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## Examining the Development of Career Identity within a College Preparatory School: A Case Study

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Examining the Development of Career Identity within a College Preparatory School: A Case  
Study

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Administration

by

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To my Heavenly Father, I love you and praise you.

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## **Abstract**

Recent college graduates are clearly facing significant labor market challenges and statistics show that college graduates will more likely find themselves unemployed or underemployed rather than gainfully employed in the current job market. The purpose of this study was to examine the career identity development of non-public high school seniors taking a career preparation program involving internships within all career pathways, not just those requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. Individual interviews were conducted with ten students, the program director, and four site coordinators to gain the insight from their experiences with the career development course. Results from this study indicated that students experienced a high level of student engagement in the program, exposure to real-world experience in careers, and meaningful relationships with adults who participated in the program. Findings in this study also indicated how self-awareness and self-confidence gained from participating in the program lead to the development of a positive career identity. This study can be used to inform schools and school districts of the value of internships on the development of career identity.

**Keywords:** Career Identity, College Prep Schools, Career Development, Career and Technical Education, Career Planning, Career Internship



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

Preparing for an adult career and incorporating a career into one's identity is a key task during a student's transition from high school to adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) further articulates that this specific task of incorporating a career into one's identity is also the most challenging task of identity formation and failing to accomplish it, unfortunately, can have a profound, negative impact on one's adjustment into society. Other theorists (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011; Vondracek, 1995) agree with Erikson and reiterate that career identity development is a process very important to one's adjustment and self-fulfillment in life. For something so abstract to hold such a powerful place in one's future outcome in life, it may be important for educators to try to understand the phenomenon of career identity development and each component involved in the process.

All through school, students have received various decision-making aides such as interest inventories and career guidance sessions to help facilitate them in this decision-making process (Amit & Gati, 2013). This career-related information, coupled with a school's ethos and the countless opinions from peers and family, becomes an intertwined phenomenon that serves to move students from career exploration to career choice. Some researchers coin the phenomenon that happens between the stages of career exploration and career choice as career identity (Savickas, 2005). Career identity is a fascinating phenomenon that has been studied by researchers since the beginning of the 1900's with Frank Parsons' work that highlighted his

efforts in giving scientific vocational counsel to the youth that visited his bureau and who had no idea what they wanted to do with their future (Parson, 1909).

Fast-forwarding a century, we find high school students in the same scenario; they do not know what to do with their future. Researchers, like Gray & Herr (2006), say that because of this, many high school students have defaulted to the one way to win phenomenon in which high school graduates sometimes perceive that the only way to succeed in life is to get a 4-year college degree. Despite the well-meaning basis for pushing college completion, a result of one way to win is that many teens go to college simply because they have no idea what they want to do and they think the only thing available to them is a 4-year baccalaureate degree programs (Gray & Herr, 2006). High school graduates today think that the only way to succeed in life is to get a 4-year college degree that will ensure a high-paying job once they graduate. Despite many well-paid careers that do not require a four-year degree, “students have been led to believe that a baccalaureate degree will lead to a career in the professions and is the only way to ensure economic security and status” (Gray & Herr, 2006, p. 65). Unfortunately, this thought process, that 4-year college is the best answer, has morphed into the career ethos of public and non-public schools and has dominated the development of career identity within this segment of youth today (Gray & Herr, 2006). This thought process about 4-year college has continued to grow in education, despite the fact that both unemployment and underemployment have followed a clear upward trend for recent college graduates over the past two decades (Abel, Dietz, and Yaqin Su, 2014).

About 3.6 million students will graduate from high school in 2017 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). According to data from the U.S. Department of Education (2013), about a tenth of these students will graduate from a non- public high school. This one way to success effect may be exacerbated for the approximately 300,000 students each year who graduate from non-public high schools in this country. There is reason to believe that these students might be particularly influenced by the one way to win ethos identified by Gray and Herr. There are a number of reasons why these parents are choosing non-public school education for their learners; career development being one of them (Council for American Private Education, 2013). Lubienski (2014) states that the successful development of a career identity within a learner appears to be a desired outcome of the private school effect on students. Parents want to spend their resources on a school that supports and promotes college and career readiness and ultimately ensures career success for their child.

Ultimately, “parent values of education and resources will shape student outcomes.” (Lubienski, 2014, p. 23) A parent’s resources and their beliefs pair together with the school’s career ethos to develop a career identity within a student. Sometimes the strong surge that radiates from these two dynamic forces can cause a non-public college preparatory school to focus myopically on 4-year colleges as the only route to success and they may unknowingly be creating an unstable future for their graduates in the job market. This myopic focus could possibly limit the career options for the hundreds of thousands of students who graduate from non-public college preparatory high schools each year in this country.

Research exist in the prescreening and exploration stages at the early high school level, much of which has led to career counseling interventions and programs such as interest inventories and career guidance systems (Amit & Gati, 2013). However, due to the work overload of high school counselors, students receive limited navigational help in the area of choice stage, more specifically in the area of what the student is experiencing as they attempt to navigate this stage. The analysis of a student's career identity development, specifically what happens during the choice phase, is a critical gap in current education.

### **Problem Statement**

Historically, high school students who graduated with post-secondary education have received a substantial economic benefit that will last them for the rest of their lives Johnson & Mortimer (2002) claim, "occupation is a strong determinant of a person's status within the community, earnings, wealth, and style of life." (p. 441). Recently, however, the labor market has become an increasingly difficult place for a college graduate to navigate. The job market ecosystem has become greatly unbalanced with a disproportionate number of overeducated workers who do not necessarily have the skills that fit the economic demands. Further research of Abel, Dietz, and Yaqin Su (2014), found that recent graduates are finding it difficult to secure a job, and those who do find work are often settling for low-wage positions in fields outside their degree area. Consistent with current research, data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2015) shows that recent college graduates are clearly facing significant labor market challenges and statistics show that college graduates will more likely find themselves unemployed or underemployed

rather than gainfully employed in the current job market. For college graduates, the underemployment rate over the past two decades has remained steady at 33 percent and unemployment at 3 percent (Abel, Dietz & Su, 2014). On top of this problem, the post-secondary attrition rates are incredibly high with only forty percent of college freshman returning for their sophomore year (Abel, Dietz & Su, 2014).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine non-public high school students' career identity development as they completed a career development program. This was a case study about the career identity development of high school seniors, who were involved in a yearlong internship program, at College Prep High, located in the suburbs of a Southern U.S. city. The interviews extracted from the participants provided insight into the experiences within the career internship program and further insight into how these experiences contributed to the development of career identity.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, my primary goal was to examine the career identity development of non-public high school seniors taking a career preparation program involving internships within all career pathways, not just those requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. The questions used to explore this were:

1. What are the experiences of non-public high school seniors in a career preparation program?
2. How do these experiences contribute to the development of a career identity?

### **Significance**

Unlike other nations, the United States does not use a formal national structure that transitions students from secondary education to the workforce (Swail and Kampits, 2004). Instead, there are several federal programs such as the Carl D Perkins Act (2006) and the College and Career Readiness Movement (2011) that tell educators what we should be doing, but not how to do it. Without a clear directive as to how, each state in our nation develops a unique, general plan for their individual schools to follow, but leaves curriculum choice and implementation up to the individual schools. These schools, working alongside state government, create a loose - sometimes limited- outline of curriculum sought to help students transition from secondary education to other education. For most schools, this transition into the labor market is most commonly via a college degree plan with very little alternative curriculum options available for students. Exploring secondary education plans, that include career and technical options, might help individual schools develop a broader outline of curriculum that in turn could possibly transition students into the workforce more effectively.

## **Definition of Terms**

**High School Senior:** According to Webster dictionary, a high school senior is a student that is attending the final year of secondary school before college.

**College Graduate:** College graduates are defined as “those with at least a bachelor’s degree who are twenty-two to twenty-seven years old” (Abel, Dietz & Su, 2014, p.2).

**Career Development:** a “continuous lifelong process of developmental experiences that focuses on seeking, obtaining and processing information about self, occupational and educational alternatives, lifestyles and role options” (Hansen, 2003).

**Career Identity:** a “career identity is a structure of meanings in which the individual links his own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles” (Meijer, 1998).

**Career Internship:** “Paid or unpaid work experience offered by an employer to give students and graduates exposure to the working environment” (Graduate Advantage, 2018).

**Career Planning:** According to Schermerborn, Hunt, and Osborn (2000), “Career planning is a process of systematically matching career goals and individual capabilities with opportunities for their fulfillment”.

## **Summary**

This chapter discusses the significant impact that career choice has on a student and the economy. From the early stages of career exploration, a student begins to develop a career identity that will eventually solidify and shape their career choice decision. In non-public schools, parents are investing their resources to collaborate with a school that will support their educational values and beliefs to ensure that their student will have a successful future. Parents, along with the non-public school, are collaborating to help develop a career identity within the learner. It is important to understand this career identity development and ensure that it does produce a successful outcome for the learner. The next chapter will discuss the literature surrounding this study.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Conceptual Framework and Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Career identity development is a complex, interactive process that begins in grade school, continues through post-secondary education, and ultimately has an impact on the economy of our Nation (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2004). Therefore, it is important for the PK-16 educational communities to study the development of a student's career identity at these different intersections and to understand the impact career identity has on the job market. Gati and Asher (2001) proposed a three-stage framework to help divide the career decision process into stages: prescreening, in-depth exploration, and choice. Porter and Umbach (2006) stress that during the analysis of the complex information that goes into the choice phase, one must look specifically at the constructs that are used to describe the phenomenon of career identity. This literature review focused on selecting and defining the two major career identity constructs, personality and environment, and examined the interaction of these two factors in career identity development.

Within the literature review, special emphasis was placed on literature that focused on high school students within non-public institutions. Public school and non-public schools alike have similar goals for their students; goals to develop career identity within their students, goals to graduate their students from high school, goals for their students to attend some sort of post-secondary education, and goals for their students to become gainfully employed in the job market they enter (Gray, 2004). While the degree to which students of different school types

might accomplish these goals will vary, the fact that these goals are common to public and nonpublic institutions is undeniable. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010), private high schools account for 24 % of our nation's schools and graduate nearly 95% of their senior class into a four-year college. With a statistic this strong, Gray & Herr's (2006) description of a one way to win message seems applicable to non-public schools. This paradigm stresses that upon graduation from high school, if a student wants to succeed, they must pursue a 4-year degree from a university. Unfortunately, only 50% of these graduates will graduate from college and find commensurate employment after graduation (Gray & Herr, 2006). Accenture LLP Career Opportunities reported that 51 % of graduates from the classes of 2014 and 2015 are working in jobs that do not require their college degree. Unless non-public high school graduates find a matching need in the current job market, non-public schools could be proportionally responsible for our Nation's unbalanced job market ecosystem and high underemployment amongst their alumni.

Within this literature review, it is also necessary to understand the complex role of a school counselors. School counselors are key stakeholders in the development of students and understanding their ever-changing role is critical in the discussion of career development within students. According to Gysber (2001), school counseling started over a hundred years ago due to the high demand for factory workers during the Industrial Revolution. During this time, vocational teachers operated dual roles of teaching and providing counsel for career placement to try and meet this need in our nation.

This dual role of teacher / counselor continued until 1957 when Russia launched a space shuttle into space before the United States. This crisis spurred our government to launch the National Defense Education Act of 1958 which authorized funding to train designated guidance counselors to guide gifted students into science and technology. This is how the term guidance counselor began. Within a decade, the number of counselors in middle school and high schools tripled (American Counseling Association, 2014).

In 1965, to fight the war on poverty, President Johnson passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, which started funding for counseling into primary and secondary schools (American School Counselor Association, 2014). Along with the role of guidance counselor transitioning into primary schools, the antiquated term of guidance counselor changed to counselor and switched from guiding students into the workforce to personal and social wellbeing as well.

In 2003, following the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) stated that students need access to high-quality, rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for work and college (The Education Trust, 2003). The TSCI believed that school counselors play a critical role in ensuring that students have access to this curriculum and training them how to implement this into schools became the primary focus.

Today, the ever-changing role of school counselor continues as counselors try to handle student wellbeing, mental health issues, academic advising and career development. It is

important that we understand how the past has shaped the role of counselors today and how the future will alter this role as we speak.

### Conceptual Framework

In order to understand what is happening during the choice phase of career identity, the whole-part-whole (Swanson, 1993) learning model was used. By using this systematic model within the conceptual framework, the researcher was able to effectively and efficiently study the abstract concept of career identity within a high school student (the whole) by closely examining the parts (environment and personality), and then linking these parts back together to allow for a higher order cognitive understanding of career identity (the second whole) (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The general structure of this conceptual framework helped the researcher to understand how psychological and sociological views contribute to the development of career identity within a high school senior.

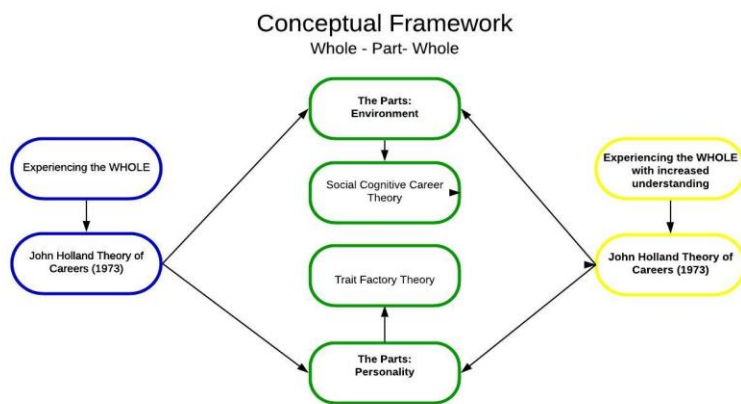


Figure 1: W-P-H Conceptual Framework

## **Experiencing the Whole: John Holland Theory of Careers (1973)**

Frank Parsons' (1909) work is considered the first recorded methodical approach towards Career Identity Development. Ever since his vocational training, researchers have expanded out the understanding of career decision-making (Miller, 2005). Holland's (1973) Theory of Careers was developed after Parsons' work ended and aimed to describe, understand, and predict the vocational choices people make (Gottfredson & Johnstun, 2009). The primary emphasis of Holland's theory was to describe and understand the career decision-making process. Miller (2005), states that two of Holland's basic assumptions are that (a) persons in a vocation have similar personalities and (b) persons tend to choose college majors consistent with their personality type. These assumptions are congruent to the purpose of my research study and therefore I concluded to use Holland's (1973) Theory of Vocational Choice as the framework of my research.

Holland began his work as a simple interest to organize occupational information for career counselors. After creating an occupational classification system for them, he saw the potential of parallel taxonomies between persons and work environments (Gottfredson & Johnstun, 2009) resulting in the characterization of persons and environments as a single set of six types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (Miller, 2005). Holland's rationale was that a person would explore or compare occupations that have the same values as their personality values. The process would continue until a person could narrow the alternatives to decide which occupation comes closest to fitting their personality. By using this

theory, career counselors could consider occupations with a person's personality in mind, and thus began Holland's (1973) Theory of Careers.

Career counselors have been using this theory for decades because of the ease with which it can be communicated and because of the self-directed nature of the corresponding assessments developed with it (Gottfredson & Johnstun, 2009). Though not intended to replace a career counselor, these assessments can be used by even a novice school counselor. Educators can easily understand the framework of the theory and apply it to career counseling and intervention within their institution. The assessments used with this theory take an average of ten minutes to complete and are commonly used by high school counselors. Porter and Umbach (2006) frequently use Holland's work as their theoretical framework because of the simplistic correlation between a student's academic environments and their personality types; reiterating that it is a very practical lens through which to study career choice. This prioritization of the fit between both the environment and the individual also influences the design of the present study.

Hirschi and Lage (2007) report that the RIASEC Markers Scale, derived from Holland's theory of careers, is the most empirically sound model due to the number of well-developed assessment instruments associated with the theory. These instruments are used in career counseling to assess two crucial factors: an individual's personality and their vocational interest. After assessing these factors, a determination can be made as a suitable occupation. More specific instruments that measure the secondary constructs of Holland's

theory can also gauge the degree to which an environment and a person fit together, making this a double impact theory on career development (Hirschi & Lage, 2007).

Several broad studies have been conducted using Holland's theory of careers (1973) to help show that human behavior is a result of an interaction between individuals and their environment (Porter and Umbach, 2006). The interaction Holland speaks of involves components of Trait Factor theory (1909): interest, values, and abilities and components of Social Identity theory (1979); categorization, identification, and comparison. According to Conklin, Dahling & Garcia (2013), when looking at college majors, a student must feel that they belong in their college major in terms of both their emotional identification and their cognitive evaluation of how well their abilities fit with the major's demand. The impact of these personal and environmental influences contributes to the high school student's career decision of a career and can lead to both personal and social consequences that are desirable for the student and the job market and consequences that are detrimental to the student and the job market.

The conceptual framework of this stud allowed me to examine the individual components of environmental and personality with an overall goal of better understanding the development of career identity within a high school senior. By focusing on the choice phase and the impact of the interaction of person-environment involved in this phase, this conceptual framework guided this research study in developing a fuller understanding of the senior student's career decision process. A fuller understanding of this process can then lead to helping seniors make a career

choice that will have a positive result in the labor market upon the completion of their post-secondary education.

### **The Parts: The Role of Environment in Career Identity Development**

Using environment as the first construct of career development, the researcher examined a student's social identity through the lens of social cognitive career theory and looked at what literature says about the impact of environment and career choice. Researchers such as Cheng (1995) have heavily researched the influence of school culture on career choice. Through the research of Cheng (1995) and Hargreaves (1995), it is evident that the culture of a school can influence a young person's aspirations to continue their education (Foskett, Dyke & Maringe, 2004). The research of Foskett, Dyke & Maringe (2004), suggest that the institutional messages and values sent out by a school's culture can act positively or negatively to a student's career identity development and therefore is an important predictor to understand in detail when it comes to career development. Along with personality traits, Pk-16 educators need to understand social influences within a school's environment in their collaborative efforts to guide young people in their selection of a career choice.

Social influences, such as a school's environment, the community, and the society in which the school resides, are always shaping the ethos of a school. Within the influential realm of the school's environment resides the development of career identity; an identity that is continually being molded and shaped by the ethos of that school. The Character Education Partnership, by Pala (2011) reported on the influence of a school's culture as studied by the U.S.



Department of Education and the National Council on School Climate. Within their report, they state, “what enables schools to have such a positive, often life-changing impact on the students is their culture” (pg.3). They further expound on the ability of school culture to shape the mentality of a student. “Once a student enters a school with a powerful culture, the ethic becomes the norm, and that’s all they know” (pg.4). Research completed by Gottfredson (1981) revealed that once a student identifies him or her within a school culture, they conform to the norms within that culture and make decisions according to the norm. One of these decisions made in the choice phase of a high school student is career pathways and post-secondary college majors. Essentially the authors are stating that because of the heavy impact of a school’s belief system, a student can feel pressure to attend certain types of colleges or to accept stereotypes about particular career paths.

When a student interacts with contextual factors (school culture), this interaction will influence self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1977). These self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in turn shape the student’s interests, goals, actions, and eventually their attainments in life; including career choices. These beliefs are further influenced by contextual factors (e.g. career opportunities, access to training opportunities, financial resources). According to Bandura’s Triadic Reciprocal Model of Causality (1977), a person’s personality and external environment overtly affect each other simultaneously and further affect one’s behavior. In this social cognitive theory, research studies show that schools which provide opportunities, experiences and mentors to impact a student’s self-efficacy have a vital, positive effect on a student’s career development.

## **The Parts: The Role of Personality in Career Development**

In addition to the external social influences are internal self- influences that shape the career choice of high school students. Dating back to the early 1900's, Frank Parsons, one social reformer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, wrote a book entitled *Choosing a Vocation* that proved to be foundational to the field of vocational education. This book highlighted his efforts in giving scientific vocational counsel to the youth based on personality traits. The research and case studies within this manuscript were the beginning of the trait factor theory. Parsons (1909) stated, "There is no part of life where the need of guidance is more emphatic than in the transition from school to work" (pg.4). Parsons put great emphasis on the choosing of a career, adequately preparing for it, and being successful in that career. His book served to point out practical ways in which a student could receive expert counsel and guidance in the selection of a career by simply examining one's self. Parsons narrowed it down to three steps: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; (3) true reasoning on these two groups of facts. This process of self-investigation and self-revelation has become known as trait factor theory (1909) and this theory has been used in the field of education for over one hundred years.

The private vocation bureau that Parsons directed used trait factor theory to successfully direct the youth towards a vocation. In step one, Parsons focused heavily on a student's

personality because, “a student needs to investigate himself in order to determine his capabilities, interests, resources, and limitations so that he may compare his aptitudes, abilities, and ambitions” (pg. 5). He referred to this as personal data needed in the process of self-investigation. The counselors at the bureau were then required to read between the lines during private interviews with students for important messages to *care, accuracy, memory, clearness*, etc. which would help to indicate the suggestions of vocations that ought to be made to the student. Applicants who sought the help of the bureau would receive advice on the classification of vocations that best meet their personality to ensure success in their future vocation. Parsons (1909) believed that ultimately people were more satisfied with their jobs when they were actively engaged in choosing it through examination of their personalities. This core concept is still evident in many psychologically based career theories such as Theory of Work-Adjustment (1984), the Self-concept Theory of Career Development by Super (1953) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994).

### **Environment Intertwines with Personality**

High school is a very social experience based on group memberships. High school students spend a good bit of time in social situations with friends and peers who they identify with. Students in the chess club socially identify with students in the chess club and make choices based off their chess club choices. In his Social Identity Theory, Tajfel (1979) suggest that a person’s social identity is who we think we are based on our group membership(s). We associate as part of one group and not part of the other group. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed

that there are actually three mental processes involved in evaluating which group we identify with. First is social categorization in which we socially categorize people to better understand them. We can do this by job titles, nationalities, races, etc. High school students categorize this way as well, socially categorizing people as White, African American, Latino, etc.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that the second stage in group identification involves social identification where we put ourselves in one of the social categorizations we best see ourselves fitting in. For example, high school students identify themselves within the category of student, find their self-esteem, and group membership within this category.

After categorizing one's self and then identifying within that category, the third stage in group identification is to compare one's member groups with other groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) call this stage *social comparison*. This is how we maintain our self-esteem and membership within a group. The groups we identify with feel superior by making the other groups seem inferior. In the examining process of high school students' career choice, the researcher believes high school students are in one of these three phases of social identity trying to make a huge decision about a career choice that will ultimately affect them and the society in which they be employed.

Over fifty years after the work of Parsons, contemporary research continued with the tenets of trait factor theory and how they relate to student's personality and career choice (Holland, 1996). In 1959, John Holland extended trait-factor theory using instruments he developed to measure how personality can affect vocational choice. These personality

instruments led to quantitative research that showed common themes in regard to personality and career development. One theme that arose from Holland's research showed that career choice is not random, but rather an expression of one's personality. He followed students within the same majors and found that they have very similar personalities and usually responded to situations similarly; suggesting that occupational choice depends on a balance of one's personality and the career environment. From the earliest of career counseling to more contemporary research, there is evidence that career choice research should seek to understand an individual's personalities as they guide young people into career choices that will ultimately have a lasting effect on their future and the economy (Porter & Umbach, 2006).

Due to the criticalness, we know personalities play in educational outcomes, it warrants attention by PK-16 educators who want to better understand career identity development. Hussain, Abbas, Shahzad & Bukhari (2011) define personality as, "the set of traits within an individual influencing his cognitions and behaviors in different context" (pg. 225). With this definition, we can assume that a student's personality traits influence their behaviors concerning a college major. Humburg (2009) agrees when stating, "the choice of a college major, to a large extent, determines the occupational field the student will work in in the future and career opportunities". PK-16 educators need to understand that personality traits have an effect on a student's choice of a career path, which has an effect on their college major, which in turn directly affects the job market.

Many theories, including Holland's theory of careers (1973), Deci & Ryan's self-determination theory (2000), and Bandura's social cognitive theory (1994) dominate the theoretical world when mediating variables that deal with the social impact and career outcome expectations. Trait factor theory, however, deals solely with the self-analysis of a student and the relationship that internal self-factors such as aptitudes, abilities, and limitations have on their career choice (Parsons, 1909). Trait factor theory focuses on internal factors thus allowing the researcher to see the full impact internal self-factors might play in career choice.

### **The Whole: Increased Understanding of Career Identity Development**

Holland's theory of careers has been used to help show that career choices are sometimes a result of an interaction between individuals and their environment (Porter and Umbach, 2006). The impact of these personal and environmental influences contributes to the high school student's decision of a career and can lead to career choice consequences that are desirable for the student and the job market and to consequences that are detrimental to the student and to the job market.

Holland's (1973) Theory of Careers theory has the potential to allow the researcher to see the parallel taxonomy of persons and environments (Gottfredson & Johnstun, 2009). In this specific research project, we study the person- environment impact of non-public schools on the career identity development of their senior students. Walking high school students through the decision-making process of career identity development has become an important part of many private school's missions. By examining College Prep Highs seniors' experiences in a career

development program, we can better understand the impact of person-environment on the student's career development. The interaction of these seniors' personality and their environment will result in a post-secondary career path identity or lack thereof.

### **Career and Technical Education**

Career preparation plays an important role in career identity development and is extremely critical for late adolescents and young adults as they move into their adult occupational careers (Skorikov, 2007a). Researchers (Stringer, Kerpelman, & Skorikov, 2007a) propose that career identity development grows more prominent among adolescents beginning in middle school and continues to progress throughout their adult life. Respectively, therefore, active career preparation for a student, according to researchers should be particularly significant during the transition from high school to work and college (Stringer, Kerpelman, & Skorikov, 2007a). This intentional career preparation, where students should be provided career counseling, career exploration, and post-secondary guidance, further leads to a career commitment, yet another component in the development of a career identity and just as significant.

These career commitments, or lack of, will have impacts for adjustment in adulthood, including later career satisfaction and opportunities (Lee & Gramotnev, 2007). When a high school student struggles with career identity, this could negatively affect their future earnings and their overall adjustment to society and the job market. Clausen (1991) also found positive correlations that adolescents who made careful decisions about their careers and planned for them had more stable careers as adults. Knowing how career preparation in schools leads to

career identity in a student can influence school programming and refine our theories of the multiple influences on an individual's career development.

### **Career and Technical Education in the U.S.**

Over the past one-hundred years, we can follow our nations back and forth debate over sending students to technical colleges and 4 -year institutions. Gray (2004) dated this historical journey dating back to with John Dewey. John Dewey was an educational reformist in the late 1800's, who believed that schools should have nothing to do with preparing students for work and furthermore, should not offer post-secondary courses in school at all. Proponents of this ideology relied heavily on classical academic curriculum instead. Opponents of Dewey's philosophy believed schools should prepare students for life and that included offering work related course options. This debate of general education versus vocational education continued over the following decades and divided high school programs into a vocational track and a college preparation track (Perry & Wallace, 2012).

A century later, our Nation renewed its interest in curriculum development with The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report, better known as *A Nation at Risk*. This report heavily swayed public and non-public schools to support a rigorous high school academic curriculum and put less emphasis on vocational courses or technical courses (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). High schools began to put together programs to steer students towards the college preparation track rather than the vocational track due to political influence and funding.



A decade later, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) turned educational attention back to vocational education (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). Educators were again seeing the importance of both academics and the preparation for high school graduates and the workplace. More career technical elective courses could be found in high schools, including Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment options. Partnerships with community colleges that offered career technical programs were growing across the Nation as well. Educators were once again seeing the importance of integrating both vocational and academic tracks in curriculum planning.

Only seven short years later, however, our Nation once again found itself questioning career technical courses and programs due to the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). This legislative movement took previous funding for career development courses and reallocated them to traditional academic improvements to help our Nation compete academically with the rest of the world (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). With limited federal funding, career technical programs became sparse in public schools and to keep up with the educational pendulum, non-public schools decreased career technical course offerings as well.

It is important to note that non-public schools are susceptible to the changes made in public schools mostly in part to accreditation changes and the required responsiveness regardless of public or non-public school status. Secondly, because non-public schools do not receive the majority of their funding from state and federal agencies, the educational trends of the nation greatly affect course offerings on their campuses merely in order of staying competitive in the

education realm and therefore in business. These two reasons alone emphasize why non-public schools must stay abreast of these educational trends and carefully follow the educational culture of the nation.

### **Current Trends in Career and Technical Training**

Today, the theme that dominates the academic arena is college and career readiness among high school students as stated by Common Core State Standards. This theme references that high school graduates should have the skills necessary to successfully enter the level of post-secondary coursework that they choose. This approach once again recognizes the need for a convergence of academic coursework and vocational training. High schools, public and nonpublic, recognize that they should prepare their graduates both academically and vocationally for career choices that involve community college plans, university plans, technical/vocational plans, or skilled certified job entry plans.

One particular way that schools are doing this is through Career and Technical Education (CTE). Proponents of CTE believe that the infusion of career and technical education concepts within the academic arena will prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce, postsecondary education, and/or further training. CTE begins as electives at the high school level and carries over into programs at the 2-year college level (Hirschy, Bremer, & Castellano 2011). Programs offered through CTE include health care, business, computer science, architectural sciences, personal and consumer services, and trade and industry (Hirschy, Bremer,

& Castellano 2011). At the high school level, public and nonpublic, CTE courses are offered as electives in the curriculum and are not part of state mandated graduation courses (Gray, 2004). Students are not required to take these courses to graduate, but many high school graduates chose to take at least one of these courses according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

At the secondary level, CTE courses range from general interest in careers classes to partnerships with businesses and community colleges. Currently, there are three models for implementing CTE courses (Shulock & Moore, 2018). The first model offers high school courses that can be part of a clear sequence of study and does not carry college credit. The second model offers high school students college credits for some of their CTE courses - usually referred to as dual credit or dual enrollment. The third and last model allows high school students to enroll in college CTE courses while still in high school and earn college credit.

Beyond specific CTE courses, also available at the secondary level are work-based learning opportunities or internships that allow students to connect classroom-based instruction to real-world applications of academic and technical skills in the workplace. The benefits to students of such experiences include helping them clarify their career goals and develop the soft skills that employers are seeking in communication, critical thinking and time management, and improving their job prospects after graduation (Swail and Kampits, 2004).

## **Federal and State Funding for Career and Technical Education**

Career and Technical Education grant programs are funded primarily under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Gray, 2004). This legislative act provides financial assistance that helps states improve CTE program administration, CTE implementation, CTE and accountability within their high schools. States are awarded Perkins funds based on the state's age appropriate population and the per capita income per state. Once the states are awarded the funds from the federal government, they can allocate under state title funds how individual schools can apply and receive these funds. These Career and Technical grants at the federal level, if utilized by state school funds, can help to provide a valuable supplement to the core programming offered at individual schools.

Perkins funding falls under Title I grants at the state level meaning funds are allotted to states through a formula based on the states' populations in certain age groups and per capita income (Career, 2006). States are then required to distribute not less than 85 percent of their Title I fund by formula to local education agencies, area vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and other public or private nonprofit institutions that offer career and technical education programs (Career, 2006). Each state determines the split of funds to be distributed to recipients at the secondary versus postsecondary level. In 2015, Louisiana high schools and colleges received about 21 million dollars for CTE programs (Career Tech, 2017). About 56% of this went to BESE approved secondary schools and 44% went to post-secondary schools (Career Tech, 2017).

## **Non-Public Schools and Career and Technical Education**

Non-profit, private and religiously affiliated schools — approved by their respective State Board of Education — are eligible for CTE funds as long as they provide at least one career and technical education program that leads directly into the workforce (Gray, 2004). Along with eligibility requirements, however, state allocation of these CTE funds are further determined by a socio-economic need based formula –leaving many non-public schools receiving little to no funds due the tendency to attract more affluent families in nonpublic schools than needs based families. Knowing that students who attend non-public schools would miss this opportunity, an appeal process was legislated into CTE funding. Now, individual students - who choose to attend a non-public school, but would otherwise attend a low-socio-economical public high school - can appeal the State department to take CTE courses at the local public high school in their district if that public school offers CTE courses.

Without state and federal funding, non-public schools find CTE courses very cost prohibitive due to the need for specialized equipment and staff, decreased class sizes more appropriate for working with equipment and in laboratories, more revisions needed to curriculum, and continual engagement with the job market to ensure program vitality (Shulock & Moore, 2018). Therefore, CTE course offerings in non-public schools vary greatly and are usually determined primarily by funding abilities. Without an endless bucket of finances or sizeable contributions from stakeholders, nonpublic schools tend to turn exclusively to college

preparatory programs such as dual enrollment and AP courses rather than CTE courses because the individual families who elect these courses for their students can primarily fund them.

Not only do the socio-economic demographics of a non-public school play a part in the kind of CTE courses offered to their students, but their reputation of implementing successful college preparatory programs plays a part as well. Non-public schools have proven to have programs that improve retention, increase graduates, and provide greater access to college (Symonds, Schwartz, & Ferguson, 2011). The assumption of optimistic onlookers is that the types of college prep programs already offered at non-public schools greatly increases the probability that a student will continue on to a post-secondary education and therefore these current college preparatory courses are more preferred course of study rather than new, costly CTE programs.

Recently, the Pathways to Prosperity Project (2012), which supports CTE curriculum in high schools, reported that high quality career education in high schools are important routes to the upcoming jobs in the next ten-year period. Perry and Wallace (2012), researchers of the Pathways to Prosperity Project, studied this project and report that about 67 percent of jobs projected in 2018 will not require a bachelors or graduate degree. This statistic reveals that other career paths that include CTE courses and programs maybe more realistic and financially beneficial for high school students today and more rewarding when they graduate into the job market.

These labor market statistics and findings are significant to public and non-public schools. All students, those who exit the public-school system and those who exit the non-public school system, enter the same labor market. Ideally, students in K-12, public and non-public, should get help thinking about how their interests relate to career options and educational opportunities beyond high school (Shulock & Moore, 2018). Therefore, all educators would benefit from knowing how career identity develops within a student and how student experiences with course offerings affect these career choices.

### **Internships and Career and Technical Education**

In many CTE courses, the classroom is a place to try to imitate actual job conditions and situations (CTE, 2017). These simulations are important for the student and help develop what is known as soft skills along with academic knowledge needed for the career field. These are, however, only imitations of the real thing. Because of that, some schools consider internships, or work-based learning approaches for their students. CTE internship programs enable students to go outside of the traditional classroom and into the work setting where they can learn these soft skills and apply what they have learned academically in a career field of interest to them (CTE, 2017). Some of these internships are paid and some of them are simply voluntary. Some school districts have implemented The Career Exploration and Internship Program (CEIP) which allows high school seniors to be placed in a career field with a mentor (CTE, 2017). Students in this program earn a ½ Carnegie unit for every fifty-four hours they serve at their internship.

By studying our past, educators have found that the field of education has struggled with creating a successful model for bridging academics and career development within our schools. This dilemma has caused an unbalance in the job market ecosystem with a disproportionate number of overeducated workers who do not have the skills that fit the economic demands. Taking what we know about CTE, current educators should research schools and school districts who are deploying successful methods of career development and examine these experiences and how they contribute to the development of career identity. This study was an attempt of a doctoral student to research a particular school that was deploying one of these programs to examine what the student's experiences were like in an internship program and how these experiences contributed to the development of a career identity.



## **Summary**

In this chapter, the conceptual framework guided the discussion of literature within this research study. Specifically, the chapter was broken into four subheadings; the conceptual framework, the construct of personality, the construct of environment, and the convergence of these two in terms of career development. Within each subheading, the researcher attempted to explain the current literature surrounding each concept and how this literature guides this particular study. In the next chapter, the methodology of this study will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This study attempted to examine a career internship program and experiences of the high school seniors who participated in a career internship program. A qualitative, instrumental case study design (Creswell, 2007) was used as the methodology for this research study in order to examine how a career development program might contribute to a senior student's career identity development.

#### **Rationale for a Qualitative Design**

#### **Research Paradigm**

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as "an inquiry into the process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p. 2). Unlike quantitative data that tends to be specific, measurable, and repeatable, qualitative data is open to interpretation and perceptions. This interpretive nature of qualitative research allowed the researcher to generate rich evidence from the students' experiences in the internship program and to focus on the context of career development.

Research shows that Case studies are the preferred method of research when the following conditions exist: (a) the questions to be answered are how and why questions, (b) the

investigator has little control over the events being studied and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with a real-life context (Yin, 2008). All three of these conditions existed within this study, making it a viable candidate for a case study. Furthermore, this case study was considered a bounded system, whose defining features are the boundaries that establish the parameters of the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The bounded system for this study referred to the senior students from College Prep High who enrolled in a career internship class.

This study was framed within an ontological assumption and needed to recognize that realities are socially constructed; and no reality is considered truer than any other (Creswell 2013). Through the students' interviews, their perceptions became useful data in making meaning of their college and career choices. Ultimately, their personal experiences were not considered factual (Soderberg, 2006), but helped to establish their reality.

More specifically, an instrumental case study was utilized in this research project. According to Stake (1995), an instrumental case study is chosen when the goal is to not necessarily understand the unique case itself, but to understand something else. The case in this study was high school seniors who participated in a career internship program. The choice was simply a way to facilitate the investigation of an external interest and the impact of person-environment interaction on career identity development. The questions used to explore this were: 1) What are the experiences of non-public high school seniors in a career preparation program? 2) How do these experiences contribute to the development of a career identity?

## **Setting and Participant Selection Procedures**

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was College Prep High, a non-public, non-denominational, faith-based high school that has been located in the suburbs of a Southern U.S. city for 40 years. College Prep High, at the time of the study, had approximately 300 students with approximately 91% White, 6 % African American, 2 % Hispanic, and 1% Asian. The annual tuition for College Prep High was approximately \$8500. College Prep High had no free or reduced lunch programs and graduated 98% of their seniors to four-year universities over the past 40 years.

College Prep High was the only non-denominational, faith-based school in its district. It is situated on 36 acres of wooded landscape and is overseen by the head of schools and the board of directors. It has been renovated over the past ten years and features two-story brick structures along with a cafeteria, gym, and numerous fields for athletics. Between the five primary buildings, there were 43 classrooms, including a science lab and a computer lab. Because expansions happen in increments, some classrooms vary in sizing and features. All classrooms had updated technology and resources.

College Prep High is a Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved nonpublic institution. A nonpublic, BESE approved school has to meet state requirements for graduation in regard to core classes they must teach, but is essentially autonomous in curriculum selection. College Prep High is allowed to incorporate faith-based

learning and develop curriculum that meets their school's vision and mission statement. It provides a number of AP courses and partners with several local universities to provide dual enrollment to their student body. College Prep High was chosen as the best, most unique case study because due to their relatively low tuition rate and high acceptance of state vouchers, the school had the socioeconomics of students who could afford private and students who could only be there because of the voucher program. In one school, College Prep High had the demographics of a public and private school mixed in one.

### **Internship Program Description**

After reviewing end of the year feedback from the stakeholders and multiple board reports from the principal, College Prep High decided to pilot a tailored career internship program to all interested seniors in the spring of 2015. This program was developed in house by the principal, career counselor, and one tenured faculty member. During the pilot phase, 23 of 61 seniors participated in the internship program. There were 14 different off-site internship sites ranging from doctors' offices to beauty salons. Students were given two weeks to choose an off-campus site and submit a rationale along with parental consent forms. Once these forms were turned in, the above-mentioned faculty members read over the forms and accepted or declined the submissions based on completion. The next step was to secure an acceptance from the business /corporation. The student completed all necessary phone calls on site or traveled to the business /corporation to speak to someone in person. Once they received a confirmation,

they needed to submit this contact information to an approved faculty member and they could begin their internship.

College Prep High ran an eight period block schedule during the week. Therefore, the career development class was sixty minutes on Monday and ninety minutes on Wednesday and Friday. Internships were scheduled as the first class of the day or the last class of the day, allowing students to enter school in second period or to leave school during eighth period. Because of the block schedule at College Prep High, students went to each class three times a week. With this schedule, students used two of their internship class blocks, equally 3 hours total in a week, to go off site and used one of classes to remain on site to complete necessary paperwork and to have collaborative discussion with the faculty members and peers as to how their internship was progressing. For accountability and assessment purposes, students were required to have weekly attendance / performance sheets signed by their partnering intern business /corporation and to turn these log sheets in every week. Failure to do so twice in a semester would forfeit the privilege of being in the program.

Due to the success of the pilot program, in the fall of 2016, College Prep High offered the internship program as a senior class for both semesters. Forty of the 61 seniors participated in the internship program during the 2016-17 school year. The demographics of this senior class was 96% White and 4% African American. Eight of the 40 students chose internships that required certification and licensing attainable at a vocational or technical college (e.g. cosmetology, welding, cuisine). Nine of the seniors chose internships at facilities that varied in degree

qualifications depending on the position you held within the business/corporation (e.g. paralegal, nursing, business). Seventeen students chose internships with professionals or establishments that required a minimum of a bachelor's degree (e.g. teaching, lawyer, medical doctor). The remaining six students had transportation limitations and chose internships on the campus of College Prep High, interning under designated personnel that held a position of interest to them (e.g. athletic director, accounting). The career internship followed the same guidelines as the piloted year, but ran for an entire academic year. Participants earned a half of a Carnegie unit each semester and could change their internship after the first semester or remain in the same internship.

Currently, the internship program is still being offered to the seniors at College Prep High. Yearly stakeholder feedback towards the program was positive and data trends showed that there has been a 5% increase in the number of seniors who participate each year and a 10% increase in the number of businesses in the community that participated.

### **Participant Selection**

The researcher used a purposive sampling method to recruit ten student interviewees from the current graduating class who participated in the career development program. The ten students created a subset of the larger population of seniors who participated in the internship program. More specifically, the researcher used maximum variation sampling in order to capture a wide range of perspectives associated with the internship program. The students ranged from those who interned with a vocational career path to those at a master's degree plus career path.

The researcher also interviewed the internship program director and conducted an on-site coordinator focus group interview. The researcher invited ten site coordinators from the respective interviewed student’s internship site, with the expectation of at least four on-site coordinators participating in the focus group discussion. Figure 2 below is a breakdown of the participants pseudonym, race, gender, and internship site.

<b>Participant (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Internship Site</b>
Linda	Senior Participant	White	Female	T-Shirt / Graphics design shop
Susan	Senior Participant	African American	Female	Small Business Boutique
Clara	Female Participant	White	Female	Accountant Firm
Ingrid	Senior Participant	White	Female	Elementary School
Tammy	Senior Participant	White	Female	Magazine Firm
Patty	Senior Participant	White	Female	Hospital
Joe	Senior Participant	Male	White	Bank
Mike	Senior Participant	Male	White	Gym/Physical Therapy Center
Frank	Senior Participant	Male	White	Law Office / Court House
Peter	Senior Participant	Male	White	Pediatrics’ Office
Sarah	Program Director	Female	White	College Prep High
Charlie	On-Site Coordinator	Male	White	Broker
Timothy	On-Site Coordinator	Male	White	Construction Management Executive
Christine	On-Site Coordinator	Female	African American	Small Business Owner
Tabitha	On-site Coordinator	Female	White	Certified Public Accountant

Figure 2: Participant Information



## **Informed Consent and Permission**

The researcher completed the necessary paperwork to gain approval from College Prep High school board to conduct research within their high school. The researcher also completed all necessary requirements set forth by the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board. After receiving approval from both of these entities, the researcher began selecting participants for this study and used the required consent guidelines from Creswell (1998). The participants were notified that their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time from the study. The participants were also be notified of the purpose of this study and the data collection procedures that were going to be used. The consent form that was given to the participants included an assurance of confidentiality statement, a list of any risk associated to the participant participating in the research, and any expected benefits to them as a participant. Because the participants were 18 or older, there was only one signature line and date line on the consent form for each participant to sign. Before the research began, all participants were given an opportunity to read the consent form, sign the consent form, and ask any questions they may have in regard to the consent form.

## **Assurance of Confidentiality**

Confidentiality will be addressed by using the Lichtman's (2014) eleven principles of ethical conduct. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, as well as the school itself. The identity of the participants was withheld from anyone other than the researcher. All audio

recordings and interview transcriptions are stored in a locked file cabinet. Now that the research has ended, these files will be stored for a period of one year after which they will be destroyed. Participants will be notified when this step has occurred.

### **Data Collection**

The first form of data collection was semi-structured student interviews (Silverman, 2013). So, the researcher could actively participate in the interview process and so attention was not solely used in note taking, all interviews were audiotaped for future data aggregation. Within 48 hours of the interviews, the researcher listened to the audiotapes and transcribed the interviews. Participants who were previously labeled as Student A, Student B, etc. were transcribed under these pseudonyms.

The second form of data collection was semi-structured interviews with the teacher who runs the program at College Prep High and with the site-coordinators at the corresponding businesses. These interviews were recorded in the same manner, as the student interviews and participants were labeled with pseudonyms of Director A and Site Coordinator A, B, etc. The interview questions were altered from the student questions as to draw from adults a different angle of the internship program. This data helped to get a 360-degree analysis of the program by including the voice of all participants within the program.

The third form of data collection was the review of all documents associated with the career development program. Documents such as letters home to parents, seniors, and participating businesses explaining the program and authorizing consent to participate. By

examining these documents, the researcher was able to understand the mission and vision of the career development program, the cost associated with the program, and the parameters under which the students and teachers had to operate.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

### **Interview Analysis**

The interviews of this study began after students finished the career development class and continued through until the end of summer. Therefore, the analysis of the data was ongoing as well and continued through the fall.

In this study, I used a thematic coding approach. Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea allowing you to index the text into categories and therefore establish a “framework of thematic ideas about it” (Gibbs, 2007). Each transcription used in this study had a left column note guide to be used for open codes and a right column note guide to be used for axial codes /themes. This template analysis allowed for central themes to emerge from the data and to remain highly organized in order to answer the research questions proposed in my study.

In my approach, there were 4 steps applied to each transcription. In step 1, I read through the transcription to get a general sense of the interview. In step 2, each transcription was read thoroughly again and marked for words and phrases that were used frequently by the participants. These frequently used words were highlighted within the body of the text and helped me in the beginning stages of grouping the data by word similarity.

From here, I reread the interviews and used “line by line” coding in the form of open coding on the transcripts themselves. The idea of open coding was to conceptualize the data or to begin to organize the data (Creswell, 2013). I began to see the data opened up and was able to put it into meaningful groups. Line by line coding was a method that enabled me to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or “families” because they shared similar characteristics. Once the transcript was open coded in the left margin, I began to see patterns emerge that allowed the remaining data to be pulled into smaller, meaningful units as well (Creswell, 2013).

In order to keep the dominant codes and to remove redundant codes, axial coding was applied in step 4. This allowed me to identify relationships amongst the patterns (Creswell, 2013). Axial coding was used to find a relationship between the codes in the left margin and was entered on the right margin of each piece of data. Essentially, through collapsing categories under themes, I was able to put the data back together by recognizing repeated patterns. These repeated patterns eventually became the themes of this study. (See Appendix E for examples of coding).

After the first set of themes for generated, the data was combed again through a second cycle of steps 3 and 4. Through this continual combing process and through member checking, it became evident that one of the themes generated overlapped two other themes. After conferring with my committee chair, I removed one of the themes and collapsed the categories under two existing themes. Ultimately, the data in this study generated into 5 themes. As the data was

being coded, it was important to keep in mind the relationships of codes to the research questions themselves. During the process of coding, themes 1, 2, and 3 became significant to research question 1 and themes 4 and 5 became significant to research question 2.

## **Data Quality Procedures**

### **Researcher Perspective**

Prior to the onset of research in this study, I was the principal of College Prep High and the originator of the senior internship program. As the researcher and data collection instrument, I understood that my former role would also have a direct effect on the epistemology of this research. I would be positioning myself as a complete-member-researcher according to Toyosaki (2011). “Complete-member-researchers are those who are full members of a culture they are interpreting and reporting” (Toyosaki, 2011, p.63). It became apparent to myself and my committee that the bias of this relationship would be very difficult to combat and might even prohibit honest responses from those being interviewed. In May 2017, however, I resigned as the principal of College Prep High to begin a new adventure as the director of a private tutoring facility. Due to this job change, the interviewees and I now shared our experiences as former principal and members within the same school structure. These shared attributes allowed us to speak candidly to each other and understand each other without the bias and / or fear of superior disapproval.

Even though I was no longer an employee of College Prep High, I was the founder of the career development course and had to continue to work hard to bracket my beliefs as I navigated the data. In order to further remove myself from the program, I spent an additional year studying

contemporary research on career development and better aligning my conceptual framework for this study before I began any interviews with the participants. This year of separation from the program allowed me to update my literature review and spend more time separating myself as a participant from the program.

Once the summer arrived, and a year had passed, I began interviews with the participants of this study. Since the seniors and adults within the program would be seeing the experience from a “common sense understanding” (Kvale, 2007, p.125), it was helpful to seek validation from “scholars familiar with the interview themes and with the theories applied to the interview texts” (p. 125). This was done by checking in with my committee chair as the transcripts were being coded to help ensure that the findings were being generated properly from the data and free of generalizations and /or bias.

### **Trustworthiness**

This research utilized Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) proposed criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability to pursue trustworthiness in this research. My goal was to triangulate data from; (1) interviews, (2) site coordinators focus group and (3) analysis of the documents that used within the career development program in order to maximize credibility within my study. My use of data triangulation was to analyze my research questions from multiple perspectives. Whereas the data from the student interviews was the most luminous data, open coding procedures from the program director and the off-site coordinators allowed me

to depict patterns from the adult perspective as well as the student perspective. By using multiple sources, I was able to increase the validity of the study.

Another form of credibility was the use of a personal journal during the coding process. From the viewpoint of credibility, self-awareness of the researcher is essential (Koch, 1994). This personal journal was used to document the coding process and to help me avoid potential biases during the coding process. With each transcription that was coded, I daily reflected in my journal to remain aware of my own biases and to help keep them out of my writing. Journaling also helped me identify generalizations and seek out evidence in my writing.

By including multiple open-ended questions in my interviews and relying on the extensive background knowledge of the organization, my goal was to further reduce error risks and increase the general credibility of the study (Soin & Scheytt, 2006). Credibility was also insured by using peer scrutiny and member checks by frequently meeting and debriefing with my dissertation committee chair. Throughout the research process, my writing was sent in to my chair for analysis and multiple phone meetings were held to discuss these findings.

If this research is published in the future, there is the understanding that some of the case study findings might be transferred to other case study findings. By providing a thick, rich description of College Prep High, the findings of this study could be transferred or applied to similar schools and therefore help ensure transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

To ensure dependability in this study, I summarized all findings, assessed the adequacy of all data, and provided the necessary feedback to committee members as the study moved

along. As the researcher, I ensured that my research was explained and clearly documented for member checks.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved. To ensure conformability, I disclosed my position on the topic and supplied an audit trail to my committee chair so every aspect of the research could be followed.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A researcher must recognize the limitations present in all types of research studies. Because of my position as the researcher in this project, the major limitation I saw was the awareness of my personal biases and subjectivity and how these may have influenced the results. Peshkin (1988) describes this subjectivity as a “garment that cannot be removed” so as a researcher, I intently worked to bracket my beliefs and keep them from taking over the project. Again, having resigned from my current position greatly allowed me to bracket my beliefs and view the program as a non-participant. I also kept a reflective journal during the process to further help me mitigate any potential biases or judgements.

Another limitation could have occurred in the coding process. The researcher must be cautious about the distinction between “the events as lived and the events as told” and avoid the illusion of “causality” Clandinin and Connelly (2004). Therefore, coding needed to rely on set patterns before a generalization was made. Knowing that the illusion of causality exists helped the researcher avoid falling snare to it.



Lastly, the storytelling process is beneficial, but becomes problematic should a student, consciously or subconsciously, try to avoid details of experiences that seemed negative or displeasing to the researcher. The researcher attempted to mitigate this by using a blend of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured question guides. Structured question guides, specifically, allowed the researcher heavy control during the interview so that all of the questions were answered and the interview did not veer away from the specified questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

## **Summary**

This chapter discusses the methodology of this research study. Specifically, the chapter is broken into five subheadings; research design, setting and participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and data quality procedures. Within each subheading, the researcher attempted to explain the rationales behind the specific decisions and how these decisions directly relate to the research questions of this study. The next chapter discusses the analysis of the research findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This chapter contains the results of a case study conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of non-public high school seniors in a career preparation program?
2. How do these experiences contribute to the development of a career identity?

The analysis of data aimed at answering these research questions yielded five themes, six core codes, and eighteen categories. The results are organized first by categories, second by core codes, and lastly by themes. The data was grouped first by category. Then, one or more categories appeared under the core ideas. The core ideas were used to categorize smaller related pieces of information within the categories. The themes highlight unique components of participant experiences within each core code. Direct interview quotes from all fifteen participants are used to highlight and personalize the data. The quotes have been edited for grammatical clarity and all names have been changed to protect participant identity of the students, director, and site coordinators.

#### **Theme One: Student Engagement**

For many of the seniors interviewed, it was their thirteenth year of schooling and they were more than ready to wrap up this phase of their life and move on to something new and

exciting. They were greatly anticipating graduation and their post-high school plans. For so many of them, this is why they chose the internship program; they wanted something different and fun during their last year of high school. Prior to the onset of the career development course at College Prep High, the seniors were only offered traditional academic courses that required them to stay on the campus. The career development class was the first class offered to them that allowed students time off campus to complete the requirements of the course.

I took the class because it was different. I could really leave school during the day and do something fun. When you have been doing the same thing for your whole life, you get excited when someone lets you do something new and different. I mean, I was a senior and I was so glad this was an option (Patty).

Patty's quote showed how students felt about the possibility of something new and different in terms of their current learning experience. For seniors who might be disengaging from their school work, this internship course may have been a key piece to keeping them engaged with school. One graduate, Peter, could even recall his feelings on the first day he left the campus for his internship.

I remember walking past the office and getting in my car while everyone was still in school. It was weird. It was like you were doing something you weren't supposed to, but you could. I know my friends felt like that too. I cranked up my radio and smiled the whole way to my internship (Peter).

After reading this Peter's quote, there is no doubt that the student was excited. This quote reiterated that the course was new and exciting. Students were allowed to do something different

and their deep desire to break the routine and step outside of the brick and mortar classroom was enough of a reason to make them choose the class.

According to the program director, Sarah, this was the second year of the career development course and with one year under their belt, College Prep High had a better grip on what student expectations were and what to expect from them. What they didn't expect, however, was the amount of pre-hype that former students caused for the second-year participants.

You have to remember, this was still new to everyone. There was a lot of excitement and anticipation with the next round of students participating. They had talked to the students the year before and came in very excited to participate. I really didn't have to promote anything the next year with the students. There were kids asking me if we were still offering the class and my main job was reassuring them that we were keeping it (Sarah). The director's quote explained the origin of the student's excitement and how easy it was to get student participation for the program in the second year. Sarah further talked about how this excitement helped them have conversations with students that they rarely heard from before the class started.

Some of these kids never said five words to me before this class. I used to have to pull stuff out of them, then you bring in this class and all of a sudden, they want a meeting to see where they can intern. I would get an email and think, where did this kid come from? (Sarah).

After quotes like this, it became apparent to the researcher that the first and most prominent theme revealed in this study was engagement. In some cases, this was engagement with their school in general. In the case above, this was interpersonal engagement with their internship teacher. Student participants experienced a significant level of excitement that transformed into student engagement in the career development program. From the descriptions of the participants, it was as if students were moving from passive recipients of learning to engaged learners - something every educator strives for, according to the director.

One time the school administrator asked me how we could get the kids this excited about their other classes? It's something we all want, kids just actively involved in their classes and you can't stop it. It makes for easy observations for sure (Sarah).

The director's quote speaks to what the administrator's goals are for the learners of College Prep High and what teachers desire as well, especially during observations and evaluations. Engaged learners is a common goal for all stakeholders at College Prep High.

The career development class was a hybrid type course with 1- sixty-minute class on site during the week and 2 - ninety minute internships off site. The weekly class held onsite was held at the beginning of the week. The students and the director sat around and discussed how internships were going and talked about any concerns or needs that the students might have.

We just drank coffee and talked. Before you knew it, the hour was up. It was like therapy. None of us knew what we wanted to do really in life and we got to just talk about jobs and stuff (Linda).

Linda's comment revealed a very relaxed environment, with little to no agenda, and a lot of unstructured conversation about careers in general. The students were engaging in high volumes of dialogue about careers and their experiences within these specific career pathways.

The enthusiasm that Ingrid expressed about being in the classroom part of the program alone gave great insight into the active role the students had in the career development course and with the weekly career discussions.

I loved being able to explore careers even if they were of interest to me or not. I just liked hearing about them and knowing stuff was out there (Ingrid).

Ingrid was reflecting on the direct impact that listening to other classmate's experiences had on them. There was an apparent appetite amongst students to learn about careers that was now being fed by firsthand experience and conversations amongst peers.

While the students were engaged and actively participating in the weekly career discussions, the program director was present and shared with the researcher about their role during the weekly meetings.

I would try to say very little and mostly just listen. I had to stay on campus while they interned so these conversations let me hear what was going on. My part was to help them when they had specific questions about careers or their internship. They were definitely in charge during the weekly meetings, meaning they would guide what we talked about (Sarah).

This quote from the director reveals why College Prep High was using a hybrid type classroom with their career development program and how the time on the field coupled with time spent conversing with classmates granted access to educators as to how the program was doing.

There was a great deal of excitement on the field, but it was also important to note that students loved the class part of the internship as well. The hybrid approach allowed students not only exposure to their intern career, but also to the careers of their fellow classmates. One student reflected on this benefit.

This class helped me learn about a lot of careers because you were exposed to your classmate's experiences, too. Mondays were a lot of fun because we got to hear about everyone's experiences (Linda).

By using the hybrid approach, College Prep High was able to provide a more extensive exposure to career options and career pathways. Students had their individual experiences and those of their classmates as well.

The student participants in this study were all interviewed after graduation, after having finished the internship program. The residual level of excitement that existed after the program was done was evident in the interviews. When asked if the internship program seemed beneficial, Patty talked about how just the classroom discussions alone had such a profound impact on their career thoughts.

I just had so many thoughts rushing through my head. Every time I would hear about another career option, I would get excited all over again (Patty).



This student quote helps explain the thoughts that are swirling around in a senior's mind that sometimes, when left alone, can turn into stress and anxiety about their future. The fact that they could explore and discuss career possibilities in the presence of a listening adult and trusted friends was so exciting for them.

For many of the students, their high levels of engagement, stopped them from wanting the program to end. The following statement, in varied word forms, came from multiple participants.

I would recommend this program again and again and hope they have something like this in college. I will miss the experience (Clara).

This quote illustrates how Clara wanted to remain an active participant even when the program had ended. They were wanting this career development experience to continue into the next phase of their life, suggesting to the researcher that there was still yet another phase of career exploration to be had by the students. This would support the career framework research suggested by Pathways to Prosperity (2011) which suggest four levels of career implementation within schools.

Through the student's comments and facial expressions during the interviews, the researcher could hear and see the level of excitement and engagement of the participants in the career development program. Their level of engagement had not dwindled or dissipated after completion of the program, but instead the students missed the experience and desired more of it.

## **Theme Two: Student Exposure**

The second most prominent theme extracted from the data was exposure to careers, people, and the community. Many of the students interviewed had only read about careers or heard second hand experience about a career before their internship experience in the career development course.

If I knew anything about a career, before this class, it was because someone told me stuff about their job. Up to this point, I have only cut people's grass or dog sat for them to make money (Joe).

As revealed in this quote, most of the students interviewed had experienced some of the traditional career awareness programs that schools offered, but none of them had formal career preparation or career training. Many of them chose the career development class because they desired firsthand experience in a career that seemed interesting to them at that point in their life.

I took this class because I wanted to work hands on with kids and make sure I want to be a teacher. Career day was great, but that was someone else's experience. I needed to feel it myself before I decided to become a teacher. What if I hated it? (Ingrid).

For this student in particular, the career development course was a way for them to experience teaching before they committed time and finances to the profession. This student had heard others speak about teaching, but wanted to know for themselves if this was the career path for them.

The director describes the career readiness variance amongst the students in the program and how College Prep High embraces students at all levels of their career identity into the program.

So many of these kids come in and don't have a clue of what the job is and then I interview them again before they leave and I feel so much better about their understanding of the field. I love to see this growth. It inspires me to keep the program going because the teachers can't do this and the counselors can't either. We need the businesses to support this (Sarah).

This quote substantiates why student interviews used at the beginning and the end the program helps the stakeholders to measure the effectiveness of the program and to make changes to the program. The emphasis on the program is not on helping the students find a specific career, but instead to open their awareness to countless careers and career paths available to them.

Up until this point, the students were only offered courses that were being offered in any other traditional high school. After review, the researcher found that there were a lot of electives in the student course book, but they were all offered onsite and were only delivered in a traditional lecture format. According to the program director, there were no electives that were directly related to careers before the career development course started a year prior to this case study. According to the program director, students could only attain career information from a meeting with the school guidance counselor or on specific program dates such as the yearly career day or maybe during college week.

This was something new. We always tried to offer career talks and college days, but never a whole class devoted to careers and definitely never firsthand experience for the kids (Sarah).

This quote from the director explains why College Prep High started this career development program. In all of their efforts prior to this course, they were not able to duplicate the firsthand experience that internships could offer to the students.

One of the goals of College Prep High was to take the students from minimal second-hand career experience to numerous first-hand career experiences. Patty, who interned in a hospital setting, commented on how their internship experience exposed them to several other careers in the medical field.

In the one building I was at, there had to be hundreds of different jobs. People were doing so many things to get the patients' needs met. I mean if you like hospitals, or medical, or whatever, you have a lot of things you can do in that field (Patty).

This quote demonstrates how one student saw the numerous job potential in the medical field after being in the career development program. They were able to see and reference, first hand, a broad range of jobs available to them or any of their peers who were interested in the medical field.

Another goal of the career development program was to expose students to the different certification and degree levels within each career field. Without trying to promote one superior

post-secondary path, the program director tried to allow open discourse about all post-secondary options.

The kids were allowed to choose their internships. We didn't want to tell them what to do or limit their possibilities. When we met once a week, all these different options were talked about and many new ones too because they would see them at their sites (Sarah).

This quote clarifies how the students were allowed to explore different career options and how this exploration magnified as the internships continued through the year. Students might have started the program with limited knowledge and then advanced their thinking as they became more aware of the career field they were interning in.

During weekly discussions, it became apparent to the program director that the students were not only becoming more aware of careers, but the exposure was also introducing them to other important aspects of careers.

Sometimes I would hear them talk about things like how much someone might get paid or who had to go to school longer or who has a bigger office or even sadly, who was more stressed out with their job. They were putting together the pieces for sure (Sarah).

Sarah's quote reveals what effect student exposure has on a student's ability to make inferences and draw conclusions about particular careers and career fields. The students were exposed to careers and career fields, but also to salaries, fringe benefits, and sometimes even negative job factors such as work-related stress.

During the interviews, the students could describe to the researcher specific, real work they did in their internships. As shared in the following quotation, students were not describing the traditional paper-based assignments that needed to get done or graded, but instead real-life applications and tasks within a career they were interested in exploring.

I spent two hours two days a week at the magazine putting together media kits, sorting through flourish items, making cold calls, attending meetings and interacting with clients (Tammy).

In this quote, Tammy could talk to the researcher about what it meant to run a business. They talked about the little details as if they were an insider in the business. They were able to talk about it as if they were on the inside looking out. This student's quote is filled with such technical lingo, that someone outside of the profession could hardly understand some of the real-world task they were describing.

Another student, Frank, that interned at the local courthouse reflected back on field trips they had taken as compared to their internship at the courthouse.

I looked forward to my days in the courtroom. I would watch the judge preside over cases that involved real people. I remember one time walking through a courtroom on a field trip in like 9th grade, but this was way different. This was real. I got to see it really happen twice a week for a lot of weeks. You can't get what I got on a field trip (Frank).

From this student's description of their day, it was obvious that time spent on the field as an intern was not something that could be replicated by a career day program or even by field trips.

In order for these real-world experiences to happen, on-site coordinators had to become actively involved in the career development program as well. These on-site coordinators were instrumental in getting the students to participate in the daily task when they were on-site. One of the on-site coordinators, Timothy, explained how they gave real work to the students to ensure they have authentic career experiences.

I tried to give him real things to do, not just busy work. He knew when the work was real and he would work harder and better than my employees sometimes (Timothy). This on-site coordinator expressed, in this quote, how they knew that the internship tasks had to be meaningful and real to the students. The coordinator wanted to clearly distinguish busy work from real-life experiences in their task choices for the student. They also recognized the student's hard work and compared it to that of their employers, giving significance to the task as if they were the same as what the employees were asked to do.

After being a site coordinator for two years, Christine, expressed the following:

I rely on these kids to help me run my business. I wish every kid had this experience to see what a job really is and what you really need to do to stay in business for yourself (Christine).

From this quote, we could see that this on-site coordinator wanted these students to have these real experiences because they could see firsthand how these experiences were not only helping their business succeed, but the student succeeds as well. The business owner expressed a level of reliance on the students for the success of their business. This particular business owner was benefiting from the student's participation as well as the student benefiting from the experience.

Another site-coordinator spoke of the student's mannerisms before and after the internship and expressed how their organization benefited from having students actively participating in the everyday ins and outs of their business. The student exposure was not only beneficial to the student, but to the businesses and the community as well.

You see these kids come in on the first day all confused and scared, then before you know it, they are answering your phones and talking to your customers and making them smile (Tabitha).

This on-site coordinator's quote revealed a dramatic change happening to the students simply from exposure to real world task in a real-world setting.

When asked to describe what they did during their internship, the students not only talked about their daily tasks, but would talk about their interaction with the business and the community as well. They talked about meeting a lot of new people and about making connections with places and people they had never heard of before.

I would be out with my friends and run into someone I met from my intern. It was weird at first, but then I got used to seeing people that I met while I was at work - I mean at my internship. My friends were always like, dude you are famous...you always see people you know (Mike).

Mike's quote shows the human impact that the interns have outside of the classroom, in the community, and with their peers. These human interactions are being portrayed as positive and impactful. Thus, we can conceptualize *exposure* not as limited only to work environments and work tasks, but also including the broader community in which internship sites are located.



Students are typically severely isolated from the broader community, but here we see the internship serving as an *introduction* to the community.

The program director said this exposure to careers and people is what they could never do in school, even with their best efforts and it took getting the kids off campus to make it happen.

We tried so many programs, but really nothing compares to interning. These businesses that work with us make the difference. We couldn't bring this level of interaction to the school, but we can get the kids out there to experience it (Sarah).

This quote from the director helps identify the key role businesses play when it comes to a successful career development program within a school. These partnerships started with school families volunteering their places of employment as internships and then grew by soliciting other local businesses to participate in the program. Without the participation of the local business partners, the program would be severely challenged.

Student exposure to careers, people, and the community around them was an integral part of the career development class. The students enjoyed describing their experiences and spoke with positivity about their exposure to work and hands on activities directly related to their internships and the community around them. It took the partnerships of local businesses with the school to make the career development program possible. The students and the program director express in unison that this sense of exposure is only possible through partnerships with local business and organizations that share the same vision. One student quote specifically addresses the different stakeholders involved in their newly gained knowledge of careers and the job market.

I wouldn't have seen it [a job possibility] without going to the gym every day. (on-site Director C) let me see his physical therapy team do their jobs and I imagined myself doing them. Then I would go back to school and talk about it. It was a lot of seeing and talking stuff (Mike).

Embedded in Mike's quote is the reality that it takes a network of people, in school and off site, working together to help a student process through the new knowledge of careers and career identity. This teamwork has to be committed and available for the students if the career development program is going to be successful.

### **Theme Three: Relationships**

As the interviews continued, it became evident to the researcher that relationships experienced amongst the participants was an undeniable theme in this case study. Students and adult participants experienced new and influential relationships with others from participating in the career development program. When asked to describe their interaction with their on-site coordinator, one student recalled the first interaction they had with their on-site coordinator.

I remember the first time I called, (On-site coordinator B). I was really nervous. I didn't know who she was and now I think of her like a mom to me. It's funny how it happened so fast (Susan).

Susan's quote reveals a lot about how the relationships between students and site coordinators quickly develops over a relatively short amount of time. During the interviews, students and site coordinators referenced each other by name and spoke fondly of each other. There was also

mention of overcoming discomfort in the quote, suggesting that students experienced genuine relational milestones in the career development program.

To go from strangers to quasi-parental relationships in one semester suggests that there must be a lot of quality time spent together between students and on-site coordinators. On-site coordinators were not just people that students saw every once in a while, but instead, people they saw every time they went to their internship.

I saw (On-Site Coordinator D) pretty much every day at my internship. She helped me with task and there were only a few days I didn't see her (Clara).

This quote reveals the amount of time this student spent with their on-site coordinators. There were 18 academic weeks in a semester meaning these students would spend upwards to 50 plus hours in one semester with their on-site coordinator or more than 100 hours in one academic year.

The on-site coordinators that volunteered for this program were committed to their students. They committed both time and energy to the program and this time and energy is what fostered new relationships. On-site coordinators took the role seriously and it was easy to see how relationships formed between the students and the on-site coordinators. One on-site coordinator, Tabitha, got teary eyed as they spoke about the students in the program and the effect they have on their business.

These kids start to grow on you and you look forward to the days they come. They bring a lot of excitement to the day and my staff loves them (Tabitha).

Heartfelt quotes, like this one, reminisced of budding relationships that transcended beyond on-site coordinators and the students, but into the workplaces as well. Even the employees of these organizations were forming relationships with these students. The director of the program, Sarah, recalls an observation they had seen on-site.

When I went to the site to observe the student, it was like they were one of the employees. If I didn't know the student before, I would have thought they worked there (Sarah).

This quote shows how these students became an active member of the business/organization they were interning at and how this sense of belonging had a lasting impact for some of them on their future career decisions. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1970) explains that belonging is a basic need that we all have. Maslow (1943) agrees and included it as one of the hierarchy of needs that humans have. When asked who had an influence on your career decision making, several of the students responded with their site-coordinators name.

My supervisor (on-site coordinator B) had a big influence on me. She talked with me about my future in the career and gave me good advice (Clara).

One student goes further and states this about his on-site coordinator:

He was like a dad to me. I knew he wanted what was best for me and I respected what he had to say about college and the jobs I wanted to do (Joe).

This quote speaks directly to the influence that an on-site coordinator had in a student's life, especially impact on a student's career choice. This suggests a significant social impact that internship sites and on-site coordinators can play in student career development. At a time when

much in their lives is undetermined, students receive another mentor-like relationship they can use to envision how they might become an adult. This thought was reiterated by the program director as well.

We need these people to pour into our students. The kids need to connect with someone and talk about their future. I am only one person and there are a lot of them that need someone to talk to (Sarah).

This quote challenges others to recognize the impact that one person can play in the life of a high school student. Students need someone to talk to about their future and reality shows that schools do not have enough manpower to do it themselves.

These student / on-site coordinator partnerships grew into impactful relationships. They appear to be symbiotic relationships of mutualism in which both participants benefit from each other. The student helped the on-site coordinator with task and duties that needed to be completed and the on-site coordinators spent hours in return with the students pouring advice into their decision-filled futures. Schools play a vital role in shaping a student's career identity and play an even greater role when they chose programs that partner with local businesses to increase the sphere of influence in a student's life.

#### **Theme Four: Self -Awareness**

The fourth theme extracted from the data was self-awareness. The student participants developed a self-awareness after being in the career development program. Student participants were able to describe to the researcher who they were as a learner and discuss certain characteristics about themselves that they not aware of before participating in the career

development program. These self-representations of the students align with theories of consciousness dating back to 1874 when Brentano talked about the mental state of self-awareness. In one particular interview question, when student participants were asked about their personal growth since being in the program, they spoke about aspects of themselves that they never knew existed before they participated in the program.

I noticed that I love learning new things by observing and asking questions. Interning allowed me to see this about myself (Susan).

This quote reveals the student becoming aware of themselves as they journeyed through the semester. Students were making self-discoveries and taking notice of these discoveries. They were able to reflect on this process and share the transformation with the researcher.

Sometimes the students were able to connect their own self-awareness to careers in general. Peter spoke of a blossoming interest in careers that developed as they participated in the career development program.

I didn't realize how many questions I had about careers until I started the class (Peter).

From this quote, we can see the direct benefits of career exploration on a student's thoughts. The students were becoming more self-aware of their desire to become knowledgeable about careers.

Not only did students have these 'aha' moments about themselves, but they were able to attribute these self-awareness moments to their involvement in the internship program.

Every time I went to my internship, I learned something new. A lot of times I learned stuff about a career, but I was surprised how much I learned about me. I don't know if this was supposed to happen, but it was (Linda).

Linda's quote emphasizes that if it had not been for their involvement in the program, it is possible that some of these characteristics would have gone unnoticed or maybe not have reached their fullest potential.

One student participant knew a lot about their likes and dislikes, but never made the connection from personal interest to careers choices until being in the program.

I knew I loved working with kids before the program, but I didn't know I wanted to make a career out of it until now (Ingrid).

This quote shows how students took what they knew to be true about themselves and filtered their career experiences through these truths. This filtering process had an impact on students' future career decisions. Outside of the classroom walls, students were discovering things about them that they did not know. Sometimes the discoveries were directly related to their career identity and the students started to identify that.

One student, Joe, described their skill set almost as if it were a hidden treasure and they just discovered it.

I didn't realize all of the different techniques and skills I had until someone made me use them to solve problems. It was neat to see them come out...like where were they

hiding.... I have a lot of stuff for my resume I didn't know I had.... stuff like executive function, organizational skills, time-management (Joe).

From this quote, we can see that once this student made this discovery about themselves and they were glad that it was out in the open. This self-awareness was like a gift that they had and could now use for the next adventure in their life.

As the interviews continued, the researcher was able to extract data from student's self-awareness that revealed student awareness of skill deficits that their internship experience had made them aware of. The program director referenced this too in one of their comments.

Sometimes I would hear the students talk about wanting to try something at their next internship, like answering the phones or making a spreadsheet. They would get together and share new things they did and inspire each other to try new things at their internships (Sarah).

Sarah's quote directly states career training task that the students were engaging in. The students had a desire to go from career exploration to career training. The students wanted to know how to do more things and were willing to try new things at their internships. One might surmise that the opportunity for immediate application of these new skills in a meaningful context played a part on this interest in learning.

One student, Peter, spoke about how they gained first-hand knowledge in communicating with younger students.



I got peds (pediatric) experience giving me knowledge on how to really work and communicate with such a young age. This is really important in this field and you just have to have that ability to be able to do the job (Peter).

Peter's quote showed that by being in this program, they knew that having book smarts was not enough for this career, they needed communication skills as well, more specifically, communication skills with younger people. This internship was able to show that need and provide them that experience.

This transition from identifying skill gaps to meaningful application of new skills was quite motivating. Some students shared their career trainings with the researcher and identified career training growth.

When I first started going to my internship, I watched everybody do stuff. Then, by the time it was, like in May, I was helping with the t-shirt layouts and graphics. I think I could do it quick and nice and the person in charge liked that (Linda).

From this quote, we can hear a student experience transition from career exploration, or the watching phase, to career training, the actual doing phase. These students evolved from watchers of the career to doers of the career and took note of their own skill evolution. Students were also aware that others were able to see the process unfold and that these other people welcomed the contributions of the student intern.

From the on-site coordinators perspective, this student revelation of self - awareness is a gratifying experience for them.

You just have to see it for yourself. They (student interns) evolve every single time. Some more than others, but it still happens and I get to see it and I love it so much (Charlie).

While this quote was just the comment of one on-site coordinator, it suggests the motivating influence of supporting the skill development of eager learners. While the commitment of time and energy on the part of the businesses and on-site coordinators seems huge, the benefits appear to be worth it.

The students interviewed became more aware of themselves as they completed the career development program. They spoke a lot about their skills, talents, and desires as if they were describing a new someone in their life. They were very excited about this new self-information and how they were going to be able to use it in their future. The evolving process was pleasurable for the student and visible to others who interacted with the students in the career exploration program.

### **Theme Five: Self - Confidence**

The sixth and final theme extracted from this data was self-confidence. Even though the student personalities varied greatly, each student possessed a healthy level of self-confidence.

While this research design could not measure the initial levels of student self-confidence, it could reveal that these self confidence levels were increasing as the student was in the program.

I knew I was like changing. My parents could notice it and (Program Director A) did too. They would tease me for being too quiet and now, I don't know, I guess I don't mind talking to the group about what I do. I guess you could say I enjoy it (Susan).

This student quote demonstrates how the student recognizes their own change in confidence and even though they cannot articulate exactly why or how, they do acknowledge that they are comfortable with the change- signifying a positive self-confidence.

What sat before the researcher, during one specific interview, was young person who was very articulate and carried themselves professionally. Without being prompted, this student credited the internship, specifically their days in the courthouse, for these attributes.

I learned a lot about the procedure in court and I definitely learned to be more professional. I carried myself different in the courtroom and felt like I was getting smarter (Frank).

This student quote emphasizes the layered dimensions of self-confidence within the student; the way they dress, the way they carry themselves, and the way they feel on the inside. These layers reflect Bandura's (1977) three layers of self-efficacy; magnitude, strength, and generality. These layers were all a by-product of their self-confidence and for this student in particular, these were all improving as the student progressed through the career development program.

Another student spoke of improvements in how they carried themselves after being in the program and shared a bit about the transformation experience itself.

I interact better with teachers and staff members and am a lot better with communication. It was so scary at first.... I never answered phones before or handled an upset customer...but you just have to get used to it (Tammy).

This student quote revealed what they thought they were better at and revealed that the transformation to self-confidence holds a bit of uncomfortableness. The student explained that they pushed through and eventually got used to it. In order to gain new skills, which led to self-confidence, sometimes they had to push themselves past the point of uncomfortable.

Maybe one viable reason for notable self-confidence was in how the program chose to celebrate student success. Not going in the same career path as your internship was acceptable to the participants. The emphasis was placed instead on the knowledge gained while being in the program. One student intern explains why this emphasis was beneficial to them

Even if you do not stay in the career path that you interned in, I would say it was worth it. You will never know what is really out there until you explore and see it happen in front of you. I know more about this field now and this knowledge is going to help me when I chose a career (Frank).

It became evident, through this quote, that the internship was the start of something more for the student participants. Initially, some students were blind to what was available to them because

they lacked real, first-hand knowledge about careers. Many of them had heard a lot about careers, but up until this internship, they had never experienced an official career. One student, who thought they knew a lot about mass communications expressed how much they really did not know once they got into the internship.

I now know what the mass communications field really entails. There's a lot more to it than I thought and so many more jobs related to it than I would have ever thought. It gave me a great base of knowledge of the field (Tammy).

Tammy's quote reveals that their knowledge base was inadequate, but they now possess a great deal of knowledge about the communication field. Understanding the power that new knowledge gains promotes self-confidence in an individual.

With this increasing self-confidence, students could speak boldly and confidently about their skills and contributions to the job market ahead of them. When asked specifically about the benefits of the program, many of the students felt like they were going to be ahead of their peers and this made them more confident about their otherwise uncertain future.

This program gave me a head start on getting field experience and now I know what kind of work I want to get into. I am ahead now for college. That feels good (Mike).

This particular student quote insinuated that they had received a head start over their future competition because they had field experience. This student thought that college was where you normally get your career experience and because they received career experience in high school,

they were ahead of others. There was a sense of confidence in the way they spoke these words that seemed as though they had something that others might not have and it was a good thing.

In addition to the students, the on-site coordinators could attest to the new confidence and would mentally note a remarkable change from day one of the program to the day of completion.

These kids are more responsible, more professional when they leave us. They come in not knowing how to answer a phone and then you see them greeting a customer like it was perfectly normal. It's pretty cool (Christine).

The quote reveals the type of transformation the students underwent that would lead to a more positive self-esteem. These newly acquired skills were noticed by the on-site coordinator and mentioned to the students during the exit interviews, again reaffirming confidence in their abilities and talents.

Self-confidence grows through verbal affirmation as well. One on-site coordinator shared how they used positive verbal reinforcement with the students who displayed necessary skills for the job market.

Some of these skills, like talking and dressing professional are not taught anywhere, but we need them in our line of work and it's just good to see that these kids are going to have an edge up because they learned it. I make a big deal about it and I see how proud they are when they sound and look like one of the employees (Charlie).

Here, one can hear the necessity of these skills and the verbal praise of the on-site coordinator. Also significant is how the student responds with pride when they recognize the transformation within themselves and self-identify with other employees. The student has picked up the cultural and behavioral norms of this workplace and successfully morphed from the *outsider* to the *insider*, which would understandably give them confidence the next time they face a new culture they must adapt to.

The program director, Sarah, also spoke of pride within the students and how this pride transferred to the school environment as well.

The kids were happy with the program and proud of what they were doing. You could count on them to come back to the campus and lead the student body. They just showed themselves as leaders (Sarah).

These words from the program director revealed a sense of pride and leadership that are evident attributes of a self-confident individual. Someone who is proud of what they are doing, generally presents this pride with self-confidence and in a positive demeanor to others around them.

The students and site coordinators spoke about a transformation that happened to the student from being in the program. A metamorphosis of skills and attitude that emulated self-confidence surfaced at some level with all of the student interviews. The student participants were vocal as well about their incompetence before the internships and the challenges they faced due to this incompetence. Through the commitment of the site coordinators and the experiences

on the field, many of the students were able to tackle some of these and present, instead, a more confident, well rounded, individual to the world around them.



## **Summary**

The findings in Chapter 4 described how one high school implemented a voluntary career development program with their senior students. Five themes emerged from the data and helped answer the research questions presented within the study. Students who participated in the career development program experienced a high level of engagement within the program and were exposed to varying careers and career paths. The student's participants created new, meaningful relationships with on-site coordinators who exposed them to real world experiences that could not be duplicated within the confines of the classroom. Students within the program grew in self-awareness and self-confidence which further led to the cultivation of a career identity.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine non-public high school students' career identity development as they completed a career preparation program. This was a case study about the career identity development of high school seniors, who were involved in a yearlong internship program, at College Prep High, located in the suburbs of a Southern U.S. city. The interviews provided insight into the experiences within the career internship program and further insight into how these experiences contributed to the development of career identity. This chapter provides an analysis of the findings from this case study and how the findings aligned with the guided conceptual framework within chapter 3. Once completed, the study resulted in 5 themes used to answer the research questions.

1. What are the experiences of non-public high school seniors in a career preparation program?
2. How do these experiences contribute to the development of a career identity?

Findings from the interviews helped describe the student experiences in the career preparation program. Students seemed to experience a high level of engagement in the career preparation program. Parsons (1909) believed that ultimately people were more satisfied with their jobs when they were actively engaged in choosing it through examination of their personalities. This core concept is still evident in many psychologically based career theories such as Theory of Work-Adjustment (1984), the Self-concept Theory of Career Development by

Super (1953) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994). Students voluntarily chose the career development program and were able to freely choose from a wide range of internships that matched their personalities. It quickly became evident to the researcher that the students were actively engaged in the program and had a high level of satisfaction with their internship experience. It is important in these findings to reference the correlation between the student's examination of their personalities and the freedom to choose their internship sites and the high levels of engagement in the career development program. These findings suggest that when deploying an internship program, students should not be mandated to participate and should have a plethora of options available to match their interest and personalities.

This particular program had students participate in an internship where they could gain real-world experience in a career of their choice. Holland's theory of careers has been used to help show that career choices are sometimes a result of an interaction between individuals and their environment (Porter and Umbach, 2006). This particular research study found that the impact of these real-world experiences, via internships, contributed to the high school student's decision of a career. The students in the career development program were content with ruling out a career as much as they were with choosing a career. Students began to identify if a career was a good fit for them or not through real-life experiences. Through the real-life experiences in the internships, they were able to really see if the career choice was something they wanted to stick with or rule out. In the end, these intern experiences could potentially save the students a lot of heartache and money had they kept going with the notion that they loved the career and later in college or after graduation realized the real ins and outs of the career were not for them.

Students and adult participants experienced new and influential relationships with others from being in the career development program. Within this data is support for social influences that stem from relationships formed within the school's environment and the internship environment. Within the influential realm of the school's environment and the internships environment resides the development of relationships and even further - career identity; an identity that is continually being molded and shaped by the ethos of the school and the partnering businesses. The Character Education Partnership, by Pala (2011) reported on the influence of a school's culture as studied by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Council on School Climate. Within their report, they state, "what enables schools to have such a positive, often life-changing impact on the students is their culture" (pg.3). They further expound on the ability of school culture to shape the mentality of a student. "Once a student enters a school with a powerful culture, the ethic becomes the norm, and that's all they know" (pg.4). After studying the experiences of the high school students in the career development program, it is evident that school culture and internship culture both play a vital role in the development of career identity within the student because of the relationships fostered between these entities.

The students grew in their self-confidence from being in the career development program. When a student interacts with contextual factors (school culture / community), this interaction will influence self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. These self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in turn shape the student's interests, goals, actions, and eventually their attainments in life; including career choices. According to Bandura's Triadic Reciprocal Model of Causality (1977), a person's personality and external environment overtly

affect each other simultaneously and further affect one's behavior. In this social cognitive theory, research studies show that schools which provide opportunities, experiences and mentors to impact a student's self-efficacy have a vital, positive effect on a student's career development.

This study also found that student participants developed a self-awareness after being in the career development program. After participating in the internship program, these students had a clearer understanding of themselves, their abilities, and their ambitions. They were also more knowledgeable about the requirements of certain careers, the opportunities within a career field, and the advantages and disadvantages within different careers. More importantly, students attained all of this information through first-hand experience – therefore, further validating this newly acquired information as factual. Essentially, through self-awareness, students received counsel and guidance and ultimately began the development of their own career identity.

### **Connections to the Conceptual Framework**

#### **Holland's Theory of Careers**

The development of career identity is a very intricate process that involves many components. Holland's (1973) Theory of Careers was aimed to describe, understand, and predict the vocational choices people make (Gottfredson & Johnstun, 2009). Holland's Career Theory (1973) suggests that a person should explore or compare occupations that have the same values as their personality values. The process should continue until a person can narrow the alternatives to decide which occupation comes closest to fitting their personality. By using this

theory, career counselors could suggest occupations with a person's personality in mind. Career counselors have been using this theory for decades because of the ease with which it can be communicated and because of the self-directed nature of the corresponding assessments developed with it (Gottfredson & Johnstun, 2009).

The director of College Prep High's career development program had each student complete Holland's Career Theory assessment before students chose their internship. After the assessment was complete, each student met one on one with the director and discussed the results. The assessments took an average of ten minutes to complete and are commonly used by many high school counselors when exploring career choices. During the discussions, students were able to choose an internship site that they felt best matched their personality type.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994) was based on Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. This model describes the process by which student beliefs influence career interests and further influence career goals. The model further explains how one's environment will in turn influence a student's beliefs and therefore affect career goals and actions as well (Lent and Brown, 2002). Students in the internship program were working with their site coordinators for up to 3 hours a week for sixteen weeks. Within this timeframe, students were receiving positive reinforcement about their performance and experiencing positive outcomes. Students that experienced supportive environments at their internship site also interacted with site-coordinators who helped facilitate career goal setting with their respective interns.

## **Trait Factor Theory**

Trait factor theory (1909) relies on students having a reliable sense of self and being able to understand one's skills, aptitudes, and interests. After participating in their internship programs, students were more aware of these attributes about themselves and some were able to articulate this self-awareness during the interview process. When this self-awareness was partnered with knowledge of careers and the job market, students were able to begin articulating their career choices with the program director and their peers who were also in the program.

## **Existing Research**

Some researchers suggest that we take a look at other countries who are showing success in helping students develop a positive career identity. When we take a look at other countries, such as Australia, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, we see well-built vocational systems designed to help young people make a successful transition from secondary school to work (Hoffman & Schwartz, 2017). These countries have built systems that offer a broad range of occupations and combine learning at the workplace with academic coursework in a classroom setting. These countries are successfully showing how our education system can prepare students for college and career without placing superiority on one post-secondary choice or the other.

These European examples abroad have been studied over the past 5 years and successful replicas can be seen locally in our own continental United States. States such as Colorado, Tennessee, Delaware, Ohio, Massachusetts, Texas, and California are pioneering the way for

career pathway systems that meet the needs of our quickly transforming economy. According to Pathways to Prosperity (2011), the 4 central ideas behind these programs are (a) to bridge the divide between academic and applied pedagogies (b) bridge the divide between high school and college curriculum (c) cross the divide better between general education and career pathways with the interest of advancing both and (d) ensure that career pathways programs reduce class and racial divides in education and economic opportunity. The framework to meet these goals involves four levels of implementation - career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career training. Proponents of the framework suggest that these levels of implementation must start at the middle school level and continue through to work based learning opportunities at the 9th - 14th grade levels.

Implementation of this career pathway framework comes with many challenges that unfortunately stop many schools before they can even get a plan off of the table. According to Hoffman & Schwartz (2017, pg.3), “challenges range from, on the school side, the overemphasis on the academic subjects to, on the employer side, hesitancy to allow teenagers into places of business”. There are also financial barriers and staffing barriers that deter career development programs from launching in schools. “The guidance staff is usually spread thin and focused on college applications, academic and behavior problems, and mental health emergencies” (Hoffman & Schwartz, 2017, pg.83). Many teachers and school counselors are over tasked and working outside of their comfort zones when trying to arrange for career speakers and career day programs. Academics accounts for a majority of the school day, with educators already under the gun to improve student performance with less and less instructional time. Implementing a new



program would call for a policy change at many school board levels in order to reallocate time needed for instruction.

Of the four levels of the career pathways framework, research done by The Harvard School of Education (2012) shows that most schools only attempt career awareness and career exploration and never make it to career preparation and career training. In fact, “there is little literature about the impact on career choices and aspirations of young people who have experienced high school internships” (Hoffman & Schwartz, 2017, pg. 89). Due to the real barriers that schools face with career pathways initiatives, many programs remain lofty dreams that never take flight.

### **Implications for Schools**

This study presents several implications for schools on providing career development programs for students with the intention of students developing a career identity. The implications range from administrators and local school boards to the community and postsecondary institutions.

Schools are encouraged to take time to reflect and dialogue on their current career development programs and policies. Lent and Brown (2002) propose that background context (i.e. school culture) influences a student’s self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies. Within Social Cognitive Career Theory (1994), we see how these background, contextual factors can influence the student’s future career choices and therefore, it is recommended that schools acknowledge and examine their career development programs carefully through continual

reflection and dialogue. During the interview process, stakeholders from College Prep High shared how, through reflection, they were able to evaluate their current career programs and make adjustments that ultimately benefited the students. Through reflection and stakeholder feedback, schools can evaluate current programs for effectiveness in the development of a student's career identity. Sometimes changes to scheduling, budget, staffing, and policies need to happen before new career development programs can be implemented, as in the case with College Prep High. This reflection process is also helpful in vision and goal setting and helps unify stakeholders when changes to current programs and policies are necessary.

Administrators within local school districts should consider creating a unified career development framework with clear structures, timelines, cost, and requirements. The framework created should reflect different levels of implementation that help a student navigate through career development. It is suggested that the framework be built around career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career training. These are believed to be the 4 levels necessary for successful implementation of a career development program (Hoffman & Swartz, 2017). Within Trait Factor Theory (1909), we see how each level is necessary to help a student gain knowledge about careers and an exposure to careers that then leads to self-awareness and self-confidence. Students at College Prep High, who participated in the career development program and experienced career preparation and career training, developed self-awareness and self-confidence due to their internship experiences. Likewise, students who are provided the opportunity to navigate through all 4 recommended levels are likely to identify with their own unique traits and to develop a positive career identity.

In order to fully develop each level within a career development framework, it is recommended that school districts start with at least middle school students and continue through to post-secondary institutions. Areas for implementation at various grade levels include promoting aspirations and interests in children and adolescents, expanding career choice options, fostering positive and realistic outcome expectations, setting specific goals, coping with barriers and building supports, and increasing coping self-efficacy and strong performance skills (Lent, 2013). Each level of an effective career development program takes time and should be fully developed before a student proceeds to the next level, therefore, we should not wait until high school to start the process of career development. During the interview process with students from College Prep High, it became apparent that the senior students wanted more from the career development program and that one year or one semester was not sufficient. High school programs that try to navigate students through all 4 levels seem to fall short of successfully implementing the stages or encounter students who are too overwhelmed to navigate through the process in a meaningful way. These students' self-efficacy would be relatively low due to their uncertainty about careers and therefore could attribute this to future failure in a career. Instead, students should feel comfortable with each phase of the career development process and should be allowed time to reflect and self-identify at each phase within the framework. This additional time in middle school would allow students to gain more knowledge about careers and therefore achieve higher self-efficacy because they could possibly see themselves successful in a career in the future.

The community is a critical component in the development of a student's career identity. Businesses, like those that worked with College Prep High, can help schools provide the real-life environments necessary for career training. This vicarious learning through internships allows students to measure their success potential and risks within careers and helps to clarify career goals (Lent & Brown, 2002). It is recommended that schools network with a variety of local businesses to better help young people successfully launch into the labor market with the necessary credentials and skills. With more options available to students, the likelihood of congruency between personality types and environment increases for students. Higher levels of congruency could ultimately lead to more satisfaction and greater success (Holland, 1996). These working relationships between schools and local businesses should remain ongoing and diversified so as to not limit possibilities for student participants or decrease levels of congruency. When schools have a strong, working relationship with a variety of local businesses, students have more options to better express their personality and develop a self-awareness.

Post-secondary institutions should be a part of the career development pipeline. Lent (2013) conceptualizes two types of contextual affordances, those that are much earlier (distal) than the choice and those that are closer in time (proximal) to the choice. This supports the idea that career identity is an evolving process and students should transition as smoothly as possible from one academic arena to another while still being able to navigate their career identity. School districts could share their career development frameworks with post-secondary institutions and perhaps participate in dialogue about continual student needs at the post-

secondary level. Senior participants interviewed in this research study showed a strong desire for post-secondary institutions to continue what they had started in their career development program. This would allow students to continue to develop relationships at the post-secondary level and to continue to test and experience new careers as they draw closer in time to actually making a career choice.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

With six states pioneering career development programs and implementing policy changes within their local state governments, numerous possibilities exist for analyzing newly generated data that could expand this study. Data from these new programs could emulate a more appropriate population size and with more diversity within public and private sectors.

With such a broad new canvas of research available in six diverse states, research can specifically look at how a student's socio-economic factors affect internship experiences. How do students from different school demographics experience internships?

Also available for research, is how schools manage and select the types of internships available to their student bodies, specifically in terms of gender neutrality. How are schools creating a diversified internship pool from which students can choose from?

Future research could also examine the role of corporate versus private business on a student's internship experience. Are students who intern at large corporations receiving the same career training as students who intern at small businesses?

Longitudinal studies would be an optional route for future research. Researchers could follow students who participated in an internship in high school, then moved to post-secondary options, and then entry into the job market. This would provide insight into the experiences of these students and the impact these experiences had on job entry.

Finally, other than internships, what other possibilities exist that can provide similar career development experiences for students? Are internships the only effective method for career training or are there other methods as or more effective?

### **Limitations of the Research**

This study examined the experience of ten high school graduates who recently completed an internship in an elective career development course. The school body was 59 % male and 41% female at the time of the study and the data retrieved came from 6 female student participants and 4 male student participants. Because the gender representation of the student participants did not coincide with the student body gender ratios, this could have created a limitation within the study.

Another limitation could have occurred in the coding process. The researcher was cautious about the distinction between “the events as lived and the events as told” and avoid the illusion of “causality” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004). Therefore, coding relied on set patterns before a generalization was made. Knowing that the illusion of causality exists helped the researcher avoid falling snare to it.

Another limitation of this study is the limited capacity for recall that a person possesses. The researcher understood this limitation and attempted to hold all interviews within thirty days of the students finishing the career development program so as to have the experiences relatively fresh for accurate recall purposes. Even with the best of intentions, events such as graduation, post - secondary planning and other events could have impacted the recall process for the interviewees.

Lastly, the storytelling process is beneficial, but becomes problematic should a student, consciously or subconsciously, try to avoid details of experiences that seem negative or displeasing to the researcher. The researcher attempted to mitigate this by using a blend of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured question guides. Structured question guides, specifically, allowed the researcher heavy control during the interview so that all of the questions were answered and the interview did not veer away from the specified questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Two years ago, three million sixteen to twenty - four- year-olds were neither in school nor at work (Pathways to Prosperity, 2017). These are real young people with no hope for a bright future. As educators, we need to relook at our current education system and ask ourselves what can we do to decrease this alarming statistic and ensure a better tomorrow for the next generation of youth in America. Great career pathway examples have been set by other countries and great educational pioneers have broken ground in our own nation today. It is critical that

educators, schools, businesses, and government agencies partner together to keep these initiatives going. We cannot afford to stay stagnant or even worse to go back to old habits no matter what the challenges might be. Every small step forward towards career preparation and career training coupled with high academic standards ensures a bright tomorrow for these three million youth and generations still to come.



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Appendix A  
Informed Consent

**University of New Orleans Ed Leadership Doctoral Study**

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:**

This study is about high school student's experiences in a career internship program.

**What I will ask you to do:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your involvement in the career internship program at your high school. The interview will take about an hour to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview.

**Risks and benefits:**

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

The direct benefits to you will be an opportunity to reflect on your experience and your role in the program and to improve the program for future students.

The benefits to society will include improved service and career identity development for the students.

There will be no compensation to any participant who agrees to participate in the study.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. Interviews will be tape-recorded and all recordings will be destroyed after interviews are transcribed, which I anticipate will be within the month of December, 2018.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with your former high school. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**University of New Orleans Ed Leadership Doctoral Study**

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Michele Margavio. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Michele Margavio at [mmargavi@my.uno.edu](mailto:mmargavi@my.uno.edu) or at 985.789.1485.

Please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon (504-280-3990) at the University of New Orleans for answers to questions about this research, your rights as a human subject, and your concerns regarding a research-related injury.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

**YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked.**

**YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ I consent to take part in the study.**

**YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.**

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for three years beyond the end of the study.

Appendix B  
Student Participant Questionnaire

1. Please describe what you did during your internship.
2. What factors do you think made you choose the career internship program?
3. What factors do you believe influenced where you interned?
4. Describe your interaction with your site – coordinator.
5. What personal growth have you noted since being in this program?
6. What changes (if any) in terms of career paths have occurred since your enrollment in this program?
7. Did your experience in the career internship program seem beneficial? If so, explain.
8. What person / persons, if any, have influenced your career decision making?
9. What suggestions would you recommend to the internship program?
10. Would you recommend this program to other students at College Prep High?  
Why / Why not?

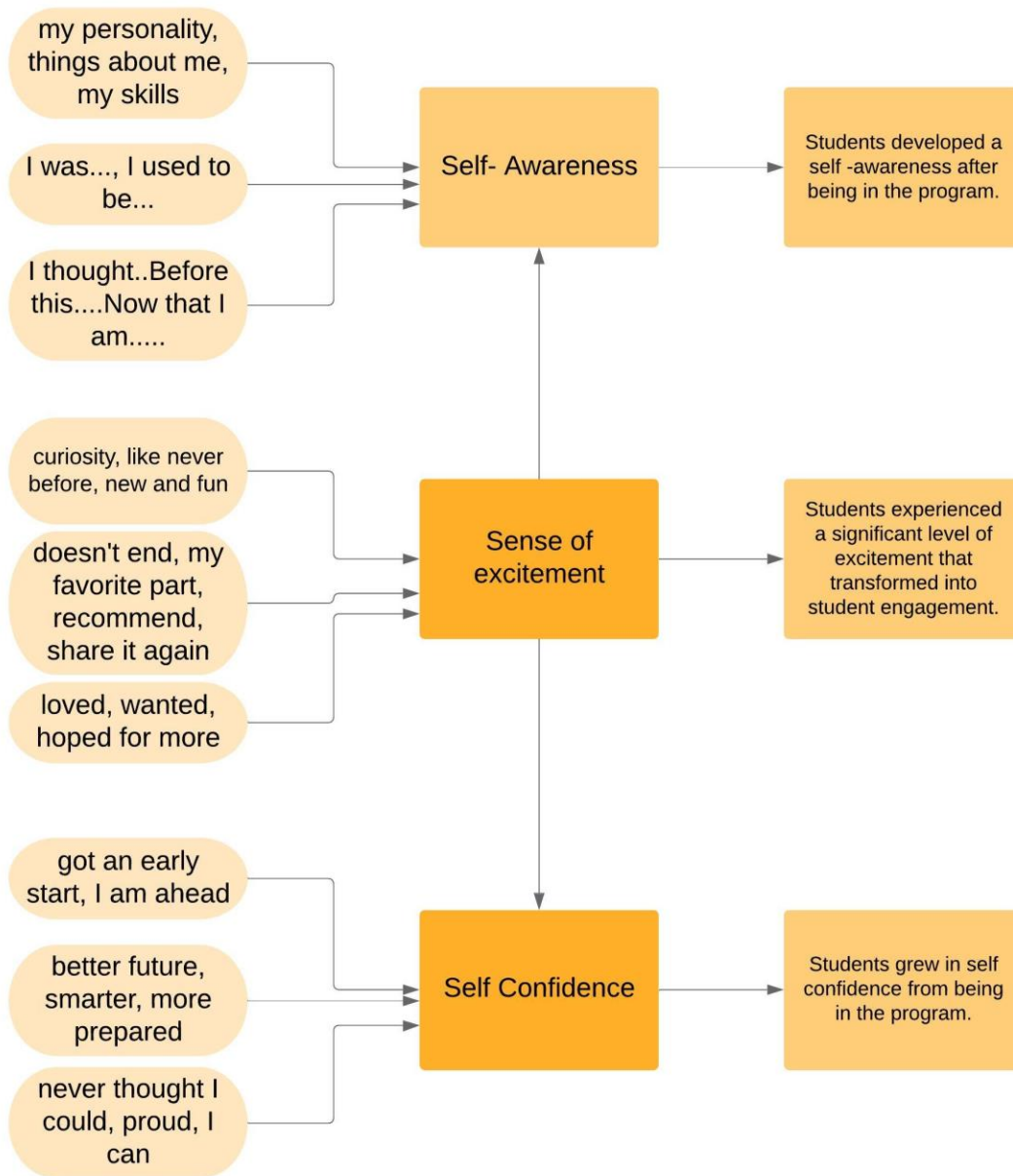
Appendix C  
Program Director Questionnaire

1. Explain your role in this internship program.
2. Why did you choose to participate in the career internship program?
3. What factors do you believe influence where students chose to intern?
4. What range of options does the program provide in regards to career choice?
5. If a student cannot decide or find a place to intern, what protocol do you follow?
6. How would you gauge the success of a student – intern match?
7. What student growth have you noted in students since being in this program?
8. What do you believe is the purpose of the career internship program?
9. Do you believe it is possible to match students' personality traits with a career?
10. What role, if any, do you have with a student's family in regards to the internship program?
11. In your opinion, what has been the overall benefit to students that this program has offered?
12. What suggestions for improvement would you recommend to the Head of Schools?

Appendix D  
Site Coordinator Focus Group Questionnaire

1. Explain your role in this internship program.
2. What factors do you believe influence where students chose to intern?
3. In your opinion, do companies / organizations benefit from having student interns?
4. If a student is not working out, what options do you have?
5. How would you gauge the success of a student – intern match?
6. What student growth have you noted in students since being in this program?
7. What do you believe is the purpose of the career internship program?
8. Do you believe it is possible to match students' personality traits with a career?
9. Have you noticed any times where you intern had the exactly right/wrong personality traits for their intern position?
10. In your opinion, what has been the overall benefit to students that this program has offered?
11. What suggestions for improvement would you recommend to the program director?

Appendix E  
Sample of Coding Process



## **Vita**

The author was born in Portsmouth, Virginia and has lived the majority of her life between Michigan and Louisiana. She obtained her bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of New Orleans in 1995. She began her teaching career in 1996 in Detroit, Michigan. In 2009, she obtained her masters in adult education from Northwestern State in Natchitoches, Louisiana. In 2012, after 16 years of classroom teaching, she began her career in school administration and gained formal admission into the University of New Orleans educational leadership doctoral program. Recently, she has started a learning lab center that provides a non-traditional learning approach for students enrolled in Louisiana's online charter school. In 2019, she celebrates her 23rd year as an educator and the culmination of her doctoral study.