

UNIVERSITY OF SHERBROOKE

**Choix de carrière: le rôle de aide pédagogique en  
mettant l'accent sur l'éducation de la petite enfance**

**Career Choices: the role of academic advising  
with a focus on early childhood education**

par

Laura Fowler-Massie

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## SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. A more focused examination of early childhood education was undertaken. Through the exploration of knowledge, attitudes and perceptions held by high school and college advisors this study was intending to identify the kind of information presented to parents and students as they considered post-secondary options.

Despite considerable research in the area of early child development, and the positive implications of high quality education on learning, the profession of early childhood education continues to suffer from an image problem. Early childhood educators are often viewed as little more than glorified baby-sitters, having their work undervalued as menial, requiring few specific skills and dubbed women's work. In this exploratory research study it was hoped that the descriptive data collected would be useful to early childhood education professionals and academic advisors alike. This study explored specific issues related to the selection of college programs by high school students, for example: do perceptions of limited post-graduate academic options, limited career options, and limited opportunities for career advancement by school advisors influence enrollment into CEGEP early childhood education programs.

For this research study three different instruments of measurement were used: focus group discussions, questionnaires and structured interviews. High school advisors employed by the Western Quebec School Board (WQSB) and college advisors from Cégep Heritage College were invited to participate in the focus groups. Students from the early childhood education student body at Cégep Heritage College were invited to participate in both the questionnaire and structured interviews. Focus group discussions and structured interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed using content analysis methods. The questionnaire contained a series of 25 focused statements and a Likert scale of measurement (i.e. strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) was used.

From the review of the literature related to academic advising and early childhood education college programs, it was anticipated that findings would reveal that academic advisors were poorly informed about occupational and educational opportunities for early childhood education graduates, resulting in incomplete and/or inaccurate information being provided to prospective students. It was further anticipated that students enrolled in early childhood programs themselves were ill informed of the scope of career and educational opportunities available to them after graduation.

The results of this research study indicated that these negative concerns were not founded. Findings indicated that advisors did not pre-judge or profile students. They held no bias based on academic performance or economic status. Data revealed that advisors focused on students' interests and aptitudes and they employed a variety of tools and strategies to guide their work. Further it was seen that advisors consistently shared positive feedback and suggestions regarding the learning opportunities available to students entering various CEGEP programs in general and early childhood education programs in particular.

Despite a somewhat limited understanding of the broader career options open to early childhood graduates by advisors, students were very well informed of future career prospects. Students' level of knowledge regarding university options appeared very strong; with data results suggesting that most students had plans to attend university sometime after graduation, and they were clearly confident in their ability to access university related information from advisors. Although the data from this study did not find that parents influenced students to choose one program over another, it did suggest that students felt supported by their parents during the advising and selection process.

The findings from this study will be useful to CEGEP administration, staff and faculty for the purpose of program promotion and student recruitment. With an ever growing need for skilled educators advisors play a pivotal role informing prospective students and parents of the value of CEGEP programs in general and early childhood education programs in specific.

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## RÉSUMÉ

Le but de l'étude était de déterminer les connaissances générales des aides pédagogiques individuels et des étudiants sur les choix de programmes professionnels au niveau collégial. La chercheuse a particulièrement ciblé l'éducation à l'enfance. Elle s'est penchée sur les connaissances, les attitudes et les perceptions des aides pédagogiques individuels dans les écoles secondaires et dans les collèges afin de déterminer le type d'information présentée aux parents et aux étudiants qui examinent les différentes possibilités d'études postsecondaires.

Malgré d'importantes recherches dans le domaine du développement de la petite enfance et malgré l'influence positive de l'enseignement de grande qualité sur l'apprentissage, la profession d'éducatrice à l'enfance continue de souffrir d'un problème d'image. Les éducatrices sont souvent considérées comme étant juste un peu supérieures à des gardiennes idéalisées, qui effectuent un travail subalterne sous-évalué, nécessitant peu de compétences particulières et qualifié de « travail de femme ». Dans la présente recherche exploratoire, la chercheuse espérait que les données descriptives recueillies seraient utiles aux professionnels de l'éducation à l'enfance ainsi qu'aux aides pédagogiques. La recherche porte sur des questions précises liées aux choix des programmes collégiaux par les étudiants du secondaire, par exemple : les perceptions qu'ont les aides pédagogiques individuels des limites entourant les possibilités d'études supérieures, les choix de carrière et les perspectives d'avancement professionnel influencent-elles l'inscription des étudiantes en techniques d'éducation à l'enfance au cégep?

Trois instruments de mesure différents ont été utilisés : des groupes de discussion, des questionnaires et des entrevues structurées. Les aides pédagogiques individuels employés par la Commission scolaire Western Québec (CSWQ) au secondaire et ceux du Cégep Heritage College ont été invités à participer aux groupes de discussion. Les étudiantes en techniques d'éducation à l'enfance de Heritage ont été incitées à répondre au questionnaire et à participer aux entrevues structurées. La chercheuse a enregistré et transcrit les discussions de groupe et les entrevues structurées et les a analysées en utilisant des méthodes d'analyse de contenu. Le questionnaire comportait une série de 25 énoncés ciblés et l'échelle de mesure utilisée est celle de Likert (c.-à-d. totalement d'accord, d'accord, pas d'accord, totalement en désaccord).

La chercheuse a examiné la publicité faite par les cégeps et la documentation sur les programmes de techniques d'éducation à l'enfance. Son postulat était que les aides pédagogiques étaient mal informés des possibilités professionnelles et éducatives des diplômés de cette discipline, et qu'ils fournissaient donc des informations incomplètes et inexactes aux étudiants potentiels. Elle s'attendait également à ce que les étudiantes inscrites à ce programme soient elles-mêmes mal informées de l'étendue des perspectives de carrière et des possibilités d'études qui leur sont offertes après l'obtention du diplôme.

Les résultats de cette étude indiquent que ces préoccupations négatives ne sont pas fondées. Ils révèlent aussi que les aides pédagogiques n'ont pas de préjugés envers

les étudiants et ne les catégorisent pas selon un profil. Ils n'ont pas non plus de préjugés basés sur le rendement scolaire ou le statut économique. Les données révèlent que les aides pédagogiques sont axés sur les intérêts et les aptitudes des étudiants et qu'ils emploient une variété d'outils et de stratégies pour orienter leur travail. En outre, l'auteure de la recherche a observé que les aides pédagogiques transmettaient constamment des commentaires et des suggestions positifs concernant les possibilités d'apprentissage offertes aux étudiants qui s'inscrivaient dans les différents programmes collégiaux en général, et à ceux qui choisissaient les techniques d'éducation à l'enfance en particulier.

Malgré la compréhension quelque peu limitée des aides pédagogiques concernant les possibilités de carrière élargies offertes aux diplômés en techniques d'éducation à l'enfance, les étudiantes étaient très bien informées des perspectives de carrière. Le niveau de connaissances des étudiants concernant les options universitaires semble très fort. Les résultats révèlent que la plupart des étudiants projetaient d'étudier à l'université peu de temps après l'obtention de leur diplôme, et qu'ils étaient clairement sûrs de pouvoir accéder à l'information fournie par les aides pédagogiques à ce sujet. Bien que les données de cette étude n'indiquent pas que les parents influençaient les étudiants quant au choix d'un programme plutôt qu'un autre, elles montrent que ces derniers se sentent soutenus par leurs parents pendant le processus de conseil et choix de programme.

Les résultats seront utiles pour l'administration des cégeps, le personnel et le corps professoral afin de promouvoir le programme, recruter les étudiants et favoriser la persévérance scolaire. Étant donné le besoin croissant d'éducatrices qualifiées, les aides pédagogiques jouent un rôle essentiel en informant les futurs étudiants et les parents de la valeur des programmes collégiaux en général et celle des techniques d'éducation à l'enfance en particulier.

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I began my journey through the Master Teacher Program (MTP) in the winter of 2008. I was one of only a few CEGEP teachers who would pioneer the new blended learning at-a-distance model. This was a very special cohort. Unlike most of the other participants in the MTP program, who lived in and around the Montreal area; I attended classes from my home in west Quebec. I participated in MTP courses weekly via video conference and continued to do so for the better part of the next six years. It was exciting for me to be one of the first to attempt the Master Teacher Program, in its entirety, from a distance. Along the way I forged several wonderful friendships with people living in and around greater Montreal and with others living hundreds of miles away in the eastern edges of the province. In fact the friendships I made with Sharon Coyle from Sept-Iles and Debbie Phillips and Brianna Kennedy from Gaspé have become so special to me. Despite only seeing each other “in the flesh” a couple of times over those years; we all became fast friends and were soon known as “the away team”. It is with heartfelt sincerity I thank Debbie and Brianna for all their support, encouragement and warmth over the years. To Sharon Coyle words almost fail me. Sharon has been such a friend and inspiration to me. Her creativity, originality and humour served us all well as we struggled to balance work, life and school. From the initial proposal writing through the data analysis portion and then on to the writing of my final conclusions Sharon has supported, encouraged and inspired me. For this I am forever grateful. She is a true friend.

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## INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career can be a daunting task. Seeking and receiving advice and accurate information is essential if one hopes to make an informed and considered choice. In Canada teenagers and their parents are tasked with this undertaking early on in high school. There are a multitude of career choices and post-secondary educational options available for consideration. College career and university degree programs abound. The amount and kind of information parents and students receive may have a significant impact on their future educational and career path selections. Interests, skills and aptitudes are all elements that help to guide future career and educational choices. The role of academic advisors and parents on this selection process is noteworthy.

Early childhood education as a professional practice has been evolving for several decades. Unfortunately misconceptions and misinformation about the role and importance of early childhood education within the general public seem to exist. It appears that this may contribute to the undervaluing of the benefits of early childhood education for children, families and the broader community. In addition to this lack of knowledge, harmful comments and negative perceptions are common. Often it is suggested by ill-informed members of the public that a diploma in early childhood education only leads to poorly paid, dead-end jobs with limited career advancement options. It may be that these negative perceptions influence parents and high school students. Indeed this misinformation could affect high school students' choices when considering enrolling in early childhood education, but also various other college career programs.

Despite considerable research in the area of early child development, and the positive implications of high quality education on learning, the profession of early childhood education continues to suffer from an image problem. Early childhood educators are often viewed as little more than glorified baby-sitters, having their work undervalued as menial, requiring few specific skills and dubbed "women's work". In this exploratory research study it is hoped that the descriptive data collected will be useful to early childhood education professionals and academic advisors alike. This

study will explore specific issues related to the selection of college programs by high school students, including questions such as: do perceptions of limited post-graduate academic options, limited career options, and limited opportunities for career advancement by school advisors influence enrollment into CEGEP<sup>1</sup> early childhood education programs<sup>2</sup>?

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<sup>1</sup> CEGEP: is an acronym for *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*, known officially in English as a "General and Vocational College". It refers to the public post-secondary education collegiate institutions exclusive to the education system in the province of Quebec in Canada.

<sup>2</sup> For admission into a Cégep diploma program in early childhood education applicants are required to have a secondary school diploma or a secondary school vocational diploma or a diploma of vocational studies awarded by the Quebec Minister of Education.

## CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Historically the primary care and early education of young children in Canada was the responsibility of mothers. Typically these mothers were not specifically trained to raise children, but rather were guided and supported by their own mothers, grandmothers and extended family members. Vital information relating to child rearing was passed down from generation to generation. Formal education was delayed until the child was five years old. Societal changes in Canadian culture over the last fifty years have resulted in changes in child rearing practices and educational objectives. As a result traditional multi-generational child rearing is increasingly less common. More common now are families made up of one or two parents who work outside the home (Statistics Canada, 2009). As a result, children are placed in child care facilities where a more formal focus on early learning and education takes place.

In today's society it is common for families to relocate to other cities and countries in search of employment opportunities. As a result families often live in cities far from parents, grandparents and other extended family members. In addition to these changes, the increase of women (mothers) in the paid labour force has dramatically increased (Statistics Canada, 2009).<sup>3</sup> According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada has one of the highest rates of mothers working outside the home among member countries (OECD, 2011).<sup>4</sup> As a result the need for childcare and family support services has increased.

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<sup>3</sup> The strong growth in labour force participation among women with young children is reflected in their employment rates. By 2009, 64.4% of women with children less than age 3 were employed, more than double the figure in 1976, when only 27.6% of these women were employed. Similarly, 69.7% of women whose youngest child was from 3 to 5 years of age were working in 2009, up from 36.8% in 1976. Source: Statistics Canada 2009

<sup>4</sup> OECD: origins date back to 1960, when 18 European countries plus the United States and Canada joined forces to create an organisation dedicated to global development. Today, 34 member countries span the globe, from North and South America to Europe and the Asia-Pacific region.

The Quebec government has responded to this need by establishing a universal childcare program. Studies by economist Pierre Fortin from the University of Quebec at Montreal and his colleagues from University of Sherbrooke indicated that the Quebec early childhood education model of universally funded \$7 childcare more than paid for itself through mothers' annual income and consumption taxes (Fortin, Godbut and St. Cerny, 2011). Their research went on to indicate that long-term employment and career options for mothers of children in these early childhood programs did not stop once their children went into the formal education system. Their study suggested that benefits for mothers who had access to early childcare services persisted long after their children outgrew the need for childcare. Links between continued and sustained employment and workforce participation were illustrated and highlighted the continued economic benefits for children, families and broader society. It is important to note that the universal childcare program in Quebec is hugely popular, so popular in fact that demand has outrun supply. The need for more qualified early childhood educators has been identified by the provincial government. The rate of investment into the training of qualified staff<sup>5</sup> and occupational standards<sup>6</sup> is intricately related to many of these broader economic and employment issues. Clearly, the Quebec government values early childhood education and care.

Despite considerable scientific research in the area of early child development (Early Years Study 3, 2011), and the positive implications of high quality education on learning, the profession of early childhood education continues to suffer from an image

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<sup>5</sup> Training of qualified staff refers to a certificate, diploma or degree from a post-secondary institution indicating a completed education program *or* a license, certificate or registration with a government regulatory body (or its designate) for an occupation indicating official permission to engage in that occupation *or* an industry-recognized certificate (granted by a certification body) upon a candidate's successful demonstration of occupational competence (CCHRSC, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Occupational Standards describes the knowledge, skills and abilities early childhood educators (ECEs) need to do their job effectively.

problem. Historically early childhood educators have been poorly paid (CCHRSC, 2012)<sup>7</sup> and may have had limited career advancement options in the past. This perception by some may contribute to misinformation about the profession and may be perpetuated by ill-informed advisors and parents. It may have also contributed to the negative anecdotal comments that are sometimes made in public or private forums. However, dramatic changes in the needs of modern Canadian families have changed all that. Presently in Canada there is a broad variety of jobs available to early childhood education graduates. Employment opportunities include positions within childcare facilities, family resource centres, early literacy programs, specialized intervention programs and kindergarten classrooms, just to name a few.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. A more focused examination of early childhood education will be undertaken. Through the exploration of knowledge, awareness, attitudes and perceptions held by high school and college advisors this study hopes to identify the kind of information which is presented to parents and students as they consider post-secondary options.

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<sup>7</sup> CCHRSC: The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) is the hub for information on human resource issues in Canada's early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector. The CCHRSC is a pan-Canadian, non-profit organization guided by a volunteer board made up of sector representatives from across Canada, and funded (between 2003-2013) by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC) Sector Council Program.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Choosing a career path and visualizing what you want to be when you grow up is a daunting task for young teenagers. Many adolescents and emerging adults particularly in the Quebec CEGEP system are forced into this situation early. By the time they are barely fifteen years old they are required to make choices about courses in high school that will have a direct impact on their future educational options. Some students are as young as sixteen when they first enter CEGEP. Many have not yet identified a clear desire or interest in one profession over another. The pressure to choose and to choose well is overwhelming for many of them.

In an effort to understand what might be going on in the teenagers' mind during this life-planning stage, it is helpful to be familiar with various theoretical frameworks. Various researchers have focused on the development of teenagers, the age group of most CEGEP students. Some of the researchers are James Marcia (1966) who focused on this age as being a transitional period from childhood to adulthood; Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) who used social and psychological theories to study the effects of external influences on a person's life choices; Robert Merton (1968) (being influenced first by William Thomas (1929)) who developed the theory of the self-fulfilling prophecy which impacts on notions of self as defined by others; and Ladislav Valache and Richard Young (1990) who developed a theory of contextual action which studied the relationship between actions and goals as they impact career and life choices.

Development, maturation and the transitional process of moving from being a child to becoming a young adult are significant. In the area of social and psychological theory much has been written about the effects of external influences on a person's life and the development of personal goals and actions. Does what others perceive about a person have the potential to affect that person's perception of themselves, and can that influence the life choices they make? By using some of these theoretical musings this researcher hopes to link how the perception of significant people in teenagers' lives influence the choices they make and the role advisors play in this process.

From a theoretical perspective James Marcia's Identity Theory (1966) helps to explore what might be going on during the adolescent stage of human development. His theory talks about the development of an identity status and how adolescents explore careers, values, beliefs and other aspects of their lives. He writes about four specific stages of development: identity diffused, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement. The first stage is one where the adolescent is confused about their identity and has not yet made any personal commitment to an occupation or future life path. In the second, called foreclosure, the adolescent has made a definite commitment to goals but these goals are often a result of socialized pressures and indoctrination. Moratorium refers to the stage where adolescents are in the midst of a crisis, where their commitments are either absent or are only vaguely defined, but they are actively exploring their alternatives. From here they move into the identity achievement stage. According to Marcia, adolescents who have moved to this stage have typically experienced a crisis, undergone some identity explorations and have finally made some kind of commitment to their personal identity. For the purpose of situating this study the first two stages of Marcia's identity theory, identity diffused and foreclosure, are of interest. As mentioned, high school students face many pressures to choose their path at an early stage in their development. It seems logical and likely that perceptions and opinions of parents and school advisors play a significant role in influencing students' choices and decisions. This would be the socialized pressure that Marcia writes about.

In conjunction with Marcia's theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development (1979) is also useful to frame this study. Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that people live their lives enmeshed in many different environments at the same time and that each of these environments (environmental systems) have an effect on each other. His theory suggests that people both affect and are affected by each of these environmental systems. The five environmental systems coined by Bronfenbrenner are: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The microsystem refers to the institutions and groups that most immediately and directly impact the child's development including family, school, religious institutions, neighborhood, and peers. The mesosystem refers to the

interconnections of the individuals and groups within microsystems, the impact of the interactions between family and teachers, and the relationships between the institutions and peers and the family. The exosystem refers to links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and how they can be affected by occurrences within these settings. An example of this is how a person's experience at home would be influenced by their parent's experience of getting fired from their job. The macrosystem describes the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include developing and industrialized countries, socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity. A child, his or her parent, his or her school, and his or her parents' workplace are all part of this large cultural context. The final system, chronosystem, refers to larger societal attitudes, cultural ideologies and historical perspective and how they may affect changes within a broader societal context. An example of this might include the increase in opportunities for women to pursue a career during the last thirty years.

In his approach, Bronfenbrenner suggests that the whole context of the adolescents' life has a role to play in their development. In what Bronfenbrenner calls the microsystem, the institutions and groups that most immediately and directly impact development are highlighted. Clearly school advisors and parental perceptions and attitudes regarding early childhood education as an education and career path can be situated within this context. Similarly the mesosystem and exosystem, which include friends, extended family, community and the broader world, play a significant influential role. Biases, misinformation and personal opinions of others are at play here. And finally what Bronfenbrenner calls the macrosystem and the chronosystem, encompassing larger societal attitudes, cultural ideologies and historical prospective are central and have an important part to play in influencing the advisors' perceptions as well as those of parents and ultimately the prospective college student.

In his groundbreaking book entitled *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), Robert Merton coined the theory known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. This theory posits that one person's belief (false or otherwise) about another person's behaviour may be sufficient enough to cause them to believe it to be true. In other words, the interpretation of a situation causes the action. This theory stems from the Thomas



theorem (Thomas, 1929), which states that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequence” (p.571-572). The notions stemming from both these theories suggest that perceptions held by some can have significant ramifications on the lives of others. In a study conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) entitled *Teacher Expectations for the Disadvantaged*, the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy was explored. In their research they looked at the effect of teacher expectations of their students’ academic abilities. After giving teachers false information about the intellectual potential of particular students (who, in fact, were selected at random by the researchers), Rosenthal and Jacobson concluded that the false information teachers’ were provided did influence their expectations of the students’ abilities, which in turn influenced the students’ performance and behaviour. Although this study would not be sanctioned by today’s ethics standards for research, it is interesting to consider if a similar influencing effect by school advisors and parents on high school students might not also be occurring today.

Contextual Action Theory was developed by Ladislav Valach and Richard Young in the 1990s, and is based on the notion that people’s behaviours can be understood as goal-directed actions. Valach and Young (Valache & Young, 2002) write that “Based on the role social representation plays in our actions: action theory systematically integrates everyday thinking and professional conceptualization and provides a means for linking counseling practice to counseling research.” (p.98). Valache and Young go on to suggest that everything a person does is an action and how these actions can lead to goals. Put in the context of career counseling, the questions school advisors ask students can lead to some kind of action. The student will provide an answer to the advisor’s questions or they won’t; either way they are performing an action by choosing to answer or not answer. The advisor is then able to perform another action. If for example, the advisor suggests a student review some websites or attend a career fair, this is an action for both advisor and student. When the student acts upon or even thinks about acting upon this action, it becomes a goal. The student then sees that learning about possible job options by attending a career fair can be a small goal that can then be built upon. Valache and Young describe their contextual action theory as an

approach that is rooted in many psychological and social psychological traditions and is informed by significant sociological literature (2002) including the writing of Lev Vygotsky on social learning and development (1930-1934/1978) and Alberta Bandura's more recent research related to his notion of social cognitive theory (1977).

Valache and Young suggest that contextual action theory has many practical applications and can be easily integrated into a career counseling context. They postulate that this theory contains a series of concepts that can be systematically organized and suggest that short-term actions can turn into mid-term projects and then into long-term career goals. They go on to discuss the notion that the relationship between life goals, projects and actions are very complex and in order for someone to remain motivated to pursue this goal oriented path, the long-term goals must be socially embedded, they must continue to hold meaning and they must be personally relevant over time.

Robert Merton's Social Theory and Social Structure (1968), James Marcia's Identity Theory (1966), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development (1979) and Valache and Young's Contextual Action Theory (1990) will all be helpful in examining the findings of this research study. The general aim of this study is to explore if and how social and psychological maturation, external environmental influences and social learning impact academic guidance advice given by advisors and received by students. Additionally it will be interesting to see if the findings indicate that cultural pressures and the systemic integration of these pressures into everyday life play a role in the choices and perceptions CEGEP students have toward potential education and future career options.

## **CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Upon conducting a literature review on academic advising vis-a-vis college career programs in general and early childhood education specifically, a number of themes emerged. Perceptions regarding longstanding gender stereotypes in early childhood education and the undervaluing of work performed by early childhood educators were evidenced. Sources revealed issues related to effectiveness of school advising and support in career planning. Additionally a number of other factors that appear to influence students' post-secondary choices were explored.

### **1 PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER OPTIONS**

Knowledge of and perceptions about future career options and the quality of information provided to students, by parents and school advisors, is central to the purpose of this study. In reviewing the literature it was found that there are factors that appear to influence post secondary choices including advisor helpfulness, emotional support, perceptions and erroneous or limited knowledge about available options. Studies (Hennessy and Leebosh, 2011; Osgood, Francis and Archer, 2006; Alexitch and Page, 1997) indicated that perceptions about the type and value of the work associated with a particular career played a key factor in how people felt about both choosing and staying with a program.

In Osgood *et al.* (2006) research indicated that students who participated in work placement programs in high school were often guided towards placements that were overwhelmingly gender stereotyped. Their research went on to suggest that high school work placements seem to be powerful indicators of possible future career or educational choices. In their study entitled *Gendered Identities and Work Placement: Why don't boys care?* Osgood *et al.* (2006) suggested the existence of gendered hierarchies and a perception that women's work is considered inferior to men's. These patterns raise issues of equality of opportunity. Trends identified in an earlier study by Francis (2002) are clearly evident, with girls being more likely to choose caring and creative jobs, and

boys more likely to choose business and technical occupations. This data also indicated that girls are more likely to say they would like to try a non-gendered traditional placement than boys, but despite indicating their interests in non-traditional work, evidence suggested that high school work placements serve to perpetuate long held beliefs of who should do what kind of work and the associated value of that work, and that work experience placements may serve to constrain occupational trajectories and perpetuate gender stereotyping.

## **2 SCHOOL ADVISING AND SUPPORT**

### **2.1 Effectiveness of Career Advising**

In a recent survey of Secondary Cycle students in Quebec entitled *A Look at Vocational Training* (MELS, 2005)<sup>8</sup> only 27% of students who participated reported that they placed a great deal of trust in academic and vocational information and guidance professionals. Close to half of the respondents (47%) reported to have met with an advisor regarding their academic future and career plans. According to the students in this survey the information they felt to be most important included job descriptions (69.8%), employment prospects (58.1%) and working conditions (49.3%).

In studies conducted by Alexitch *et al.* (1997), Nitecki (2011), and Munro (2007) a variety of issues relating to school advising were examined. These issues included: the type and quality of advice provided to prospective students, the usefulness of the advice they received and the effects of the advice on student decisions. Respondents rated the usefulness of advice from advisors less positively than advice received from either high school teachers or university professors, indicating that the information had been too vague or generally discouraging. More students felt that their teachers and professors had encouraged further educational and career development, and had helped them improve their academic skills. Results also appear to suggest that high school teachers and university professors provide students with important emotional support and

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<sup>8</sup> Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, Quebec.

encouragement. Findings also indicated that educational orientation (academic capacity and/or motivation) may play a role in the type of advice sought from instructors. This suggests that students may not be getting the type of individualized advice they need and this lack of guidance may discourage some students from taking a more active role in their learning.

Munro (2007) explored high school teachers' perceptions and knowledge of career guidance tools and their interest in assisting students in their future planning. Teachers generally agreed on the overall importance of students exploring career options in high school but indicated that high school teachers may not be familiar with the range of career options available to students. They also said they felt overworked and unskilled in the area of career advising, perhaps resulting in limited, incorrect or no career advice being provided. Also explored were the teachers' perceptions of parental influences on career planning for high school students. The data suggested that teachers thought that parental and family influences were the most important factor when it came to students' career choices.

The type and effectiveness of school counseling provided to students appears to vary considerably. In a US study entitled *Can I Get a Little Advice Here?* (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott and Dupont, 2010) data suggested that school guidance counselors are overworked and underpaid and generally ineffective in helping students make decisions about their lives after high school. The data collected suggested that teachers, rather than school counselors scored higher for helpfulness on career guidance to students.

## **2.2 Factors that Influence Post-Secondary Choices**

In the survey conducted by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS, 2005) it was estimated that close to 55% of the student respondents showed interest in their future and that when it came to discussing their future plans with family members and close friends, they most often consulted with their mothers (64.9%), followed by their fathers (50.9%) and to a lesser degree their siblings and friends. Based on these findings it seems that parents as well as school advisors play key roles in

influencing future planning by high school students and that this interest in their future begins early in their high school experience.

The issue of student retention at the college level may also be influenced by the guidance advice students are given. The data collected by Nitecki (2011) looked specifically at issues of student success and retention within college career programs. They found that where there were support groups within the academic program (either peer or faculty groups), with skilled and focused faculty that supported students' course and career aspirations, improved student success and retention resulted. Further evidence seems to suggest that the college program itself plays an important role in student support and subsequent success, serving as a bridge between the individual student and the larger institution. In other words, once a student is in an academic program, they are mentored in occupations and career choices. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development (1979) is helpful in examining the interconnectedness between students and various levels of school and community environments. As his theory suggests, students are affected by their environments. Interactions with peers and teachers illustrate how the whole context of what is going on in an adolescent's life (environment) impacts their choices. This theory suggests that interactions (influences) with particular people or groups can and does affect important life decisions and subsequent life choices.

It is interesting to look to the broader community, not just the school environment, when examining perceptions about school advising and career prospects. Perceptions of parents and the general public about early childhood education were examined in a focus group report by Hennessey et al. (2011). It seems likely that many of the perceptions (or better said misperceptions) about early childhood education and childcare expressed by the focus group participants could also be held by school advisors and may thereby bias the quality of information they share with high school and college students. A general lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of early learning on child development (Duncan, 2010) amongst the general public appeared significant, as did the lack of understanding of the role early childhood

educators play in helping children learn and supporting families. It will be interesting to see if the results of this study's investigation will yield the same conclusions.

Fenech, Waniganayake and Fleet (2009) conducted a study in Australia which looked at issues related to recruitment and retention in post secondary education. Specifically they were interested in collecting data that could help address a chronic shortage of early childhood teachers in that country. The perception of early childhood education being women's work and requiring no specific training was again evidenced in their data. They argued that the early childhood profession is a profession on the margins and that this marginalization complicates the efforts to enhance numbers of early childhood teachers. It went on to suggest that teachers in early childhood education services are less recognized for their pedagogical practices than teachers in other educational sectors therefore are less publically visible than their primary school counterparts. Strong public perception suggested that (child-related) community programs do not require qualified early childhood teachers; that the work they do is "just care, not educational". Similar to what was observed in the focus group report conducted in Canada by Hennessey et al. (2011) the lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of early childhood education for young children and its associated benefits for optimum child development are problematic.

In a study published in the *Journal of Employment Counseling*, Mark Chae (2002) wrote that it was important for counselors to be aware of and sensitive to their own biased attitudes about women and recognizes that they are at risk of internalizing cultural stereotypes that perpetuate sexist ideology. Not only do biased attitudes and gender stereotypes affect women, men too can be affected. In a study entitled *Rewards, Risks and Tensions: perceptions of males enrolled in an early childhood teacher education program* (Sumsion, 2000) 13 males enrolled in a program were surveyed. In the surveys they were asked about their reasons for wanting to become early childhood educators, the reactions of family and friends to their decisions and their experiences as male early childhood education students. Issues associated with having to work in a highly gendered feminist professional culture, the risk of being falsely accused of child sexual abuse and limited career options were all themes that emerged from these

interviews. Although it is difficult to generalize from the small non-representative sample used, it appears that perceptions about early childhood teaching continue to undermine male participation, thereby perpetuating the under-representation of men in early childhood programs. Sumsion (2000) goes on to say that with respect to advising students “a discussion of the preconceptions and misconceptions frequently ascribed to males’ professional involvement with young children could provide a useful starting point” (p. 95).

Factors that appear to influence post secondary choices vary greatly. Deeply held cultural biases and erroneous or limited knowledge of available career and educational options appear to be problematic (Schenck *et al.*, 2012). Limited resources (Rowan-Kenyon *et al.*, 2011), overworked systems and misguided directives may further contribute to lower program enrollment and student retention in college programs. Better access to information and clarity surrounding future prospects for students must be improved.

### **3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career programs, with a focus on early childhood education. The perspective of both advisors and students was sought. From the review of the literature related to academic advising and early childhood education college programs, it was anticipated that findings from this study would reveal that academic advisors are poorly informed about occupational and educational opportunities for early childhood education graduates resulting in incomplete and/or inaccurate information being provided to prospective students. It was further anticipated that students enrolled in early childhood programs themselves are ill informed of the scope of career and educational opportunities available to them after graduation. A series of research questions was used to guide this study.



### **3.1 Research Questions**

1. What do school advisors know about career opportunities for early childhood education graduates within the early learning employment sector? Do they share this information with prospective students?
2. What do school advisors know about university and post graduate opportunities for early childhood education students? Do they share this information with prospective students?
3. Do advisors have a student profile in mind when recommending a student go into early childhood education?
4. What perceptions (negative and positive) do school advisors have regarding early childhood education?
5. What perceptions do early childhood education students have regarding their chosen profession?

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4 METHODS**

Multiple sources were used to collect data in this study. The data collection methods used were intended to help draw a picture representing what students and advisors believe, know and share about college-level career program options. The data collected provides a snapshot of the kind of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options. The methods used in this study were intended to uncover attitudinal themes and overarching beliefs of both advisors and students about early childhood education programs specifically and career programs in general.

#### **4.1 Selection of Participants and Instruments**

For this research study three different instruments of measurement were used: focus groups, structured interviews and questionnaires. High school advisors employed by the Western Quebec School Board (WQSB) and college advisors from Cégep Heritage College were invited to participate in the focus groups. Students from the early childhood education student body at Cégep Heritage College were invited to participate in both the questionnaire and structured interviews.

#### **4.2 Procedures**

##### *4.2.1 Recording and Transcribing Interviews and Focus Groups*

Student interviews and focus group discussions were all audio recorded using two Nexus 7 tablet devices and a recording App called Tape-a-Talk Pro. Two recording devices were used simultaneously to ensure consistent sound quality and clarity of the spoken word. The audio recordings were stored electronically and shared only with the transcriber. The paid transcriber, who was unrelated to the project, transcribed and formatted the audio files using MS Word. The audio files were transcribed verbatim and included the interviewer's instructions and guiding questions. The texts were formatted so as to show the exchange of conversation. Different paragraphs were used to indicate the different speakers.

#### 4.2.2 *Focus Groups*

Convenience samples were used for the two focus groups. An email soliciting participation was sent to all advisors in the WQSB and Cégep Heritage College (Appendix I). Follow up emails and telephone conversations were also required in some instances. Four high school advisors from the WQSB participated in the first focus group and two college advisors from Cégep Heritage College participated in the second. A brief introduction and disclosure of the study's purpose was presented (Appendix A) and an Informed Consent form was completed by all participants (Appendix E & F). Both focus groups were held at Cégep Heritage College, 325 Cité des Jeunes, Gatineau, QC. Advisors from WQSB met in the college boardroom at 10am on April 4, 2014 and advisors from Cégep Heritage College met in Room 270A at 1pm. The focus group with advisors from the WQSB ran for just over one hour while the focus group with the Cégep Heritage College advisors ran for just over 28 minutes.

Student profiles and situational scenarios were used to provide context for the advisors. The researcher read aloud each of the five student profiles one at a time: allowing full discussion of each scenario before moving on to the next. Hard copies of each profile were provided to the participants for reference purposes. The five student profiles included specific information which related to five categories: a student description (i.e. age, personality, temperament etc.), school performance (i.e. academic standing), family background (parental influence, siblings etc.), personal interests and volunteer/work experience. A content analysis of the recorded data was conducted where specific themes were identified, coded and counted. The researcher remained non-judgmental by keeping a neutral demeanor and refraining from agreeing or sharing their opinions with the participants.

#### 4.2.3 *Student Questionnaire*

A questionnaire (Appendix H) was used to collect data from the students. It was distributed to all early childhood education students during the winter semester of 2014. The purpose of the questionnaire was twofold: 1) to determine students' thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of early childhood education programs, and 2) to

understand what role academic advising had in their choice of early childhood education as a career. This questionnaire captured basic demographic information which could be used to compare data between participants, and contained a series of 25 specific and focused statements. A Likert scale of measurement (i.e. strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) was used. A final question asked participants to rank their familiarity with various early childhood education employment settings using a scale of 1 to 10 where 1= most familiar and 10 = not at all familiar.

A pilot test of the questionnaire was performed by two early childhood education faculty members prior its use. This pilot test assisted in clarifying questions and helped to ensure that the statements and questions used made sense. Additionally the pilot test identified any assumptions or biases that may have been made while creating the statements and questions and also ensured that the most appropriate language was consistently used throughout.

#### 4.2.4 *Structured Interviews with Students*

Student interviews were conducted in the winter semester of 2014. All interviews were conducted by an early childhood education professor from Cégep Heritage College who was not currently teaching any of the interview participants. This was done to help facilitate a level of comfort for the participants: allowing them to feel comfortable to speak openly and honestly without any perceived fear of academic repercussions. A written explanation of the purpose of the study was provided in the email invitation requesting volunteer participation (Appendix J) and was sent out to all early childhood education students in the fall semester of 2013.

Nine students volunteered to be interviewed and represented early childhood education students from across all three years of the program. Four students from first and third year and one student from second year participated. All participants read and signed the Informed Consent form (Appendix D), which included a brief explanation of the purpose of the interviews and the research study. Additionally, student participants were told that anything said during the interview would remain confidential and that their participation was completely voluntary. Those student participants who were

under the age of 18 were provided with consent forms and were asked to have their parents/legal guardians sign them.

Both open and closed-ended questions were asked in an effort to ascertain student knowledge of academic advising related to career programs in general and of early childhood education specifically (Appendix G). A strict guideline for conducting the interviews was followed. The interviewer adhered to some key strategies and techniques including: patient listening, a tolerance of silence, and avoiding asking leading questions. The interviewer remained non-judgmental by keeping a neutral demeanor and refraining from agreeing or sharing personal thoughts with the participants. All information provided was held in strict confidence. Special care was taken to ensure all shared information was anonymously integrated into the final report to protect the identities of participants.

#### *4.2.5 Checking for Validity and Reliability of Instruments and Coding Process*

A content analysis of the recorded interviews was conducted where specific themes were identified, coded and counted. Both inductive and deductive reasoning was used when analyzing data and determining emerging themes. In order to safeguard against subjectivity and to support validity, all transcribed data was verified through vigilant re-reading. Careful attention was given to the integrity of the coding by checking and re-checking and by employing a constant comparative method of analysis. An inter-rater reliability test was conducted to ensure the reliability of the coding process. Another faculty member was asked to code a portion of the responses (20%) using the coding system devised by the researcher. As will be noted in the following Chapter, there was a 93% agreement between coders.

### **4.3 Ethical Considerations**

#### *4.3.1 Selection of Participants*

Participants for both the focus groups were solicited by email invitation. In this email invitation the purpose of the project was provided (Appendix J) as well as the Informed Consent form (Appendix E and F). Potential participants were contacted by telephone within two weeks of receiving the email invitation to determine if they were interested in participating. All high school advisors from the WQSB and Cégep Heritage College received the email invitation.

Similarly all early childhood education students enrolled in the fall 2013 semester at Cégep Heritage College were invited to participate. Students were informed that the interviews would be conducted after the submission of their fall 2013 final grades and that participation or non-participation in this research project would have no bearing whatsoever on their grades. Students were invited to respond within one week of receiving the email invitation. Selection of student participants was on a first come first served basis. Nine students volunteered to be interviewed.

#### *4.3.2 Confidentiality*

Participants were informed that all information shared through focus-group participation, interviews or questionnaires would be held in complete confidence. All questionnaires were anonymous. All data (questionnaires and audio files) will be held securely at the researcher's home until the completion of the research project. All data will be destroyed one year after the final submission of the research project to the University of Sherbrooke.

### 4.3.3 *Sharing Results*

A copy of the final report of this research project will be made available to all participants. Participants will be notified via email and invited to request a copy of the final research project. An electronic copy will be provided to all interested parties. The final report may also be shared with other interested parties including the Association Québécoise de Pédagogie Collégiale (AQPC)<sup>9</sup> and the Canadian Child Care Federation.

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<sup>9</sup> Founded by a group of educators eager to stimulate pedagogical progress in colleges and to enhance the teaching profession, the AQPC is an association open to all employees of public and private colleges, universities and other educational organizations within Quebec and in other regions.

## **CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

This study was conducted at a small English CEGEP located on the provincial border of Quebec and Ontario. Students studying early childhood education at Cégep Heritage College benefit from participation in fieldwork placements in both Ontario and Quebec. Graduates from this program have varied employment opportunities and university options in both Quebec and Ontario. Both local and regional influences should be considered when interpreting the findings from this study.

For this research study three different instruments of measurement were used: a student questionnaire, structured student interviews and focus groups interviews with advisors. Participants for the questionnaire and interviews were comprised of student volunteers from the early childhood education program at Cégep Heritage College. Focus group volunteer participants were employees of WQSB and Cégep Heritage College.

There were some modifications to the procedures outlined in the initial proposal. In the original proposal for this research study the researcher intended to use a pre-focus group questionnaire with the high school and college advisors. After further consideration it was decided that by using student scenarios (case studies), followed by specific questions related to early childhood education, the researcher would collect richer data, data that would reveal the working philosophy of the advisors. Additionally, in the original proposal the researcher intended to interview both students and advisors. After further consideration it was decided that student interviews and advisor focus groups would provide ample data, therefore the advisor interviews were not conducted.

### **5. PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Below, a summary of the data collected from student questionnaires and student interviews are presented in full. This is followed by an analysis that is an amalgam of students' perceptions and understanding. Timelines from the original proposal were adjusted due to delays in receiving approval from the WQSB Ethics Committee. Pilot tests for both the student questionnaires and the interview questions were conducted in



late October 2013. Data collection began in earnest in the winter of 2014. The student questionnaires and interviews were completed in February 2014. The focus groups sessions were held during the month of April and the transcription of both was completed in late April 2014.

### 5.1 Results of Student Questionnaires

A total of 47 early childhood education students from all three years volunteered and completed the questionnaire (Appendix H) during the winter of 2014. The questionnaires were distributed by early childhood education department faculty at the beginning of their respective classes. A verbal explanation of the purpose of the study was provided (Appendix A). Students were asked to complete the questionnaire without consulting with their peers in an effort to get honest and unbiased opinions.

In Table 1 below, a summary of the responses to each item are presented. The subject of the item is presented in an abbreviated phrase. Refer to Appendix H to see the item in full. Not all students answered every question. In some instances one or more of the questions was left blank. Consequently, N (number) is somewhat variable.

**Table 1: Student Questionnaire - Summary of Responses**

Questionnaire Statements		1 <sup>st</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
1. Always knew I wanted to work with young children		(N=22)		
	SA	18%	44%	56%
	A	64%	33%	38%
	D	18%	22%	6%
	SD	0%	0%	0%
2. Ease of getting information about careers in early childhood education		(N=22)		
	SA	27%	45%	44%
	A	68%	56%	50%
	D	5%	0%	6%
	SD	0%	0%	0%

3.	Advised to take early childhood education in HS	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=21)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	19%	0%	6%
	A	24%	25%	38%
	D	38%	50%	44%
	SD	19%	25%	13%
4.	Parents wanted early childhood education	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	23%	0%	25%
	A	27%	67%	38%
	D	41%	22%	38%
	SD	9%	11%	0%
5.	Early childhood education not as academically challenging as pre-university programs	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	18%	11%	6%
	A	41%	22%	15%
	D	36%	56%	22%
	SD	5%	11%	4%
6.	Able to work in Community Health Centre programs with early childhood education diploma	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=20)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	10%	33%	6%
	A	65%	44%	75%
	D	25%	22%	19%
	SD	0%	0%	0%
7.	Able to get into Social Work Programs	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=21)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	29%	56%	44%
	A	62%	44%	56%
	D	10%	0%	0%
	SD	0%	0%	0%
8.	Aspiring to teach elementary advised to take early childhood education	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	27%	0%	44%
	A	64%	78%	44%
	D	9%	22%	13%
	SD	0%	0%	0%

9. Good choice for career in Family Resource		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	32%	22%	75%
	A	59%	78%	25%
	D	9%	0%	0%
	SD	0%	0%	0%
10. Elementary teachers better qualified to teach preschoolers		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=21)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	10%	0%	0%
	A	0%	0%	19%
	D	76%	78%	38%
	SD	14%	22%	44%
11. Can expect to earn up to \$20/hr		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=15)
	SA	9%	25%	20%
	A	68%	50%	27%
	D	23%	25%	40%
	SD	0%	0%	13%
12. Upon graduation will be paid \$12/hr		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	0%	0%	0%
	A	50%	50%	19%
	D	45%	25%	56%
	SD	5%	25%	25%
13. After 5 years early childhood educator's make \$45,000		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=7)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=15)
	SA	5%	0%	0%
	A	68%	100%	67%
	D	27%	0%	27%
	SD	0%	0%	7%
14. Early childhood education employees receive benefits like sick leave & extended health care		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=15)
	SA	14%	0%	0%
	A	68%	75%	88%
	D	18%	25%	13%
	SD	0%	0%	0%

15.	Graduates are able to apply into social science at university		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=21)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
		SA	10%	0%	0%
		A	57%	75%	88%
		D	33%	25%	13%
		SD	0%	0%	0%
16.	Most early childhood education graduates go to university		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=21)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=14)
		SA	5%	0%	0%
		A	71%	25%	71%
		D	24%	75%	29%
		SD	0%	0%	0%
17.	Females over males advised to pursue early childhood education		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=15)
		SA	23%	13%	33%
		A	41%	63%	47%
		D	32%	25%	20%
		SD	5%	0%	0%
18.	Females better suited to early childhood education than males		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=15)
		SA	0%	0%	0%
		A	5%	0%	0%
		D	55%	38%	38%
		SD	41%	63%	63%
19.	Men not suited for early childhood education		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
		SA	0%	0%	0%
		A	0%	0%	0%
		D	50%	38%	38%
		SD	50%	63%	63%
20.	Easy to get early childhood education job after graduation		1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=15)
		SA	5%	0%	13%
		A	64%	50%	80%
		D	32%	50%	7%
		SD	0%	0%	0%

21.	Early childhood education employees are perceived as teachers	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	0%	13%	25%
	A	64%	50%	13%
	D	32%	38%	44%
	SD	5%	0%	19%
22.	Early childhood education is a prestigious profession.	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=21)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	24%	25%	19%
	A	57%	38%	44%
	D	19%	38%	25%
	SD	0%	0%	13%
23.	Daycare early childhood education employees are well respected	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=7)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	14%	0%	0%
	A	59%	43%	25%
	D	27%	57%	56%
	SD	0%	0%	19%
24.	Early childhood education graduates have more specialization in child development than elementary teachers	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=8)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	14%	38%	38%
	A	59%	50%	50%
	D	27%	13%	6%
	SD	0%	0%	6%
25.	Will be working as early childhood educators in 10 years	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (N=22)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (N=9)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (N=16)
	SA	32%	0%	25%
	A	36%	44%	38%
	D	27%	56%	38%
	SD	5%	0%	0%

## 5.2 Results of Student Interviews

Nine students were interviewed over a three week period in the winter semester 2014 and each interview lasted between eight and fifteen minutes. Specific open and closed-ended guiding questions were asked of each participant (Appendix G). Additional clarifications with regards to some of the open-ended questions were

sometimes used in an effort to extrapolate details and to allow the participants to offer elaboration around specific questions.

The answers provided for each of the guiding questions were grouped in Table 2 for future content analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative data was derived from the student interviews. Where it was possible to count like answers (i.e. yes or no) that was done, additionally more detailed and descriptive student comments were grouped and analyzed using codes that emerged after applying constant comparative analysis techniques. Not every student interviewed clearly answered each question posed to them. In some cases a definitive answer could not be ascertained. An in depth comparison of student responses between first, second or third year students was not a focus for this study however is it noteworthy that when asked about the kinds of work they were aware of for early childhood education graduates the third year students were much more knowledgeable. These students were able to speak of specific kinds of work beyond that of traditional childcare sector jobs and appeared to have a deeper understanding of the diverse skills required by early childhood educators.

**Table 2 Summary of Answers from Student Interview data**

<b>Questions asked</b>	<b>Answers</b>
What year are you in?	4 first year (including adult student returning to college – off profile) 1 second year 4 third year
Was early childhood education your first choice?	6 reported yes 1 reported no
Did you change from another program?	2 reported yes 7 reported no
Did you ever speak to an advisor at HS?	5 reported yes 4 reported no
Did you ever speak to a college advisor?	2 reported no 2 reported yes
What kind of advice did you seek?	3 reported seeking career and future options info 4 reported seeking advice about college programs and university 1 reported seeking help identifying strengths and weaknesses

Was the advice you receive helpful?	5 reported yes 1 reported it was repetitive 3 reported no
Did you receive any advice from your parents?	2 reported no 2 reported yes 5 reported that parents were supportive of whatever they wanted to choose.
What do you know about academic requirements for getting into early childhood education?	9 reported high school diploma 1 reported Quebec residency 2 reported no advanced math required 2 reported criminal reference check 1 reported immunizations and good health
What kind of jobs/work are you aware of for early childhood education graduates?	<p><i>Many jobs/career paths and higher education options were mentioned. These included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work as an early childhood educator in group or home child care setting</li> <li>• Own or open own daycare program become a coordinator of a child care program</li> <li>• Able to work as early childhood educator with different age groups/settings (school age, preschool, toddler, outdoor)</li> <li>• Work helping parents: adoption/financial services, community resource worker</li> <li>• Work in an elementary school as early childhood educator or teacher's aide</li> <li>• Work as a kindergarten teacher</li> <li>• Work as early childhood educator in Full Day Early Learning classrooms</li> <li>• Work one-on-one with children</li> <li>• Teach Baby Sign Language</li> </ul> <p><i>Other jobs mentioned that required additional education included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social worker – reported 2 times</li> <li>• Child psychologist – reported 2 times</li> <li>• Child psychiatrist</li> <li>• Work in an autism unit (clinical)</li> <li>• Teacher: elementary – reported 4 times</li> <li>• Teacher: high school, college and university</li> <li>• Speech pathologist</li> <li>• Counselor</li> <li>• Resource teacher</li> </ul>
Describe the kinds of skills necessary to work as an early childhood educator?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding/compassionate/caring: reported 17 times</li> <li>• Patience: reported 7 times</li> <li>• Confidence, self - awareness: reported 7 times</li> <li>• Passion; desire to work with children, help others: reported 6 times</li> <li>• Communication &amp; teamwork skills: reported 4 times</li> <li>• Flexible: reported 4 times</li> </ul> <p><i>Other specific skills/qualities mentioned:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to handle stress</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to prioritize</li> <li>• Be organized</li> <li>• Have good behaviour management skills</li> <li>• Awareness of diversity of other cultures</li> <li>• Knowledgeable about child development and governing legislation</li> </ul>
<p>Did the advisors talk about opportunities in early childhood education beyond college?</p>	<p>4 reported no 4 reported they spoke about some early childhood education related opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholarships</li> <li>• We talked about how we can link early childhood education to different pathways, early childhood education doesn't mean I can only work in a daycare but it can help lead me to other things totally unrelated (ie: senior policy analyst/negotiator),</li> <li>• Just that it was easier to go to college first and then university</li> <li>• It would be easier to get a teaching diploma</li> </ul>
<p>What are your plans after graduation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitely want to be an educator; I definitely want to go to university, work helping parents with financial stuff, study to be a social worker or a youth counselor.</li> <li>• Leave my mark on the world, make it a better place, help shape children's future, have an impact on children's lives.</li> <li>• I'm keeping my options open, I would like to go into the elementary school system and then go back to school.</li> <li>• I want to go to Bishop's or McGill to go right into the education program to become an elementary teacher and then I want to get my masters, I really want to work with kids, go back to university to take other courses and get in touch with different techniques.</li> <li>• Get my bachelors of education, I haven't figured it out but I like children and I like education.</li> <li>• Take online courses, I'd like to take what I have learned and put it into practice, I'm always learning, further my studies and earn money at the same time. I'm looking at some psychology courses – understand how children's brains are working and how they are developing so I can help them further.</li> <li>• I plan to go to university – sociology with woman's studies to work with families instead of children directly, or maybe psychology and second language teaching – it interests me and is related to early childhood education too. Psychology because I want to broaden my knowledge of child development – to understand how people think.</li> <li>• Work in the local area for a year in the childcare field and then teach kindergarten in Tonga. Volunteering first then working there.</li> <li>• I've decided to keep on pursuing teacher education university – direct entry programs, Guelph-Humber,</li> </ul>



	Bishops, Carleton Ottawa U...there's lots.
Do you plan to go to university?	7 reported yes 2 reported yes but not right away
Do you plan to go directly into the labour force?	<i>General comments from students reporting they want to enter workforce after graduation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm interesting in travelling and working not just locally but internationally.</li> <li>• Yes I want to work for a while and take online courses</li> <li>• Right now I have debts so I need to work to pay off my debts</li> <li>• Definitely want to be an educator and study at university later</li> </ul>
Are you aware of various university options available to early childhood education graduates?	2 reported no 4 reported Bishops University 2 reported Carleton University 2 reported schools in Toronto 1 reported Sherbrooke 1 reported British Columbia 1 reported university in Australia
What do you know about salary scales and benefits for early childhood education grads?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 students reported no knowledge of salary scales</li> </ul> <i>Other general comments:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are low. It depends on the place, different provinces have different rates. Most of them don't have any benefits.</li> <li>• I know there is quite a range and depending if you work in regulated or unregulated daycares so you need to be careful when choosing your employer. Pay ranges depends upon your experience and it goes up by the year and level (at least in Quebec). You get more vacation and stuff as you work longer, up to 4-5 weeks maximum I think.</li> <li>• I know that in some places in Canada they're paid really high and really well where other places there're paid really low. I know it depends on the centre itself, so if it is privately owned chances are it is going to be a little different than a government owned centre. But the difference in the provinces is really crazy.</li> <li>• Benefits...there's not a lot. Because most educators I talk to tell me they are underpaid especially when it comes to insurance and it's taken off your pay. I know you can start at \$17.50 and then for the years go up to \$24 an hour. I think that's the top you can up...it's not a job that you are going to become rich doing it. If you're doing it for the money you're not in the right place. You need to have the "la volonte" the desire.</li> <li>• I know that as soon as you have your diploma it kinda boosts your salary quite a lot and I think it counts for years of experience but I'm not sure.</li> <li>• Between \$15 and \$25 but it depends on the daycare. I'm not sure about benefits but I think that if they are paying good money then there will be benefits as well. I'm pretty sure there are good benefits.</li> </ul>

<p>What kind of career would you like to have?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have an impact on the world and to teach</li> <li>• Work with kids; be around kids and helping them, listening and helping them to learn to be good kids.</li> <li>• Definitely want to be teaching kids, probably kindergarten or up to grade 4...something stable where you see the kids every week.</li> <li>• Work in a daycare for a couple of years and then go back to school. I like working with younger kids so in a centre or home childcare.</li> <li>• I really like toddlers; they are a lot of fun.</li> <li>• Working with families, becoming an consultant, share my knowledge of child development with parents during the day at childcare services.</li> <li>• Going to university and be a full time early childhood educator. I look towards working with kids with special needs but I definitely want to get my Bachelors of Ed. and teach elementary school.</li> <li>• 2 reported they were not sure</li> </ul>
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### 5.3 Analysis of Data Collected from Students

#### 5.3.1 Access to Information

Items 2, 3 and 4 asked respondents to rate statements related to access to information about early childhood education. Overwhelmingly 99.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they found it easy to find information about careers in early childhood education. Interestingly only 37% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that their high school advisor had been helpful in advising them to pursue early childhood education in college. This begs the question, where did the students access their information if not from their advisor? It also may suggest that the advice students did receive was limited. These results seem to align with a study by Alexitch et al. (1997) conducted at the University of Windsor, where respondents indicated that the information they received from guidance counselors had been too vague or generally discouraging.

### 5.3.2 *Advice from Advisors*

A content analysis was conducted on the transcribed data from the nine student interviews. Several trends emerged during this process. When asked if early childhood education was their first program choice 86% reported yes. When asked about advice received from advisors, all participants reported they had sought and received some kind of advice or counseling however only 55% stated this advice was helpful. As in the recent survey of Secondary Cycle students in Quebec entitled *A Look at Vocational Training* (MELS, 2005) 47% of respondents reported to have met with an advisor and 73% reported that they did not have much faith in their guidance professionals. In another study entitled *Can I Get a Little Advice Here?* (Johnson *et al.*, 2010) the data suggested that school guidance counselors had limited effectiveness in helping students make decisions about their lives after high school.

### 5.3.3 *Advice from Parents*

When asked about the advice they may have received from their parents, only 22% of participants indicated that they had received parental advice when investigating program choices after high school. What is interesting is that of the participants interviewed more than half (56%) stated that their parents were supportive of whatever program they chose. This supportive role seems to align with some of the findings of a study conducted by Monroe (2007). In that study the data suggested that high school teachers thought parental and family influences were the most important influence when it came to students' career choices.

### 5.3.4 *Knowledge of Employment Opportunities for Early Childhood Education Graduates*

#### 5.3.4.1 Post Graduate Employment Opportunities

When asked to rate statements related to post graduate employment options respondents across all three years were optimistic for future employment prospects. Items 6 and 9 asked if early childhood educators would have the credentials to work in

community resource programs or have a career in a family resource centre; 79% and 87% respectively indicated they agreed or strongly agreed. This optimistic outlook regarding postgraduate employment seems to hold up when compared to the results of the survey by the Government of Quebec entitled *Relance Survey of College Graduates Technical Training 2013*. Their data for 2013 indicated that 94.1% of early childhood education graduates were working full time as early childhood educators or in a related field.

#### 5.3.4.2 Job Opportunities and Post Graduate Opportunities

When asked questions related to jobs or post graduate opportunities, students reported a wide range of possibilities. Knowledge of direct-entry labour force jobs was very high, with all participants mentioning several potential employers. A significant number of career options requiring additional university education was also frequently discussed with no less than nine specific careers highlighted.

#### 5.3.4.3 Salary and Expected Rates of Pay

Knowledge of salary scales, rates of pay and benefits available to early childhood education graduates seemed to be relatively weak. While some participants had some basic knowledge, the majority appeared to only have the vaguest notion of what salary scales, rates of pay and benefits might look like in today's Canadian labour force.

### 5.3.5 *Perception of Attributes Needed by Early Childhood Educators*

#### 5.3.5.1 Important Attributes in an Early Childhood Educator

When interview participants were asked to describe the kinds of skills they thought were necessary to work as an early childhood educator, they used words such as understanding, compassionate and caring 17 times. Additionally, words such as patience, confidence and self awareness were reported seven times. Having a passion or desire to work with children and wanting to help others also emerged as a significant theme, being reported six times.

### 5.3.5.2 Gender and the Early Childhood Education Profession

When asked to rate statements related to gender, responses were overwhelmingly consistent across all respondents. Item 18 and 19 sought to determine if respondents felt females were better suited to a profession in early childhood education than males. When asked to rate the statement “men are not well suited to become early childhood educators”, 100% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings run contrary to statements made in a study published in the *Journal of Employment Counseling* (2002), where Mark Chae wrote that biased attitudes and gender stereotypes that affect women can also affect men.

### 5.3.6 *Awareness of University Options for Early Childhood Education Graduates*

#### 5.3.6.1 University Bound

When asked if they were planning to go on to university 100% of those interviewed reported yes, with two of the participants indicating they planned to go directly to work first, and return to university at a later date. Awareness of university options available to early childhood education graduates appeared to be high, with several universities across Canada being mentioned. These findings are interesting and appear contradictory to what many others researchers have found. In studies by Schenck *et al.* (2012) and Rowan-Kenyon *et al.* (2011) that looked at factors influencing post secondary choices, they suggested that limited knowledge of available career and educational options appear to be problematic.

Similarly when asked about post graduate university options on the student questionnaire participants overwhelmingly indicated positive responses: items 7 and 8 asked if early childhood educators would be qualified to apply to university social work programs or elementary school education, their responses were 97% and 86% respectively. These findings suggest the same optimistic outlook regarding postgraduate university level studies as seen in the Quebec government survey *Relance Survey of*

College Graduates Technical Training 2013, where their data for 2013 indicated that 87.9% of early childhood education graduates went on to study in a related field.

### 5.3.7 *Value of Early Childhood Education*

#### 5.3.7.1 Early Childhood Educators: Teachers or Not?

When asked to rate statements related to the value of the work, knowledge or skills of early childhood educators, 90% of all respondents indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “elementary school teachers are better qualified than early childhood educators to work with preschool children”. Interestingly however, when asked to rate the statement “early childhood educators are perceived as teachers”, only 55% of overall respondents agreed or strongly agreed and of the third year students who responded only 38% agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. This apparent contradiction could reflect a state of cognitive dissonance. It also seems to support the findings of a study conducted by Fenech *et al.* (2009), investigating a chronic shortage of early childhood teachers in Australia, which noted that there appeared to be a perception of early childhood education as women’s work requiring no specific training. This study went on to suggest that teachers in early childhood education services were less likely to be recognized for their pedagogical practices than teachers in other educational sectors, therefore were less publically visible than their primary school counterparts.

Attitudes and perceptions about early childhood education as a profession are central to this research study. When asked to rate the statement “early childhood education is a prestigious profession”, 69% of the total respondents agree or strongly agree. However when asked to rate the statement “early childhood education trained daycare workers are well respected by the general public”, the overall response rate for agree and strongly agree fell to 47% with only 25% of third year respondents agreeing and none strongly agreeing. These response results appear to indicate a discrepancy between perception of early childhood education as a profession and the perceived status of early childhood educators working within the daycare or childcare milieu. These kinds of findings were also indicated in the study by Fenech *et al.* (2009) which stated

that strong public perception suggests (child-related) community program staff do not require qualified early childhood teachers; that the work they do is “just care, not education”. This is similar to what was observed in the focus group report conducted in Canada (Hennessey et al. 2011) which noted a lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of early childhood education for young children and of the associated benefits for optimum child development.

## 5.4 Analysis of Data Collected from Advisors in Focus Groups

### 5.4.1 Scenarios used to initiate Discussions

The researcher read aloud each of the five different student profiles one at a time then asked the advisors to offer their thoughts on the kind of guidance and/or advice they would provide for each scenario. Advisors were asked to provide the kinds of questions they would ask and what they would be looking for based on those questions. The researcher asked specific advisors to begin the dialogue based on each student profile. Each advisor was given the opportunity to speak first, then the others were invited to add to the conversation as they saw fit. The advisors were asked to respect a speaking order so as not to interrupt or speak over one another. This procedure helped to ensure quality audio recording for later transcription. Subsequent conversations were allowed to flow until all participants had offered all they wanted to say before the researcher moved on to the next student profile.

Below are the scenarios which were read aloud. The complete scenarios with a summary of the advisors responses and the exchanges of conversation that followed are found in Appendix N and were formatted so as to show the scenarios. In Appendix N, different paragraphs were used to indicate the different speakers.

### Table 3: Student A

**Student Description:** 16 year old male with an outgoing personality. He makes friends easily and demonstrates confidence and ease when speaking with peers and adults. He has no clear career aspirations.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** Low academic standing: struggles to pass both English and math but with tutoring and support he is expected to graduate on time.

**Family Background:** Two parent family living in Aylmer. Both parents work full-time at blue-collar jobs. Both parents hold high school diplomas but never attended post-secondary education. Neither parent has indicated strong feelings about any college program choice. There are two younger siblings; 3 and 6 years old.

**Personal Interests:** Strong athlete: plays on the HS soccer team and is captain of his local rugby team.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** Volunteers every Saturday morning and during the summer coaching soccer to children 5-10 years old. Babysits for neighbors and siblings often but has not had any other paid employment experience.

#### Table 4: Student B

**Student Description:** 16 year old female, extremely shy and has difficulty speaking up in class or with peers. She has no clear career aspirations or is too shy to speak about them.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** Strong student with high grades in all courses. She possesses excellent reading and writing skills and is expected to graduate top of the class, winning several academic awards.

**Family Background:** Comes from a small rural farming community. Neither parent graduated high school. They married young and both work the farm. They hold to traditional gender role stereotypes regarding career and lifestyle choices and have clearly expressed these opinions to their children. Although they do not discourage their daughter from applying to college they have expressed that she should take something “practical”. She is the middle child with two older brothers and two younger sisters.

**Personal interests:** Loves to read non-fiction and cook and spends most of her time at home with her parents on weekends.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** Casual babysitting of younger siblings/cousins who live on nearby farms.

#### Table 5: Student C

**Student Description:** 16 year old female. She gets along well with others. She is comfortable discussing her thoughts and ideas both inside and outside of class. She aspires to work with children, possibly becoming a kindergarten or grade one teacher.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** She is an average student who probably could get better grades if she applied herself a little more. She has solid reading and writing skills and is an effective problem solver.

**Family Background:** She is an only child living with her single mother in downtown Hull. Her mother is a university graduate with an MBA, working as a senior policy advisor for the federal government. Her mother feels strongly that her daughter should choose a college program that



will allow her to go on to university.

**Personal Interests:** She loves working with children in recreation programs. She enjoys art, theatre and dance and has taken several extracurricular courses in these subjects. She played the lead role in the last two HS drama productions.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** She babysits for several families regularly and has done so since she was 13 years old. She volunteers with the local Brownie troop and worked last summer as a paid assistant counselor at a local summer day camp.

### Table 6: Student D

**Student Description:** 23 year old female. After high school she was enrolled in Social Science but did not finish the program. After taking a couple of years off to work she wants to return to Cegep to complete her DEC but is unsure which program to choose. She is interested in psychology and enjoys working with people.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** Her first attempt at CEGEP did not produce stellar grades except in the courses she was particularly interested in. She excelled in both Intro to Psychology and Intro to Sociology. She has solid reading and writing skills.

**Family Background:** She is one of three children in a middle class two parent family from Chelsea. Her mother is an elementary school teacher and her father is an accountant. They support any path she wants to take and let her make her own choices. She has moved out of her parent's home and now shares an apartment with a girlfriend who is in her first year at the University of Ottawa. Her parents are prepared to help her financially while she is in school full-time.

**Personal Interests:** She has a dog she is very attached to and takes recreational dance and yoga classes regularly.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** Presently she works part time as a server in a popular local restaurant where she makes good money. She has held a variety of positions since leaving Cegep the first time including child care, retail and restaurant work.

### Table 7: Student E

**Student Description:** 17 year old male. Very sociable and gets along well with others. Has a girlfriend that he has been dating for two years. She will also be attending CEGEP in the fall. He enjoys discussing current affairs and issues related to social injustice.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** He is a good student who succeeds at most things he puts his mind to. He graduated high school with an overall average of 80%. He plans to go to university but wants to get some kind of credential so that he can work to help pay his own way through school.

**Family Background:** Two parent working family. His mother is a Developmental Service Worker with a college diploma and his father is a university graduate working as a computer

programmer/analyst with the federal government. Both parents are very supportive of their son's choices and feel that Cegep is a time to "try things on". They have told him that if he chooses a program and then decides it's not for him, he is welcome to make a change into another program. They say "you are young and there are many paths in the road ahead. It is okay to travel down a few in an effort to find the one that is best for you."

**Personal Interests:** He plays recreational soccer and loves video gaming in his spare time.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** For the past three summers he has worked at a local golf course cutting grass and doing general odd jobs. Although this is a good job and the money isn't bad he knows he doesn't want to do menial labour in the future.

#### 5.4.2 *Content Analysis of Focus Group Discussions: General Responses to Scenarios of CEGEP Applicants*

##### 5.4.2.1 Getting to Know the Student

As the focus group discussions progressed patterns and overarching themes began to emerge. It became clear that advisors were primarily concerned with getting to know the students. They wanted to glean a picture of the students' strengths and interests and what ideas students might have concerning their potential career path. In an effort to ascertain this information they often asked questions such as:

"What are your favourite subjects?"

"What kind of career do you see yourself in?"

"If the student really has no kind of specific career goal, I really want to try to help him see, "What are you good at?"

"Where do they see themselves and what would they enjoy doing for the rest of their life or for part of their career?"

##### 5.4.2.2 Presenting Options and Pathways

Advisors indicated they did not want to lead students down specific paths but rather how they wanted to present students with options, pathways or opportunities that they might not be aware of.

"I hate leading students down a specific path."

“I never want to lead a student too strongly into a career, “oh this program is amazing...you should do this.” But I still suggest ones that I think are a good fit and see how the student reacts.”

“So looking at various programs that we offer and distinguishing, explaining what a career program is, explain what a pre-U program is. But again, I never pretend to know what that person thinks or wants. I just like to try to present options and then have them ask further questions and just keep the dialogue going to help them that way.”

“I feel for so many students it’s important to get them exposed to the programs available...”

#### 5.4.2.3 Ascertaining Family Dynamics and Practical Issues

Family dynamics and practical issues related to costs and living arrangements also emerged as important themes. Clearly advisors felt that practical considerations had a significant impact on long term success. They expressed that it was important to ascertain the level of parental support students had and then advise students of options that were practical and held more possibility of parental acceptance.

“I’d be saying, “Can you picture yourself being that far away from home?”

“I’d also want to involve the parents in terms of their support... and we want to make sure we are on the same page...”

”These are my favourite parents to work with; who support the CEGEP system, who also support the fact that our students are graduating so early, that making a career decision at this time is not realistic for a lot of kids...they are open to the transitional phase where CEGEP is really the best thing; it is exploratory and it’s tuition free...”

A larger sampling of the advisors’ responses highlighting these themes can be found in Appendix N.

#### 5.4.3 *Content Analysis of Responses to Specific Questions Related to Early Childhood Education*

Once all of the student profiles were thoroughly discussed the researcher shifted the focus from academic advising in general to early childhood education advising

specifically. These questions were asked in an effort to ascertain advisors' knowledge, perceptions and advice given to prospective early childhood education students. A larger sampling of the advisors' responses highlighting these themes can be found in Appendix N.

#### 5.4.3.1 List of Questions and Presentation of Sample Responses

1. Describe the kind of student you might suggest enrolling into an early childhood education program.
2. Assume a student asks you about the kind of jobs he/she could get after graduating from an early childhood education program. What do you tell him/her?
3. Assume a student is interested in early childhood education but his/her parents want him/her to go to university. What do you say to the student?
4. A male student is interested in early childhood education but is concerned it is "a girls' program". What do you say to him?
5. A student is very interested in the early childhood education program but his/her parents feel it will only lead to poorly paying jobs. What do you say to him/her?

Analysis of the transcribed data identified an overarching category, Tools and Strategies, used by the academic advisors to get students to think about what they wanted to do and why, thereby helping them to advise the students. This major category was then broken into six smaller, specific categories that represented the themes that emerged after employing the constant comparative method of content analysis. The categories and codes used to analyze the data from both focus groups are illustrated in Table 8 below. When coding the focus group data colour highlighters were used to select and identify specific phrases, sentences and sometimes paragraphs that fit into one of the six identified categories. An inter-rater reliability test was conducted. An early childhood education faculty member was asked to code a portion (20%) of the data using this coding system to ensure the integrity of the researchers coding system.

Agreement between coders was 93%. Table 9 (below) details a sampling of coded phrases advisors provided.

**Table 8 Categories: Tools and Strategies: codes used in focus group analysis**

Categories	Description	Code Colours
Practicality of Choice:	This category includes questions or statements advisors use to glean information about the practicality of students' choices. It can include information about the student's age, living arrangements, financial support, tuition issues etc.	PC: yellow
Strengths/ Weaknesses/Interests:	This category includes questions and comments that encourage students to espouse their strengths, weaknesses and interests. These may be gleaned through interviews, self reporting, aptitude tests etc.	SWI: orange
Encouraging Personal Exposure:	This category represents opportunities where advisors expose students to "real world" experiences related to school or work. These could include telling them about obstacles to getting into a field, visiting work or school environments, reviewing websites and published program information etc.	EPE: green
Presenting Options within Options:	This category includes information provided to students and parents regarding CEGEP vs. University, CEGEP leading to university, dispelling misconceptions about career programs, job/employment opportunities and various other academic pathways.	POO: turquoise
Finding out about Parents Role:	This category includes information and/or comments about parents; including probing questions regarding parents' thoughts and/or concerns, and suggested meetings.	FPR: pink
Student Autonomy:	This category includes statements on the part of the advisors or the students that stress the student's autonomy to make decisions.	SA: Red

**Table 9 Sample of coded entries for each category**

Practicality of Choice: (yellow)	<p>"Well, the first thing for my students is I always ask them if they're thinking about either staying in Ontario or Québec, because my students always have to leave home usually, to come to the city, because they usually don't drive."</p> <p>"Potentially cost is an issue..."</p>
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Strengths/ Weaknesses/Interests: (orange)	<p>“I might ask him what are your favourite subjects; those kinds of things. What kind of careers do you see yourself; working inside an office or working more hands-on outside.”</p> <p>“I want to know what their strengths are. I think we should map out weaknesses.”</p>
Encouraging Personal Exposure: (green)	<p>“I feel for so many students it’s important to get them exposed to the programs to see what’s available (i.e. student-for-a-day).”</p> <p>“I have a little video that shows...it’s a really neat six minute video that shows all careers...really well done...shows all the careers related to the field”</p>
Presenting Options within Options: (light blue)	<p>“I would mention the early childhood education to Bishops University connection.”</p> <p>“Tell them the various pathways that they could take. So they could go to pre-university CEGEP then off to university or they could do the early childhood education then go off to university afterwards that way too.”</p>
Finding out about Parents Role: (pink)	<p>“It’s important, with parents like this, to inform them of what the options are as well, not just the student because sometimes that message is not relayed the same way it would be it was directly from us.”</p> <p>“I feel it is primarily a student focused meeting .... but you want the parent to be supportive. You want them to be on board so I would be asking about “what do you see your child doing?”</p>
Student Autonomy: (red)	<p>“I would kind of leave that to him at that point to kind of come back to me. And then would revisit him to see what came out of what his ideas.”</p> <p>“...give her exposure and then make a decision based on what she liked to do.”</p>

#### 5.4.4 A Synthesis of Advisors’ Statements

In comparing the responses and statements made by advisors based on the student scenarios and the early childhood education specific questions, a pattern of overlapping themes emerged. It seems evident from the statements provided by advisors that broadening the understanding of the CEGEP system is central to the work they do.

Educating both parents and students alike on the varied options, opportunities and potential pathways available through the CEGEP system is a priority for advisors.

#### 5.4.4.1 The Value of a CEGEP Education

Advisors mentioned several practical issues they considered significant to long term student success. These issues included facts related to university tuition versus tuition-free CEGEP, the potential benefit of a three year CEGEP program which allows students to mature before going on to university, the added value of hands-on practical fieldwork from early childhood education and the advantage that experience offers students when applying into many university programs. The following quotes, given by different advisors, exemplify a commonly held belief amongst the advisors regarding the CEGEP system, university pathways and the value of choosing early childhood education as a career option.

“I think a huge part of our role and part of our job is just dispelling common myths. It’s constant. Everything that parents think about the CEGEP system in general, because they don’t know what it’s about...they don’t value the career programs at all. They’re still university minded and think that CEGEP pre-U is the only direct link to that.”

“Parents coming from that frame of mind need to realize partly based on tuition and partly based on experience, they can think of CEGEP programs as the springboard to the next step.”

“It’s important with parents like this to inform them of what the options are as well, not just the students, because sometimes that message is not relayed in the same way it would be if it was directly from us.”

“I think it’s about educating them that it doesn’t end with the early childhood education program, right, and I think that’s sort of a misconception.”

#### 5.4.4.2 Presenting All Options

Another common theme between general advising and early childhood education specific advising was the idea of presenting options and potential pathways. When advising students in general, advisors sought to provide a variety of possible routes to

career and university. Several advisors mentioned that students who were interested in psychology or working with children might consider a two year pre-university social science pathway or a three year early childhood education pathway; they indicated that both could lead to university but one path was a straight academic route while the other provided more practical hands-on learning options. The following quotes are examples of how advisors approached various student scenarios and how they sought to present options and potential pathways to those students.

“If she’s considering going into teaching, does she want to do all the academic side of things; social science, then university, then teachers college, or would she want to do early childhood, get the hands on experience right away and then go on to university to become a teacher that way?”

“I’d tell them the various pathways to take. So they could go to pre-university CEGEP then off to university, or they could do the early childhood education then go off to university afterwards that way too.”

“Some students identify immediately that they want to work with children hands on. They don’t want to do that academic component. They will when they get into educational studies at a university level...”

In addition to simply enlightening parents and students on the CEGEP system and beyond, the data collected from focus group discussions indicated other key priorities for advisors. Presenting potential pros and cons of programs and pathways and identifying key needs, interests and desires of students was also a significant priority. Advisors expressed their desire to listen and understand their students so they would be better able to guide them and tailor the kind of advice they provided.

#### 5.4.4.3 Knowledge of Early Childhood Education Options

General knowledge on the part of advisors about the kinds of work done by early childhood educators and awareness of potential salaries appeared to be limited. Although they made many statements that indicated they valued the work of early childhood educators and the benefits of pursuing early childhood education as a future stepping stone to university, advisors appeared to have only vague notions of



employment possibilities. They supplied very few concrete job options outside of traditional daycare or childcare jobs. Advisors appeared very knowledgeable about educational pathways for early childhood education graduates, but their knowledge of direct-entry career possibilities was definitely lacking. The following quotes highlight the limited knowledge advisors appear to have of early childhood education specific jobs.

“So, working in a daycare, I’m not super familiar with the Ontario side of things, but working in a kindergarten as a teacher. I don’t know the name. Teacher’s assistant, that type of thing.”

“Well if they’re graduating from the three-year diploma, basically there’s a huge variety of opportunities for them and traditionally, they can work in any type of daycare setting, whether it’s an organized daycare or in a home daycare or working in before or after school age program or a variety of other experiences.”

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **6. DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career programs, with a focus on early childhood education, as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. In this final chapter the discussion of the data presented in the previous chapter has been organized according to the research questions used to guide the data collection. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to apply the theories presented as part of the conceptual framework to understand the findings. Based on informal observations and more importantly, from the review of the literature related to academic advising and early childhood education college programs, it was anticipated that findings from this study would reveal that academic advisors are poorly informed about occupational and educational opportunities for early childhood education graduates resulting in incomplete and/or inaccurate information being provided to prospective students. It was further anticipated that students enrolled in early childhood programs themselves are ill informed of the scope of career and educational opportunities available to them after graduation. The findings of this study challenge those presumptions.

#### **6.1 Approaches Taken By Advisors**

##### *6.1.1 Giving General Advice on Post-Secondary Education*

It seems evident from the statements provided by advisors that broadening the understanding of the CEGEP system is central to the work they do. Educating both parents and students on the varied options, opportunities and potential pathways available through the CEGEP system is a priority for advisors. When advising students in general, advisors sought to provide a variety of possible routes to both career and university.

### 6.1.2 *Encouraging Student Autonomy*

Advisors expressed a strong desire to help students identify their own interests, strengths and weaknesses. Helping them develop a sense of autonomy was important. Allowing students to consider options before bringing parents into the conversation was also a noteworthy strategy advisors spoke about. Several mentioned that only after a student had a general idea of the way forward would parents be brought into the conversation. It was evident that advisors wanted their students to make decisions based on their feelings and interests rather than being overly influenced by what parents wanted them to do. Advisors felt that parents often had biased opinions or incorrect information about career programs and that this could and often did affect student college choices.

## **6.2 Advisors Knowledge about Opportunities for Early Childhood Education Graduates**

### 6.2.1 *Limited Knowledge of Direct-Entry Employment Options*

When asked about jobs and careers specifically related to early childhood education most advisors only had vague knowledge of opportunities beyond the traditional childcare sector. Although advisors were very knowledgeable about the varied pathways to university, awareness of direct-entry employment appeared to be limited. Similar findings were discussed in a study entitled *Can I Get a Little Advice Here?*, wherein Johnson *et al.* (2010) suggested school guidance counselors had limited effectiveness in helping students make decisions about their lives after high school.

### 6.2.2 *Student Access to Career and Employment Options*

Student respondents of both the questionnaire and interviews indicated overwhelmingly that they found it easy to find information about careers in early childhood education. Students agreed that early childhood educators would have the credentials to work in community resource programs or have a career in a family resource centre; results were 79% and 87% respectively. Exactly how and where

students acquired this information was somewhat vague; however several of the students interviewed reported they accessed information from various website searches and from conversations with teachers.

Despite advisors' limited knowledge of direct-entry job opportunities within the early childhood sector it appears clear that students may easily avail themselves of any employment information they require. It seems likely that advocates for early childhood education have stepped up and filled this information gap, thereby allowing potential students to access necessary information about career prospects.

### 6.2.3 *Knowledge of Further Educational Pathways*

Findings from this research suggest that school advisors were well informed of the many university options available to CEGEP students. Despite advisors limited knowledge of direct-entry job opportunities specific to early childhood education they appeared very well informed about various academic pathways open to CEGEP graduates. Both students and advisors appeared to have a good understanding of how a diploma in early childhood education is valuable as a stepping stone to higher learning opportunities. This optimistic outlook was consistent with the results of the survey commissioned by the Government of Quebec entitled *Relance* Survey of College Graduates Technical Training 2013; with data from 2013 indicating that 87.9% of early childhood education graduates were studying in a related field after completing their CEGEP diploma program.

## **6.3 Profiling For Early Childhood Education by Advisors and Students**

### 6.3.1 *Listening and Supporting Potential Students*

Based on the data collected in this study it appears that advisors do not have specific student profiles in mind when recommending students choose early childhood education, or any other program for that matter. Advisors repeatedly spoke of how they did not want to lead students in one direction or another but would rather help the student to reflect and consider all the possible options available to them. Advisors expressed their desire to listen and understand their students and stated that by doing so

they would be better able to tailor the kind of advice they provided. They went on to suggest that family dynamics and practical life issues were important considerations when advising students. Additionally they wrote that it was very important for them to get to know the student as an individual and gain insight into their desires, interests and talents. When advising students about potential career programs issues of gender did not appear relevant to advisors, and there appeared to be no bias towards one gender or another when it came to suggesting CEGEP program options. Clearly personal strengths, weaknesses and interests, as well as varied learning styles and practical life issues played a larger role in how students were advised about career and academic options.

### 6.3.2 *Students' Response to Questions of Gender Bias in Early Childhood Education*

When asked to rate statements related to gender, responses were overwhelmingly consistent across all respondents. When asked to rate the statement “men are not well suited to become early childhood educators”, 100% of questionnaire respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. School advisors also showed no bias toward male students over females when suggesting early childhood education as a CEGEP option. In fact advisors indicated that males would be well advised to go into this field if they were interested, as job prospects are excellent due the chronic lack of males currently in the field. These findings appear opposite to statements made in a study published in the *Journal of Employment Counseling* (2002), where Mark Chae wrote that biased attitudes and gender stereotypes that affect women can also affect men who work or study in traditionally female dominated positions. He went on to suggest it is important for advisors to be aware of and sensitive to their own biased attitudes.

### 6.3.3 *Advisors Offer Positive, Practical and Encouraging Options*

Attitudes and perceptions about early childhood education as a profession are central to this research study. Findings indicated that both advisors and students highly value early childhood education. Advisors indicated they are very knowledgeable of various academic pathways available to graduates; they frequently stated that early childhood education was an excellent venue for students to gain important hands-on

experience and that it also offered varied learning opportunities. They repeatedly indicated that the practical aspects of fieldwork and direct contact with children were important assets that could be leveraged when applying to various university programs. The overall attitude toward the profession was generally positive and encouraging for students.

#### 6.3.4 *Students Suggest General Public Undervalue Work of Early Childhood Educators*

When asked of their perceptions of early childhood education, student responses were also very favourable. Data from the student questionnaire regarding academics suggested students felt they learned specialized skills and highly valued their early childhood-specific knowledge. However, students also indicated that they thought the public perception of early childhood educators as teachers was very low. When asked to rate the statement “early childhood educators are perceived as teachers”, only 55% of overall respondents agreed or strongly agreed and of the third year students who responded, only 38% agreed or strongly agreed. Despite the high opinion they held of the academic skills and hands-on experience gained by graduates of early childhood programs, students clearly felt the work done by early childhood educators was not highly valued by the public. These findings regarding perceived undervaluing of early childhood educators aligns with results found in the study conducted by Fenech *et al.* (2009). In this study it was noted that there appeared to be a perception of early childhood education as women’s work requiring no specific training. This study suggested that teachers in early childhood services were less likely to be recognized for their pedagogical practices than teachers in other educational sectors, therefore were less publically visible than their primary school counterparts. Their findings went on to state that strong public perception suggested (child-related) community program staff do not require qualified early childhood teachers; that the work they do is “just care, not education”. Further, in a report conducted in Canada (Hennessey et al. 2011) it was stated that there was a lack of awareness of the importance of early education for young children and the associated benefits for optimum child development.

## 6.4 Linking Conceptual Framework to Study Findings

Identifying the kinds of information advisors presented to students (and their parents) as they think about post-secondary options was central to this study. Discovering if perceptions and attitudes about early childhood education affected student choices was also important. In an effort to structure the study's findings within a conceptual framework several theories were examined.

### 6.4.1 *Ecological Theory of Development and Identity Theory*

Wittingly, or unwittingly, the advisors interviewed applied the theories outlined in the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter two of this paper. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory of Development (1979) speaks of how people live their lives enmeshed in many different environments at the same time and how these environments (environmental systems) have an effect on one another. His theory suggests that people are influenced by what he calls microsystems, made up of parents, siblings, school and neighbourhoods. Clearly advisors participating in this research study felt that parents wielded significant influence regarding their children's CEGEP program choices. Additionally it seems that advisors recognized their inherent power to influence students and made efforts to guard against any undue bias. They suggested that by helping students to know themselves they were providing the kind of support that was most useful in the long run. Advisors often spoke of notions detailed in Marcia's Identity Theory (1966) which suggests that adolescents must move through several stages of personal exploration before they can have a clear picture of who they are. The advisors in this study appeared to consider this sense of personal exploration and discovery to be highly significant. Advisors frequently spoke of the need for students to think about what they wanted, what they liked and where they saw themselves in the future. Many of the guiding questions advisors asked and much of the information and activities they used to inform students (and parents) seemed to embrace Marcia's notion that making life choices and finding one's own path was a process that needed to be worked through: an evolution, taking a person from one place of unknowing to a newer, fuller and more mature place of knowing oneself.

#### 6.4.2 *Merton's Self Fulfilling Prophecy*

In his book entitled *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), Robert Merton coined the theory known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. His theory posits that one person's belief (false or otherwise) about another person's behaviour may be sufficient to cause that person to believe it to be true. This speaks to the power one person's beliefs can have on another person; the potential for this power to have profound implications on self-perception and resulting life choices can be significant. Findings in this study indicated that advisors felt strongly that the development of a sense of personal autonomy was very important in their work with students. It was found that advisors wanted their students to make decisions based on their feelings and interests rather than being overly influenced by what their parents wanted them to do. Advisors mentioned they felt parents played a very important role in the choices students made but expressed caution about the potential for parental influences to dominate student choices. Certainly many young people strive to please their parents and live up to their expectations. It seems plausible that parental influences could contribute to what Merton described as the self-fulfilling prophecy. Students may see themselves as envisioned by their parents, thereby making life choices that are rooted in their parents' ideals, rather than through the lens of their own desires, interests and personal aspirations.

#### 6.4.3 *Valance and Young's Contextual Action Theory*

Contextual Action Theory was developed by Richard Young and Ladislav Valach in the 1990's, and is based on the notion that people's behaviours can be understood as goal-directed actions. Valach et al. (2002) write that "action theory systematically integrates everyday thinking and professional conceptualization and provides a means for linking counseling practice to counseling research" (p.98). The theory goes on to suggest that short-term actions can turn into mid-term projects and then into long-term career goals. Focus group conversations from this study revealed that advisors consistently encouraged students to take steps that would lead to what Valance and Young refer to as actions leading to goals. These actions were varied and included such things as attending college open house events, student for a day events,



participating in online aptitude tests, watching career videos and reading college promotional materials. Clearly the focus group advisors employ many strategies to engage students as a first step, with the hope of moving them onward toward positive goal-oriented behaviours, much as Valance and Young's Contextual Action Theory suggests.

#### 6.4.4 *Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*

It appears something else is also going on in students' minds as they consider themselves in the role of early childhood educator. An incongruity between early childhood education and society's undervaluing early childhood educators appears to exist. Students revealed that despite their dedication and commitment to early childhood education and their belief that early childhood educators have specialized training in child development, they also felt that society at large does not hold this profession in high esteem. Although students reported they wanted to work with children, they also reported they did not feel early childhood education employees working in daycare centres were respected. Further, these same students went on to report that they were very likely to go on to university after graduating from college. Perhaps they are experiencing something called cognitive dissonance. The theory known as cognitive dissonance was coined by Leon Festinger (1957) and suggests that "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance" (Festinger, 1957, p.3). The notion here is that a person's uncomfortable feelings, in this case the undervaluing of the work done by early childhood educators, becomes a motivating factor for them to take an action and by doing so they then move from that uncomfortable place (dissonance) into a place of greater comfort (consonance). Could this be what is going on in students' minds when they express their desire to continue on to university after college? Is this their way of reconciling what they want to do (work with young children) with being recognized and valued by society?

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to yield descriptive data regarding the opinions, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career programs, with a focus on early childhood education. The perspective of both advisors and students was sought. From the review of the literature related to academic advising and early childhood education college programs, it was anticipated that findings would reveal that academic advisors are poorly informed about occupational and educational opportunities for early childhood education graduates, resulting in incomplete and/or inaccurate information being provided to prospective students. It was further anticipated that students enrolled in early childhood programs themselves are ill informed of the scope of career and educational opportunities available to them after graduation. The results of this research study indicated that these negative concerns are not founded. Findings indicated that advisors do not pre-judge or profile students. They hold no bias based on academic performance or economic status. Data revealed that advisors focused on students' interests and aptitudes and they employed a variety of tools and strategies to guide their work. Further it was seen that advisors consistently shared positive feedback and suggestions regarding the learning opportunities available to students entering various CEGEP programs in general and early childhood education programs in particular.

Contrary to many of the findings from studies examined in the literature review, this research study found that thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge, by advisors and students, of college-level programs and specifically early childhood education were very positive. Despite a somewhat limited understanding of the broader career options open to early childhood graduates by advisors, students were very well informed of future career prospects. Students' level of knowledge regarding university options appeared very strong; with data results suggesting that most students had plans to attend university sometime after graduation, and they were clearly confident in their ability to access university related information from advisors. Although the data from this study did not find that parents influenced students to choose one program over another, it did

suggest that students felt supported by their parents during the advising and selection process.

The outlook regarding early childhood education programs appears optimistic based on data from both advisors and students in this study. Students appear proud of their chosen field and have clear ideas of the job opportunities available to them upon graduation. Students also appear to understand that without a university degree they will hold less status and earn less money for the work they do, however they also see early childhood education as an excellent springboard from which they are able to pursue a wide array of post graduate pathways.

Moving forward it will be important to provide high school and college advisors with more comprehensive information regarding job opportunities available to early childhood education graduates. With the ever growing need for skilled educators these school advisors can play a pivotal role. Once school advisors are fully informed of all prospects and pathways available to early childhood education graduates they can educate parents and students. Breaking down barriers created by undervaluing early childhood educators in society is an ongoing struggle. Professional advocacy by educators will help to shed light on the importance of high quality early childhood education within the early learning and childcare sector.

### **Limitations of This Study**

Findings from this study have revealed interesting data regarding attitudes and perceptions related to college advising and program selection options. It is important however to acknowledge a number of limitations. As this study was meant to capture a moment in time, it cannot necessarily be generalized beyond the place and time in which it was conducted. Given that a limited number of student and advisor participants were involved, findings may not be applicable across a larger context. As this study hoped to capture a snapshot of thoughts, attitudes and perceptions of the participants, their thoughts and feelings may be unique and therefore not representative of advisors and students at other high schools and colleges across Canada and elsewhere in the world.

## **Future Studies**

Although comparison between student cohorts across the three years of the program was not the main focus of this research, data analysis from the questionnaires did unearth some interesting differences in student responses. When asked to rate the statement “early childhood education is not as challenging as pre-university programs”, the data showed that 59% of first year students agreed or strongly agreed, however this agreement level dropped to only 33% by second year and dropped again to 21% by third year. It seems probable that the third year students have a more comprehensive understanding of the academic rigor required in the program based on their own personal experiences. When asked to rate the statement “daycare early childhood education employees are well respected” once again agreement fell consistently over the three different cohorts, with 73% of first year students reporting they agreed or strongly agreed, while only 43% of the second year and 25% of the third year students responded favorably. It appears that a change in student thinking takes place. It seems likely that over the course of their studies and fieldwork third year students acquire a broader understanding of society’s perception of the work done by early childhood educators. It would be interesting to pursue this topic in a later study.

This researcher suggests that additional studies examining public perception of the value of work done by early childhood educators should be conducted. Data related to value of work could unearth why, when early childhood students highly value their chosen profession, they still report feelings that this value is not shared by the broader public community. Despite considerable scientific research in the area of early child development (Early Years Study 3, 2011), and the positive implications of high quality education on learning, the profession of early childhood education continues to suffer from an image problem. A longitudinal study of early childhood education CEGEP graduates who went on to university could be conducted. An examination of their thoughts and perceptions regarding society’s valuing or undervaluing the work of early childhood education professionals could be examined. It would be interesting to see if the attitudes of alumni changed over time and if their perceptions of the public’s attitudes toward early childhood education changed.

Further, more research based on general attitudes within the private sector regarding early childhood education also needs to be done. As politicians lobby for voter support, the issues of parental choice and childcare are often bandied about. Despite the obvious need for childcare in today's two parent working world, there remains a pervasive mindset with respect to early learning and childcare professionals' low status, both professionally and economically, within society. Why does this attitude persist? What is the underlying root that holds this profession back? Is it the low pay? Is it the perception of women's work? There is still much research to be done to begin to understand the persistence of these attitudes within Canadian society.

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**APPENDIX A – VERBAL EXPLANATION TO PARTICIPANTS**



## APPENDIX A – VERBAL EXPLANATION TO PARTICIPANTS

I am conducting a research project for my Masters in Education. The purpose of this study is to ascertain thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. The data collection method used is intended to help draw a picture or capture a moment in time representing what participants believe, know and share about college-level career programs. Career options and pathways to university and higher education will be explored. The data collected will provide a snapshot of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

In order to do this I will be conducting two focus groups; one will be made up of high school advisors and the other, college advisors. Guiding questions will be used to facilitate discussions. All discussions will be audio recorded. These discussion groups will be approximately one hour in length. Participants from these focus groups will also complete a pre-focus group questionnaire. Additionally interviews of CEGEP students and high school and college advisors will also be conducted. Guiding questions will be used to facilitate the interview process. All interviews will be audio tapes. Participation or non-participation in this study will in no way impact upon students' grades. All interviews will be conducted after all final grades for the fall 2013 semester have been submitted.

The audio recording from the both the focus groups and interviews will be transcribed verbatim and then analyzed. No participants will ever be identified and all shared information will be treated with the utmost respect for confidentiality. All data collected will be stored securely in my home office and will be destroyed one year after the completing and submission of the final report to the University of Sherbrooke.

All participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Participants are free to excuse themselves or withdraw from the study at any time. All participants will be asked to complete a consent form prior to participation.

*Thank you.*



**APPENDIX B - PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
QUESTIONNAIRE (STUDENTS)**



**APPENDIX B - PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
QUESTIONNAIRE (STUDENTS)**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. Through focus-groups, interviews and questionnaires a wealth of data will be collected. An analysis of the data collected will be used to help draw a picture of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

**Consent to Participate in Research**

*Questionnaire – Student (Signed by parent/guardian if student is under 18 years)*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in a study looking to collect thoughts, perceptions and knowledge of college-level career program choices. I agree to participate in a short written questionnaire. I understand that my participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and that anything I say will be confidential and that my name will never be used in any published report. I further understand that my participation in this study will in no way impact upon my grades and I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

X _____ _____ (Signature of Participant/Parent/Guardian)	_____ _____ (Date)	_____ _____ (Printed name)
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Laura Fowler-Massie

February 2014





**APPENDIX C - REQUEST FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEW  
(EMAIL)**



**APPENDIX C - REQUEST FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEW  
(EMAIL)**

I am conducting a research project for my Masters in Education. The purpose of this study is to ascertain thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. The data collection method used is intended to help draw a picture or capture a moment in time representing what participants believe, know and share about college-level career programs with a focus on early childhood education. Career options and pathways to university and higher education will be explored.

For this research project several short interviews will be conducted; some with school advisors and some with college students. Guiding questions will be used to facilitate these interviews. All interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed at a later date.

I am requesting your participation in one of these interviews. I hope to schedule interviews sometime after the final exam period in December 2013 or January 2014; after all final grades have been submitted. Please note that anything said in the interviews is absolutely confidential and your participation is completely voluntary. Your name will never be used in any published report and participation in this study will in no way impact upon your grades. Please also note that should you wish to withdraw from the study you may do so at any time without penalty. All participants will complete a consent form before any interviews are conducted. All interviews will be conducted by a neutral third party (not me).

If you are interested in participating in this research project please RSVP at your earliest convenience. Your participation is extremely valuable and greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Laura Massie  
[lmassie@cegep-heritage.qc.ca](mailto:lmassie@cegep-heritage.qc.ca)



**APPENDIX D – INFORMED CONSENT FORM INTERVIEWS (STUDENTS)**



**APPENDIX D – INFORMED CONSENT FORM INTERVIEWS (STUDENTS)**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. Through focus-groups, interviews and questionnaires a wealth of data will be collected. An analysis of the data collected will be used to help draw a picture of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

**Consent to Participate in Research**

*Interview – Student (Signed by parent/guardian if student is under 18 years)*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in a study looking to collect thoughts, perceptions and knowledge of college-level career program choices. I agree to participate in a short recorded interview. I understand that the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed at a later date for analysis. I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary and that anything I say will be confidential and that my name will never be used in any published report. I further understand that my participation in this study will in no way impact upon my grades and I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

X	_____	_____
_____		
(Signature of Participant/Parent/Guardian)	(Date)	(Printed name)

Laura Fowler-Massie

February 2014





**APPENDIX E – FOCUS GROUP - PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT  
FORM (WQSB Advisors)**



**APPENDIX E – FOCUS GROUP - PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT  
FORM (WQSB Advisors)**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. Through focus-groups, interviews and questionnaires a wealth of data will be collected. An analysis of the data collected will be used to help draw a picture of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

**Consent to Participate in Research**

*Advisor Focus Group*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in a study looking to collect thoughts, perceptions and knowledge of college-level career program choices. I agree to participate in a one hour focus group with other academic advisors from the Western Quebec School Board. I understand that this focus group will be audio-taped and transcribed at a later date for analysis. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that anything I say will be confidential and that my name will never be used in any published report.

This study has been reviewed by WQSB Ethics Committee and clearance to proceed has been granted.

X _____ _____ (Signature of Participant)	_____ _____ (Date)	_____ _____ (Printed name)
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Laura Fowler-Massie  
April 2014



**APPENDIX F – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT  
FORM (Cégep Heritage College Advisors)**



**APPENDIX F – FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT  
FORM (Cégep Heritage College Advisors)**

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. Through focus-groups, interviews and questionnaires a wealth of data will be collected. An analysis of the data collected will be used to help draw a picture of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

**Consent to Participate in Research**

*Advisor Focus Group*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in a study looking to collect thoughts, perceptions and knowledge of college-level career program choices. I agree to participate in a one hour focus group with other academic advisors from Cégep Heritage College. I understand that this focus group will be audio-taped and transcribed at a later date for analysis. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that anything I say will be confidential and that my name will never be used in any published report.

This study has been reviewed by the Ad hoc Ethics Committee at Cégep Heritage College and clearance to proceed has been granted.

X _____ _____ (Signature of Participant)	_____ _____ (Date)	_____ _____ (Printed name)
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Laura Fowler-Massie

April 2014





**APPENDIX G – GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS**



## APPENDIX G – GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS

1. What year are you in at college?
2. You are in early childhood education now, right? Was that your first choice? If not, what were you interested in before? Why did you change? Did the advice you received from an academic advisor help you make your decision? Explain
3. In what school did you talk to an academic advisor – high school? College? Both?
4. What advice did you seek? ... (Ask only if required: Career path? Kinds of jobs? Job availability? Difficulty of program/courses?)
5. In retrospect, was the guidance you received from the advisors helpful?
6. What advice, if any, did you receive from your parents when choosing a college program? Explain  
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7. Can you tell me what the academic requirements are for students wanting to enter in college early childhood education programs? Are they different from other programs?
8. What kinds of jobs or work settings are you aware of for early childhood education graduates?
9. Can you describe the kind of skills necessary to competently work as an early childhood educator?  
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10. Did the academic advisors talk about opportunities in early childhood education beyond college?
11. What are your plans after graduating from the early childhood education program? Does it include going to university or going in the labour force right away?

12. Explain why you are considering this path?

**Follow up questions if required**

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13. Are you aware of various university options available to graduates of early childhood education programs? Explain

14. What do you know about salary scales and employment benefits for early childhood education graduates?

15. Tell me about the kind of career you would like to have.

*Thank you! Your participation is greatly appreciated.*



**APPENDIX H – STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**







- |  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 7. Early childhood education graduates have the credentials to apply into a social work program at university.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 8. Students who wish to work in an elementary school are advised to choose early childhood education at college.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 9. Early childhood education is an excellent choice of study for students who want to work as a Family Resource Worker.  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 10. Elementary school teachers are better qualified than early childhood educators to work with preschool children.  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 11. Upon graduation early childhood education graduates can expect to earn up to \$20.00 per hour.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 12. Upon graduation most early childhood education graduates will be paid approximately \$12.00 per hour.  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 13. After working for five years early childhood education graduates can earn \$45,000 per year.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 14. Most qualified early childhood education graduates working in a child care program will receive employment benefits like paid sick leave and extended health care. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 15. Early childhood education graduates have the credentials to apply into a variety of social science programs at university.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 16. Most early childhood education graduates go on to university.  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 17. More female than male students are advised to pursue early childhood education at the college level.   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

18. Females are better suited for a career in early childhood education than males.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
19. Men are not well suited to become early childhood educators.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
20. Getting a job as a qualified early childhood educator after graduation is easy.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
21. Early childhood educators are perceived as teachers.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
22. Early childhood education is a prestigious profession.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
23. Early childhood education trained daycare workers are well respected by the general public.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
24. Compared to elementary school teachers early childhood educators have more specialized knowledge of child development.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
25. In ten years I will probably be working as an early childhood educator.  
 Strongly Agree                      Agree                      Disagree                      Strongly Disagree
26. Please **rank** your familiarity with various early childhood education settings.  
**Scale: 1 = most familiar                      10 = not at all familiar**
- Centre-based Child Care (0-5 yrs.)
- Home Child Care
- Family Resource Program
- Early Literacy Program
- Full-day Early Learning Kindergarten (Ontario Model)
- Preschool
- Drop-in Centre
- Parent Co-op Nursery School
- After School Care (5-12 yrs.)
- Head Start Program

*Thank you very much. Your participation is greatly appreciated!*

**APPENDIX I – FOCUS GROUP EMAIL REQUEST**



## **APPENDIX I – FOCUS GROUP EMAIL REQUEST**

I am conducting a research project for my Masters in Education. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the thoughts, perceptions and knowledge of early childhood education as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. The data collected will provide a snapshot (a moment in time) of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

For this research project I will be conducting two focus groups; one made up of high school advisors and the other of college advisors. Guiding questions will be used to facilitate discussions. All discussions will be audio recorded. These focus group discussions will be approximately one hour in length. Additionally, participants will also be asked to complete a short post-focus group questionnaire.

I am requesting your participation in one of these focus groups (either the high school advisor group or the college advisor group). I hope to schedule them sometime in early April 2014 at a time that is mutually agreeable. If you are interested in participating in this research project please RSVP at your earliest convenience. Your participation is extremely valuable and greatly appreciated.

Please note that anything said in these focus groups is absolutely confidential and your participation is completely voluntary. Your name will never be used in any published report.



**APPENDIX J – EMAIL REQUEST FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN  
INTERVIEW**



## **APPENDIX J – EMAIL REQUEST FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN INTERVIEW**

I am conducting a research project for my Masters in Education. The purpose of this study is to ascertain thoughts, perceptions and general knowledge of college-level career program choices as seen through the eyes of advisors and students. The data collection method used is intended to help draw a picture or capture a moment in time representing what participants believe, know and share about college-level career programs with a focus on early childhood education. Career options and pathways to university and higher education will be explored. The data collected will provide a snapshot of the kinds of information available to students from advisors regarding potential career and post-graduate options.

For this research project I will be conducting several short interviews: some with school advisors and some with college students. Guiding questions will be used to facilitate these interviews and they will be audio recorded.

I am requesting your participation in one of these interviews. I hope to schedule interviews sometime after the final exam period in December 2013 after all final grades have been submitted. Please note that anything said in the interviews is absolutely confidential and your participation is completely voluntary. Your name will never be used in any published report and participation in this study will in no way impact upon participating students' grades. Please also note that should you wish to withdraw from the study you may do so at any time without penalty.

If you are interested in participating in this research project please **RSVP** at your earliest convenience. Your participation is extremely valuable and greatly appreciated.



**APPENDIX K – ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL CÉGEP HERITAGE  
COLLEGE**



**APPENDIX K – ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL CÉGEP HERITAGE  
COLLEGE**



December 20, 2012

To whom it may concern,

This is a letter of support for Laura Massie: a teacher in our Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program.

Laura is currently enrolled in the Master Teacher Program at the “Université de Sherbrooke” and she is preparing to do research as part of her studies.

Our College fully supports Laura’s research proposal. It will be very helpful to the College to discern the perceptions and potential misconceptions concerning the ECCE program, on the part of academic advisors at the high school level in both our feeder schools, and the larger region.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Sincerely,

Michael Randall  
Academic Dean



**APPENDIX K – ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL CÉGEP HERITAGE  
COLLEGE**

**APPENDIX L – ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL WQSB**






## APPENDIX L – ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL WQSB

Ethics Permission WQSB.PDF - Adobe Reader

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Our Future Begins Here  
Notre avenir commence ici


**COMMISSION SCOLAIRE WESTERN QUÉBEC  
WESTERN QUÉBEC SCHOOL BOARD**

<i>Président</i> Chairman	<i>Directeur général</i> Director General	<i>Directrice générale adjointe</i> Assistant Director General	<i>Secrétaire général</i> Secretary General
Michael Chiasson	Paul Lamoureux	Ruth Ahern	Richard Vézina

To whom it may concern, March 18, 2014

The Education Committee of the Western Quebec School Board has reviewed and approved the educational research proposal provided by Laura Fowler Massie. The Western Quebec School Board understands that the focus of Ms Fowler Massie's research is related to student advising and counseling of high school students looking into post-secondary education (specifically Cegep). This research will seek to collect data from local high school and college advisors about the information they provide to students regarding Cegep career programs in general and Early Childhood Education in specific. It is hoped that the data collected from this research will help to inform issues related to student recruitment and retention at the Cegep level.

Sincerely,



Ruth Ahern  
Directrice Générale Adjointe-Directrice de services éducatifs  
Assistant Director General-Director of Education  
Western Quebec School Board  
1 819 684 1313 ext 1153

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15, rue Katimavik, Gatineau (Québec) J8J 0E9 Tél.: 819.684.2336 – Sans frais/Toll free: 1.800.963.9111 – Téléc./Fax: 819.684.1328  
Courriel/E-mail: wqsb@wqsb.qc.ca – Site Web/Website: http://wqsb.qc.ca

3:40 PM  
5/16/2014





**APPENDIX M – STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE – ALL RESPONSES ACROSS  
ALL YEARS (RAW DATA)**



**APPENDIX M – STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE – ALL RESPONSES ACROSS  
ALL YEARS (RAW DATA)**

Student	Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
<b>A</b>		D	A	SD	A	D	A	SA	SA	SA	D	A	A	A	SA	A	SA	A	SD	SD	A	A	SA	D	D	D
<b>B</b>		A	SA	A	SA	A	SA	SA	SA	SA	D	A	A	D	D	A	A	D	SD	SD	A	D	A	SA	D	SA
<b>C</b>		A	SA	D	D	A			A	A	D	A	A	A	A		A	D	D	D	A	A		A	D	A
<b>D</b>		A	A	D	D	D	A	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	A	A	D	D	D	D	D	A	A	A	A	A
<b>E</b>		D	D	SA	SA	D	D	A	SA	A	D	SA	SD	SA	D	D	A	D	D	SD	SA	A	SA	SA	SA	D
<b>F</b>		A	A		SA	SD	SA	SA	SA	SA	D	A	D	D	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	A	A	SA	SA	D	SA
<b>G</b>		A	A	D	D	D	A	D	D	A	D	A	A	D	A	A	A	SD	SD	SD	A	D	SA	A	A	SA
<b>H</b>		A	AS	A	D	A	D	A	A	A	SA	D	A	A	A	A	D	A	SD	SD	A	A	A	SA	A	D
<b>I</b>		SA	A	SD	A	A	A	A	A	SA	D	A	D	A	A	D	A	D	SD	A	D	D	A	SA	D	
<b>J</b>		A	SA	D	D		A	A	A	D	D	A	D	A	A	D	A	D	D	D	A	D	A	A	A	SD
<b>K</b>		A	A	A	D	D	D	SA	D	A	D	D	D	A	A	D	A	A	D	D	D	A	D	D	A	D
<b>L</b>		SA	SA	SA	A	A	A	SA	SA	SA	D	A	A	A	SA	A	A	SA	SD	SD	D	A	SA	A	A	SA
<b>M</b>		SA	A	A	SA	A	A	A	A	A	AD	D	A	A	A	D	A	D	D	SD	A	A	A	A	A	A
<b>N</b>		A	A	SA	SA	D	A	A	A	A	SD	D	A	D	A	A	D	A	SD	SD	A	D	A	A	SA	A
<b>O</b>		D	SA	D	D	A	D	A	SA	SA	SD	A	D	D	A	D	A	SA	D	D	D	A	A	A	D	A
<b>P</b>		A	A	AS	A	D	A	A	A	A		A	D	A	A	A	A	SA	D	D	D	A	A	D	A	D
<b>Q</b>		D	A	SA	SD		D	SA	A	A	SA	SA	D	A	D	SA	D	SA	SD	SD	D	SD	D	D	D	D
<b>R</b>		A	A	SD	SD			A	A	A	D	A	D	A	A	A		SA	SD	SD	A	D	D	D	A	SA
<b>S</b>		A	A	D	A	D	A	A	A	D	D	D	A	D	A	A	A	A	D	D	A	D	A	A	A	A
<b>T</b>		SA	A	A	D	SA	A	A	A	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D	D	A	A	A	A	A	A
<b>U</b>		A	A	D	A	D		A	A	A	D	D	D	A	A	A	D	A	D	D	SA	A	A	SA	A	SA
<b>V</b>		A	A	D	A	A	A	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	D	D	D	A	A	D	A	A
<b>W</b>		A	A	D	D	A	A	D	A	A	D	A	D	A	A	D	A	A	A	D	A	A	A	A	A	A
<b>X</b>		A	A	D	A	A	A	A	D	A	D	A	A		A	A	D	A	D	D	D	D			A	D
<b>Y</b>		SA	A	SD	D	D	D	SA	A	A	SD	A	A	A	D	A	D	D	SD	SD	D	A	SA	D	SA	A
<b>X</b>		D	SA	SD	SD	D	A	A	A	A	D	A	D	A	A	D	D	A	D	D	D	A	A	D	A	A
<b>AA</b>		A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	D															A
<b>BB</b>		A	A	D	A	D	SA	SA	D	A	D	SA	SD	A	SA	A	D	D	SD	SD	D	D	A	D	D	D

<b>CC</b>	SA	SA	D	A	SD	SA	SA	SA	SA	D	A	A	A	A	A	A	D	SD	A	A	A	A	A	A	
<b>DD</b>	SA	SA	D	A	D	A	SA	SA	SA	SD	SA	D	A	A	A	D	A	SD	SD	A	A	D	A	A	D
<b>EE</b>	D	A		D	SA	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	A	A	A	A	D	A	SD	SD	A	SA	SA	D	SA	D
<b>FF</b>	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	A	A	A	D	D	SD	A	A	D	A	SA	D	D	A	D	D	A	SA	D
<b>GG</b>	SA	SA	SA	A	SD	A	A	D	SA	SD	D	D	A	A	A	A	SA	D	SD	A	SD	A	SD	A	D
<b>HH</b>	SA	SA	D	D	D	D	A	SA	SA	SD	D	SD	A	SD	A	A	A	SD	SD	A	SD	SD	SD	SA	D
<b>II</b>	A	SA	A	A		D	A	A	SA	D		A	D	D	A		A	D	SD		D	D	D	SA	D
<b>JJ</b>	SA	A	D	SA	A	A	A	A	A	D	D	D			A	A	A	D	D	D	D	A	D	A	A
<b>KK</b>	SA	SA	A	SA	D	A	A	A	SA	D	D	D	A	A	A	A	A	D	D	A	A	SA	A	A	SA
<b>LL</b>	A	A	SD	D	A	A	SA	SA	SA	SD	SD	D	SD	A	A	D	D	SD	SD	A	SD	SD	SD	A	D
<b>MM</b>	SA	A	A	SA	SD	SA	SA	A	SA	D	SD	A	D	A	A		SA	SD	SD	A	D	A	D	A	D
<b>NN</b>	SA	A	D	A	D	A	SA	SA	SA	SD	A	D	D	A	A	A	A	A	SD	A	SA	A	A	SA	SA
<b>OO</b>	A	SA	D	D	A	A	A	SA	A	D	SA	SD	D	SA	A	A	A	D	D	SA	SA	A	D	SA	SA
<b>PP</b>	D	A	D	D	D	A	A	A	A	AD	D	D	A	A	A	A	SA	SD	SD	A	SA	SA	S	D	A
<b>QQ</b>	SA	SA	A	A	D	A	SA	SA	SA	SD	SA	SD	A	D	D	A	SA	SD	SD	SA	D	SA	D	SA	A
<b>RR</b>	SA	A	A	A	D	A	SA	SA	SA	AD	A	SD	A	SA	A	D	SA	D	D	A	D	D	D	SA	A
<b>SS</b>	A	D	SD	D	A	A	SA	A	SA	SD	A	D	A	A	A	D	D	D	D	A	SA	A	D	SA	A
<b>TT</b>	A	A	D	D	D	A	A	D	SA	AD	D	A	A	D	A	D	A	SD	SD	A	D	A	D	A	SA
<b>UU</b>	SA	A	D	SA	D	A	SA	SA	SA	SD	A	D	A	A	A	A	D	D	D	A	D	D	D	A	D
<b>VV</b>	A	SA	A	A	D	D	A	A	A	D	SA	D	A	A	D	A	A	D	D	A	A	D	A	A	A



**APPENDIX N - FOCUS GROUP: SCENARIOS AND STUDENT PROFILES  
WITH SAMPLING OF ADVISOR RESPONSES**



**APPENDIX N - FOCUS GROUP: SCENARIOS AND STUDENT PROFILES  
WITH SAMPLING OF ADVISOR RESPONSES**

**Student A:** 16 year old male with an outgoing personality. He makes friends easily and demonstrates confidence and ease when speaking with peers and adults. He has no clear career aspirations.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** Low academic standing: struggles to pass both English and math but with tutoring and support he is expected to graduate on time.

**Family Background:** Two parent family living in Aylmer. Both parents work full-time at blue-collar jobs. Both parents hold high school diplomas but never attended post-secondary education. Neither parent has indicated strong feelings about any college program choice. There are two younger siblings; 3 and 6 years old.

**Personal Interests:** Strong athlete: plays on the HS soccer team and is captain of his local rugby team.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** Volunteers every Saturday morning and during the summer coaching soccer to children 5-10 years old. Babysits for neighbors and siblings often but has not had any other paid employment experience.

**Samples of Advisors Responses:** “I might ask him questions like what are your favourite subjects?”, “What kind of careers do you see yourself in?”

“I didn’t think about favourite subject, that’s a good one”, “I want to know what their strengths are”. “I think we should map out the weaknesses.”

“If the student really has no kind of specific career goal, I really want to try to help him see, “what are you good at?”, “Where do they see themselves?”, and “What would they enjoy doing for the rest of their life or for part of their career?”

“I might suggest that he go try career cruising or some type of questionnaire...”

“I really like to start from square one with just a career aptitude. Let’s just answer some questions. You’ve got to find out about the student first”.

**Student B:** 16 year old female, extremely shy and has difficulty speaking up in class or with peers. She has no clear career aspirations or is too shy to speak about them.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** Strong student with high grades in all courses. She possesses excellent reading and writing skills and is expected to graduate top of the class; winning several academic awards.

**Family Background:** Comes from a small rural farming community. Neither parent graduated

high school. They married young and both work the farm. They hold to traditional gender role stereotypes regarding career and lifestyle choices and have clearly expressed these opinions to their children. Although they do not discourage their daughter from applying to college they have expressed that she should take something “practical”. She is the middle child with two older brothers and two younger sisters.

**Personal interests:** Loves to read non-fiction and cook and spends most of her time at home with her parents on weekends.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** Casual babysitting of younger siblings and cousins who live on nearby farms.

**Samples of Advisors Responses:** “I would start with just discussing interests; discussing interests in what she can see herself doing, discussing how she feels about her parents...and some of the traditional family stuff will come up”, “I’d also what to involve the parents in terms of their support and how supportive, and we want to make sure that they’re on the same page, because she’s in the middle and might have a lot of family responsibilities as well.”

“...well again, when I work with students, in my mind I always try to think interests. Strengths, abilities, personality and values” “...kind of talk a bit about how her parents careers and values shape her ideas of what she might like to do.” “I never what to lead students too strongly into this career, oh this program is amazing. You should do this. But I still suggest ones that I think are good fits and see how the she student reacts.”

“I hate leading students down a specific path.”

“And in terms of parents, I just would want to know...first of all, I would not bring them in until she had some ideas and then we would present ideas and talk about them together, but not to start with the parents and say what your feelings?”

“I know we already mentioned it. But just the shy piece is always one that I am leery with students like this. We have a lot of strong academic students, who are shy, and you want to expose them to everything but to what point is that going to be interfering with their ability to be successful at school?” “So we really need to look at...like McDonald campus is a good example of a small school, small classes, small community, a good niche.”

“I’d be saying “Can you picture yourself being that far away from home?” That would be a big question in my mind, because if they say no..... Then I’d pick a completely different direction with them saying okay...we’ve got to look at programs close to home where you can go home on weekends.”

**Student C:** 16 year old female. She gets along well with others. She is comfortable discussing her thoughts and ideas both inside and outside of class. She aspires to work with children, possibly becoming a kindergarten or grade one teacher.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** She is an average student who probably could get better grades if she applied herself a little more. She has solid reading and writing skills and is an effective problem solver.

**Family Background:** She is an only child living with her single mother in downtown Hull. Her

mother is a university graduate with a MBA, working as a senior policy advisor for the federal government. Her mother feels strongly that her daughter should choose a college program that will allow her to go on to university.

**Personal Interests:** She loves working with children in recreation programs. She enjoys art, theatre and dance and has taken several extracurricular courses in these subjects. She played the lead role in the last two HS drama productions.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** She babysits for several families regularly and has done so since she was 13 years old. She volunteers with the local Brownie troop and worked last summer as a paid assistant counselor at a local summer day camp.

**Samples of Advisors Responses:** “She obviously shows a lot of experience and strengths working with kids. She presents that as her aspiration in terms of maybe a teacher so I’d obviously start there. The teaching piece is tricky because in Quebec, obviously there’s a certain path as opposed to Ontario, and because we’re so close to the border, there’s different options.” “...does she want to do all the academic side of things; social; science then university, then teachers college; would she want to do early childhood, get the hands on experience right away and then go to university to become a teacher that way?” “...some kids identify immediately that they want to work with children hands on.” “I would mention the early childhood education to Bishops connection”

“And this where definitely mom would be involved in this meeting. So she wants her daughter to go to university...it’s primarily a student focused meeting...but you want the parent to be supportive. You want them on board.”

“I would do pretty well the exact same as what has already been discussed, so I’d tell them the various pathways that they could take. So in terms of they could go to pre-university CEGEP then off to university, or they could do the early childhood education then go off to university afterwards...”

“Really sitting down with the parents and saying okay, this is the end goal and these are the different avenues.”

**Student D:** 23 year old female. After high school she was enrolled in Social Science but did not finish the program. After taking a couple years off to work she wants to return to CEGEP to complete her DEC but is unsure which program to choose. She is interested in psychology and enjoys working with people.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** Her first attempt at CEGEP did not produce stellar grades except in the courses she was particularly interested in. She excelled in both Intro to Psychology and Intro to Sociology. She has solid reading and writing skills.

**Family Background:** She is one of three children in a middle class two parent family from Chelsea. Her mother is an elementary school teacher and her father is an accountant. They support any path she wants to take and let her make her own choices. She has moved out of her parent’s home and now shares an apartment with a girlfriend who is in her first year at the University of Ottawa. Her parents are prepared to help her financially while she is in school full-time.

**Personal Interests:** She has a dog she is very attached to and takes recreation dance and yoga classes regularly.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** Presently she works part time as a server in a popular local restaurant where she makes good money. She has held a variety of positions since leaving CEGEP the first time including child care, retail and restaurant work.

**Samples of Advisors Responses:** “This is a more difficult case I think, largely based on the fact that at the age of 23 and living here in the region, she’s got a lot of ties here...” “I feel for so many students it’s important to get them exposed to the programs... like reading about them in the viewbook. I’d get her to come in for student-for-a-day...get her to maybe try some classes in other programs, look at nursing maybe...give her the exposure and then make a decision based on what she liked to do...”

“I’d be wanting to find out if they’re interested in pursuing university level and then getting a career afterwards, so essentially how many years... how long do they want to be spending in school? Was it a matter if they want a career program, three year program then get off to work or do they want something more?”

“I was going to talk about a similar approach. You get the comments, or I do often, I like working with people. And so often, they assume that that is a direct line...if they’re going to do academia, it’s going to be psychology or something like that. But there are so many different careers and possible programming options underneath that umbrella of working with people.”

**Student E:** 17 year old male. Very sociable and gets along well with others. Has a girlfriend that he has been dating for two years. She will also be attending CEGEP in the fall. He enjoys discussing current affairs and issues related to social injustice.

**School Performance – Academic Standing:** He is a good student who succeeds at most things he puts his mind to. He graduated high school with an overall average of 80%. He plans to go to university but wants to get some kind of credential so that he can work to help pay his own way through school.

**Family Background:** Two parent working family. His mother is a Developmental Service Worker with a college diploma and his father is a university graduate working as a computer programmer/analyst with the federal government. Both parents are very supportive of their son’s choices and feel that CEGEP is a time to “try things on”. They have told him that if he chooses a program and then decides it’s not for him, he is welcome to make a change into another program. They say “you are young and there are many paths in the road ahead. It is okay to travel down a few in an effort to find the one that is best for you.”

**Personal Interests:** He plays recreation soccer and loves video gaming in his spare time.

**Volunteer/Work Experience:** For the past three summers he has worked at a local golf course cutting grass and doing general odd jobs. Although this is a good job and the money isn’t bad he knows he doesn’t want to do menial labour in the future.

**Samples of Advisors Responses:** “He probably wants to do something university based. He’s a high academic student so I probably am looking at the programs of either liberal arts or social

science.”

“I’m always thinking about that set of parents, of the parent and what the relation with me is going to be like? These are my favourite parents to work with; who support the CEGEP system, who also support the fact that our students are graduating so early that making a career decision at this time is not realistic for a lot of kids, and they’re open to the that transitional phase where CEGEP really is the best thing about this system, it is exploratory and tuition free.”

“...regarding the credentials, if he’s wanting to maybe get something before university, I would look at some programs like Police Foundations at CEGEP. Is that something? Because he could get some hands on programming and then go on to university afterwards if he’s interested in social justice.”

“I’d just like to add something else....dealing with the credential part, I might pursue what coop programs are available that have pay. Is that something he is interested in?”







**APPENDIX O - FOCUS GROUP: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
SPECIFIC QUESTIONS WITH SAMPLING OF ADVISOR RESPONSES**



**APPENDIX O - FOCUS GROUP: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
SPECIFIC QUESTIONS WITH SAMPLING OF ADVISOR RESPONSES**

**Specific Questions Related to Early Childhood Education**

*Introduction:* For this research I am interested in learning your thoughts about academic advising in general and I am also interested in academic advising as it relates specifically to early childhood education.

**Describe the kind of student you might suggest enrolling into an early childhood education program.**

“...students who are really interested in working with people, with kids, and they know that’s what they want to do.”

“These students are academically capable; they just don’t want to be in the classroom, in a lecture hall. They don’t want that environment. They really want to be with kids or out on co-op or those kinds of things.”

“I just have a few this year actually, who are talking a lot about social work, so I’m talking to them about the early childhood education program.”

“They often want their teaching degree. A lot of people now are coming to me and they want to take that route, but to get the diploma and then degree, the academic piece, and so those are the students who are the students who I primarily try to send.”

“So even if they don’t pursue teaching or that kind of capacity, it’s a good knowledge base and a practical knowledge base.”

**A student asks you about the kind of jobs he/she could get after graduating from an early childhood education program. What do you tell him/her?**

“...working in a daycare...I’m not super familiar with the Ontario side of things, but working in a kindergarten as a teacher...a teacher’s assistant, that type of thing”

“Probably any youth kind of organization...municipal or community agency that are youth oriented like recreation programs”

“Even though everyone thinks daycare, I more think about not social service worker, but social service working at a recreation centre or at a camp or at any kind of your oriented program”

“...just to have that experience and that frame of mind, working in any capacity with kids really...that’s the foundation that’s built in early childhood education and you can go on and do further study later.”

“...they can also give courses I believe, to parents within the youth protection system, in terms of attachment and early childhood and eventually for parents who are having difficulties

parenting.”

**A student is interested in early childhood education but his/her parents want him/her to go to university. What do you say to the student?**

“Just assure them that it absolutely aligns with university, whereas there are different articulation agreements with different places. If they are looking at education...I’d talk to them about child studies at Carleton University.”

“It helps them get into education a lot of the time because they have all the experience, and they almost have an advantage over the other students.”

“”The courses that they are doing are very academic, so they’re getting that hands on as well as the academic. It’s a very good prep academically for university because of the workload...”

“Part of the problem is that the program streams are called pre-university and then career or technical programs. We’re constantly trying to overcome that label...even with the students. Even with the students, these academically capable students who funnel themselves in sciences, they’re pre-university. Yes, it’s probably the shortest direct route, but career and technical programs allow you to go to university thereafter. And often, the agreements are that your university stay would be shortened significantly.”

“That’s the big thing that comes up in those conversations, is the battle over the amount of years, and I’m always saying you know, having to say, we’re very young when we graduate in Quebec. And if you go through the CEGEP system it’s just allowing more time to mature.”

“Imagine a student who does three years in early childhood education, two years of an education program. They do a one year teaching degree...imagine that person...”

“...and the amount of time they spent in a classroom or with kids by comparison to someone who’s done an undergraduate degree in whatever their discipline is, and then does one year of teacher’s college with two placements. It’s just two completely different worlds in terms of what the practicality of going in and being a teacher.”

“I hate to say it but the financial piece is huge.....so if you think it is a waste of time, I tell parents again, you want to develop the maturity....”

**A male student is interested in early childhood education but is concerned it is “a girls program”. What do you say to him?**

“It is a traditionally female kind of area, but I said all the proven studies have shown that these children need male role models.....try to find examples of people that they might know in the community that have taken on a role that they can relate to...”

“In such a competitive field like this, I hate to say it guys, but if you’re in specifically early childhood or elementary, and you’re male, you are a diamond in the rough. You are going to get the job over the stack of resumes for the female applicants. They’re going to pick the and right out of the pile and they need those men in schools so the kids have both gender roles represented and they can connect with...some students connect better or respond better to a male figure in a

classroom than they do with a female.”

“You’re going to probably be guaranteed a job.”

“Guys are so well received with children.”

“I have to say in my experience in working with advising students in early childhood and speaking to some of the male students, that has not even come up.....you think it would maybe but it has not come up as an issue at all.”

**A student who is very interested in the early childhood education program but his/her parents feel, it will only lead to poorly paying jobs. What do you say to him/her?**

“Basically, we have a discussion about that but I basically say that that’s not necessarily true and that there’s so many options that the student can pursue whether they go to work right after graduation from the early childhood or become a little more specialized in a field of their interest or go on to university.”

“Parents coming from that frame of mind need to realize based on tuition and partly based on experience, they can think of and the students can too, they can think of CEGEP programs as the springboard to the next step.”

“Sometimes I get a little philosophical with them, even with parents too. If I have parents and students in my office and the parents are saying “oh, that’s not going to lead to a good job”, but the kid really likes it and wants it, I’ll say....”in the end what you’re making, as long as you’re happy, as long as it’s what you always wanted to do, as long as you can pay your bills and be happy and have a good life, isn’t that what we all try to aspire to?”

“...dispelling the myths of early childhood education....there’s the many layers of pre-conceived notion that you have to break through...”

