern School District

Dear Dr. MacDonald,

I am requesting permission to conduct a research project on the High School Transition Program and How it Affects Career Maturity under the supervision of Dr. Alexander MacDonald in the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. This study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Master of Education degree.

This research project aims to evaluate the Transitions program and its effects on Career maturity.

Student participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Students may stop their participation in the research project at any time, without penalty or prejudice. All information collected in the course of this project will remain confidential and anonymous, and students will not be able to be identified from any of their responses. Only Grant Canvin, Dr. Alexander MacDonald, and those evaluating the thesis will have access to the data resulting from this research project. All data resulting from the research project will be retained for a period of five years from the date of completion of the project (June, 2006), after which time it will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, you may consult with Dr. Alexander MacDonald, Superintendent of the Eastern School District, Holland College, 566-9684. If any issues arise for you during the course of this research project, please contact Dr. Alexander MacDonald, who can then refer you to an appropriate professional in the area. For access to the full results of the research project once these are available, please contact Grant Canvin at 894-6896 or

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Grant Canvin

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island. I understand that I can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902)-566-0637 or by email at lmacphee@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Appendix C – Participant Consent Form

I have read and understood the material bout this study in the Information Letter. I consent to participating in research on the Transitions Program and its effects on career maturity.

I understand that my participation involves participation in a pretest before starting the transitions program and a post-test upon completion to the program.

I understand that:

1. My participation in the study is entirely voluntary.
2. I may discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice.
3. My responses will be kept confidential and anonymous, within the limitations of the research and the law.
4. I have the freedom not to answer any question included in this research.
5. I may have a copy of the signed and dated consent form to keep.

This research is being conducted by Grant Canvin for the Master of Education, under the supervision of Dr. Alexander MacDonald in the Faculty of Education at UPEI. Any questions or concerns about this study can be directed to Grant Canvin, 894-6896 or OR Dr. Alexander MacDonald at 566-9684. IF any issues arise for me during the course of this research project, I understand that I can contact Dr. Alexander MacDonald, who can then refer me to an appropriate professional in the area.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Universit of Prince Edward Island. I understand that I can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902)-566-0637 or by email at lmcphee@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Participant's name (please print):_____

Participant's signature:_____

Date:_____/_____/_____
D M Y

Appendix D – Student Data

Participant	Cinfopre	Sknowpre	Ccanxpre	Gindecpr	Cinfopos	Sknowpos	Canxpos	gindepo
1	8	5	9	5	18	10	9	9
2	29	20	10	6	27	20	18	11
3	29	20	28	20	23	19	20	11
4	26	16	21	21	28	18	22	16
5	28	20	11	7	30	20	14	13
6	19	20	9	11	17	20	12	12
7	23	14	12	15	17	14	17	10
8	20	18	14	16	20	16	13	13
9	23	16	19	18	25	15	21	18
10	30	20	8	7	28	14	6	7
11	21	12	14	16	24	14	18	10
12	20	16	16	13	23	16	19	20
13	23	13	17	17	17	10	17	15
14	24	20	10	9	22	19	17	13
15	16	16			21	12	22	17
16	28	20			19	14	19	18
17	30	18	8	13	28	20	8	15
18	26	13	14	16	20	10	16	9
19	24	15	15	14	23	14	9	12

Appendix E – Career Factor Inventory Tests

Career Factors Inventory (CFI)
By Judy M. Chartrand
Steven B. Robbins
Weston H. Morrill

Background

The Career Factors Inventory (CFI) assesses four career factors related to career indecision. The four factors are divided into two categories representing information needs of the client and decision needs of the client. The two information needs factors measured by the CFI are Need for Career Information and Need for Self-Knowledge. The two decision needs factors measured by the CFI are Career Choice Anxiety and Generalized Indecisiveness.

The Career Factors Inventory (CFI) helps the career client understand their readiness to choose a career or make a career change by measuring four important factors that can interfere with effective career decision making. The results of this inventory will help the client identify the obstacles that can make it difficult for them to make career choices. Identifying such obstacles is the first step in developing a personal plan for making a satisfying career choice.

Below are sample directions and items for the Career Factors Inventory (CFI).

Directions to the CFI.

To respond to each item, click on the NUMBER that best indicates how you feel. For example, if you strongly agree with the item, you would click the number 5 as illustrated below.

Before choosing or entering a career area, I still need to gather more information about one or more occupations.
Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

Sample Items on the CFI by career factor:

Need for Career Information

13. Before choosing or entering a particular career area, I need to gain practical knowledge of different jobs through as much work experience as possible.
    Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

Need for Self-Knowledge

3. Before choosing or entering a particular career area, I need to answer, what are my personal values?
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

Career Choice Anxiety

8. When I think about actually deciding for sure what I want my career to be, I feel:
relaxed 1 2 3 4 5 tense

Generalized Indecisiveness

19. While making most decisions, I am:
certain 1 2 3 4 5 uncertain

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Grant Canvin
Holland College
140 Weymouth Street
Charlottetown, PE C1A 4Z1

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