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# Career Development Interventions with Low Socioeconomic Status Students

Megan C. Hoffman  
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Running head: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND LOW SES

Career Development Interventions with Low Socioeconomic Status Students

Megan C. Hoffman

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Abstract

Research has shown that students that are of low socioeconomic status (SES) are less likely to engage in deliberate and planful career development. This paper reviews group counseling in the high school setting, career development in the high school setting, career counseling in the group setting, issues associated with low SES, career development and SES and low SES and career development theories. Results of career development interventions in a group counseling setting are included.

### Career Development Interventions With Low Socioeconomic Status Students

Career planning plays an important role in career development for high school students. Too often, socioeconomic status (SES) negatively effects the career planning process. For the most part, there has not been a lot research done to explore the role that social class plays in career development. Research shows that students of low SES are engaged in less deliberate career development activities, receive less guidance in school and from home regarding career (Blustein et al., 2002) and encounter barriers that prevent them from attending college (Valadez, 1998). Additionally, research shows that current career development theories are not applicable to those with low SES (Blustein, 1999; Kerka, 1998; McWhirter, Crothers & Rasheed, 2000). As a result, it is important for school counselors to assist students with low SES to aid them in career development and planfulness. This study investigated whether group career development counseling would help low SES students in their career development.

#### Review of the Literature

The literature review summarizes group counseling in the high school setting, career development in the high school setting, career counseling in the group setting, issues associated with low SES, career development and SES and low SES and career development theories.

#### *Group Counseling in the High School Setting*

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) developed the *ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2005) to outline academic, personal, social, and career competencies that comprehensive school counseling program should address. Within the model, ASCA identifies group counseling as an important and effective way to address

these competencies. Group counseling allows school counselors to work with an identified group of students that share similar concerns that cannot be effectively addressed by a teacher or in a classroom (Webb & Bringman, 2007). School counselors often have a caseload of between 400 to 1000 students; group work allows counselors to conduct interventions to reach greater numbers of students (Khattab & Jones, 2007).

The Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW, 2002) defines group work:

as a broad professional practice involving the application of knowledge and skill in group facilitation to assist an interdependent collection of people to reach their mutual goals which may be interpersonal, intrapersonal, or work-related. The goals of the group may include the accomplishment of tasks related to work, education, personal development, personal and interpersonal problem-solving, or remediation of mental and emotional disorders (p. 2).

The ASGW identifies four types of counseling groups: psychotherapy, counseling, psychoeducational, and task. Of the three groups task groups are the only groups that are not therapeutic and would not be used to achieve personal growth (Stanley, 2006).

However, psychoeducational, counseling, and psychotherapy groups are effective groups to use in the school setting (Paisley & Milsom, 2007).

Psychoeducational groups are appropriate for the general population and can address issues such as social skills, school performance and peer relations.

Psychoeducational groups focus on skill development with the goal of prevention.

Activities conducted in a group can include role-playing, problem solving, decision-making, and communication and coping skills (ASGW, 2000). Psychoeducational

groups are commonly utilized in the school setting (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). Psychoeducational groups are also said to be effective with students with disabilities. Effective group topics with this population include career exploration, barriers to employment, self-advocacy and other transitional challenges (McEachern & Kenny, 2007). McEachern & Kenny (2007) also state that, psychoeducational groups work particularly well in the school setting because they can address a variety of topics and can accommodate as few as eight to ten students and as many as 20 to 40 students. Counseling groups are more appropriate for students with developmental challenges and often address issues such as self-esteem and social challenges. Psychotherapy groups are appropriate for students that have adjustment or behavioral issues. These groups may address issues such as, aggressive and violent behaviors, eating disorders or depression (Crespi, Gustafson, & Borges, 2005).

Tuckman (1965) identified four stages that groups go through in the group process. Later Maples (1988) identified an additional fifth stage that the group experiences in the group process. According to Tuckman groups experience the forming stage, the storming stage, the norming stage, and the performing stage. Maple's additional fifth stage is the adjourning stage. The forming stage is a time with the group establishes dependence and structure. Polite discourse and silence are characteristic of this stage. As group members move into the storming stage they are likely to experience conflict as they interact and wrestle with both individual and group dynamics. The norming stage is marked by a sense of cohesiveness; group members experiment with different roles and begin to feel support within the group. As the group moves into the performing stage basic conflicts have been worked out and it is marked by high



productivity and decreased emotionality. Lastly, in Maple's fifth, adjourning stage, task completion and termination is noticeable (Crespi, Gustafson, & Borges, 2005).

When forming a group it is useful to consider factors such as age, gender, diversity, compositions, compatibility, contribution and emotion. Consideration of these factors as the group is formed may help the group be more effective (Hines & Fields, 2002). If a group is being established in the school setting Hines and Fields (2002) and Ritchie & Huss (2000) outline additional aspects that need to be considered in planning the group. If a student is under 18, consent must be obtained from the participants as well as parents or legal guardians. Group and personal confidentiality may be harder to ensure in a school setting and counselors must take all necessary steps to stress the importance of confidentiality to group participants. Additionally, school counselors must consider scheduling and assessment when planning a group in the school setting.

Group counseling in schools is one of the few areas that have been proven to be effective by a great amount of research, yet school counselors only spend eight to twelve percent of their time conducting group counseling activities (Whiston & Sexton, 1998). Furthermore, Littrell and Peterson (2002) state, "a systemic and comprehensive program focused on group work affords the opportunity to change an entire school" (p.161). Group counseling is an economical and effective way to communicate with and address students' issues in a brief period of time. Groups are a non-threatening technique in uncovering and resolving issues. Additionally, students may gain insight into their own lives by participating in a group with their peers (Veach & Gladding, 2007).

Veach and Gladding (2007) maintain that high school is an ideal time and environment to conduct group work with students. Not only is high school an ideal

setting, but high school students are also going through significant transitions in cognitive and emotional development during this time. Group work can help students work through these transitions. For many students these transitions are somewhat difficult and most high school students want to learn skills to help them through these transitions and improve interactions with others. Many students are at a stage where they are open to input, feedback and group experiences. Groups in high schools are a great way to help students grow and become more comfortable with themselves and the world they live in (Veach & Gladding, 2007). Often students think they are the only ones experiencing specific thoughts and feelings. Group work with high school students allows them to see that they are not alone in what they are experiencing. Therapeutic factors such as cohesion and universality are effective in the group setting with high school students (Yalom, 1995).

In an effort to discover the effectiveness of groups in schools, Hoag and Burlingame (1997) found that the average child who was involved in group counseling activities fell in the 73<sup>rd</sup> percentile prior to group counseling and rose to the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile post group counseling. In a similar study, Durlack and Wells (1997) analyzed the results of 156 predominantly mental health groups for students. Results found that the students in the counseling groups improved over 59 to 82 percent of those that were in the control group. Prout and Prout (1998) analyzed 17 studies of counseling and psychotherapy in the school setting from 1985 to 1994. The interventions were primarily in the group setting and were followed up with an individual component. Prout and Prout found the groups to be highly effective and the addition of the individual component compounded with group counseling to be the most effective (1998).

While groups are found to be effective in the school setting there are limitations as well. Issues such as single group designs, small sample sizes, lack of control groups, little information on treatment validity and short-term follow-up data make it difficult to fully assess the effectiveness of group counseling in the school setting (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007).

### *Career Development in the High School Setting*

The ASCA national model not only advocates for school counselors to conduct group counseling but also stresses the importance of career development and the need for school counselors to help students prepare for the transition from high school to their next step in life (American School Counselor Association, 2005). Helping students make successful transitions from high school to their next step in life is one of the most basic, but important tasks a school counselor faces (Lapan, Aoyagi, & Kayson, 2007). Proper career development activities include, establishing career and vocational preferences, narrowing occupational choices, developing career goals, and formulating long-term career plans (Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002).

Ideally, counselors should conduct career education activities beginning in elementary school. When students start thinking about their careers in elementary school they are more likely to have better knowledge of their personal interests as well as what career options are available to them (Battles, Dickens-Wright & Murphy, 1998). Szymanski (1994) contends that career planning should be viewed as a long term, ongoing career oriented process and one time, occupational choice approaches should be avoided (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). When students are more aware of their career

interests they can then link their high school classes and programs to their career goals (McEachern & Kenny, 2007).

Positive career orientation does not only affect an individual's career plan, it is also associated with positive aspects other than career development. Research suggests that successful career development positively affects one's mental health and sense of well being (Herr, 1989). Additionally, a range of constructive outcomes accompanies positive career orientation. Positive career orientation is a combination of favorable career and school attitudes combined with positive perceptions in individual ability to succeed at a chosen career and reach self-fulfillment (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). When students are positively future oriented and are working towards a goal they are likely to see positive side effects in other aspects of their lives (Nurmi, 1991). Positive career orientation is seen as a factor in predicating successful adjustment and is associated with disengagement from deviant behavior (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007).

Career indecision is a normal step in the career development process for some. Some are able to experience career indecision and move on while others are negatively affected by the stage (Skorikov, 2007). Research shows a correlation between career development and levels of adjustment. Career indecision is said to be the best indicator of adjustment (Creed, Prideaux, & Patton, 2005). Not everybody experiences career indecision, while others are more affected by the stage. For some, career indecision is simply a step in the career developmental process and is not accompanied with negative side effects (Skorikov, 2007). However, for others it is a difficult step in the career development process. Prolonged career indecision can be associated with anxiety,

depression, low self-esteem, maladjustment and low life satisfaction (Creed, Muller, & Patton, 2003).

A meta analysis conducted by Lapan, Aoyagi, and Kayson found that as far back as 1958 research has shown that students that receive guidance from a school counselor in regards to career planning are more successful post graduation (2007). More recent research has shown that thorough career development activities in high school are helpful to students with the transition out of high school. Lapan, Aoyagi, and Kayson (2007) conducted a three-year longitudinal school-to-career study with twelfth grade students in a rural setting. The study evaluated the outcome of career development activities that were outlined by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA). Students also received emotional and instrumental support while preparing to make a post high school transition. Results of the study showed that aspirations to attend college or further educational training were related to six skills that are outlined in the Integrative/Contextual Model of Career Development. The six skills that were noted as effective are: (1) develop positive self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations, and career-enhancing attributions; (2) explore options and develop personally meaningful goals; (3) enhance the perceived fit between the individual and the world of work; (4) integrate work readiness behaviors and prosocial skills into everyday actions; (5) identify career paths of interest; and (6) become successful students and self-regulated, lifelong learners. Students that used these six skills reported feeling satisfied with educational experience and with their next steps beyond high school (Lapan, Aoyagi, & Kayson, 2007).

Career development programming is linked to positively enhancing student attitudes towards school and increasing school engagement (Kenny et al., 2006). As students learn about and explore careers they are able to relate school to their future career goals and are more likely to value school. Additionally, vocational planfulness and knowledge of possible career expectations can help students find purpose and opportunity in education that they may not have seen without vocational aspirations. Kenny et al. also found that the higher the level of career planfulness and expectations the more engaged in school the student is.

Gibbons, Borders, Wiles, Stephan, and Davis (2006) interviewed 85 to 115 freshman students in eight different districts to find out their thoughts and needs in regards to career development. Their research found that many students are misinformed and are missing critical elements regarding career development. Gibbons et al. specifically focused on academics, career exploration and planning and college knowledge and planning. The majority of students involved in the study were on a college preparation track in high school and stated that they would most likely attend a four-year college post graduation. Many students reported that they had researched information about a career that was of interest to them or talked to their parents about their career interests. However, the majority of the students had not taken a career interest inventory, talked to their school counselor, written a resume, worked or volunteered in the field they were interested in, or taken classes that were related to their identified career. In this case school counselors were not frequently utilized and were rated as “least helpful” in comparison with internet sites, teachers, family and media (2006).

Gibbons et al. (2006) also found that the majority of students they interviewed did not have accurate beliefs regarding college knowledge and planning. Over half of the respondents overestimated the cost of a community college by \$3,000 or more. 72 percent of the respondents overestimated the cost of a private college and most students underestimated the number of community and private colleges in their state. Lastly, 65 percent of the students had never visited a college campus and 50 percent had never visited a college website.

Parents play a large role in their children's career development. Parents are important role models for their children (Morrow, 1995). Many parents see helping their children develop their career interests as an important role of parenting (Young & Friesen (1992). Downing and D'Andrea (1994) found that although many parents see helping their children develop their career interests as a vital function of their roles as parents they also feel helpless and uninformed about their child's career decision-making process. Many parents are unsure of what is effective when it comes to career development. Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, and Witko (2005) conducted a study to learn more about parental perceptions of their role in their child's career development process. When parents of junior high students were surveyed about what gaps exist in services, programs, and resources, parents were most concerned about nine specific themes. Parents of junior high students see the most need for professional speakers in the school setting, earlier career education, workshops, more information and resources for parents and students, full-time school counselors with good communication between parents and students, additional options for non-academic students, additional work experience, more courses that are related to the workforce, and more help with life skills and transitions.

Parents of senior high students were concerned about the above issues but also wanted more information from the high school, additional information about government funding and scholarships, and job fairs. While there were common themes in need between the two groups of parents, junior high parents are more concerned with school-based long-term career development and senior high parents desired more specific information related to post high school (Bardick et al., 2005). The work of Gibbons et al. (2006) and Bardick et al. (2005) shows the need for career development and education in schools so students and parents are not misinformed and have more accurate views of career and post high school options.

#### *Career Counseling in the Group Setting*

Little research has been done in regards to group career counseling in the high school setting. While there are many career education programs that can be conducted in the classroom, it is difficult to find research that is specific to career counseling in a group setting with high school students. Oliver and Spokane (1988) postulated that career interventions that are conducted in the group setting have a similar or greater effect as other career development interventions.

While there has been minimal research regarding group career interventions with high school students there has been some work regarding group career development with other populations (Mawson & Kahn, 1993; Schriener & Roessler, 1988). A group, career counseling program was conducted with 99 women who were undecided about their careers, the results of the group indicated that the participants highly valued both the cognitive and affective aspects of the group process within the career counseling group. The participants also valued the universality and group discussion the group provided.



The majority of the group participants reported increased self-knowledge and all but five of the women used the group to help them establish personal career goals (Mawson & Kahn, 1993). Career counseling has also been successfully conducted in the group setting with disabled individuals using the Occupational Choice Strategy (Schriner & Roessler, 1988). More research is needed to determine the effectiveness of group career counseling with high school students.

*Issues associated with low socioeconomic status*

Low socioeconomic status (SES) can have a negative effect on a variety of aspects of an individual's life including, physical health (Singh & Yu, 1996), mental health (Wight, Botticello, & Aneshensel, 2006), cognitive functioning, and academic achievement (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). SES is most commonly measured in two ways, material resources and nonmaterial resources. Some researchers argue that one plays a larger role of the other; however, many agree that both aspects play a role in SES (Chen, Langer, Raphaelson, & Matthews, 2004). Material resources consist of quantifiable assets, such as savings or property, while nonmaterial resources encompass family education or occupation (Krieger, Williams, & Moss, 1997). Bradley and Corwyn (2002) claim that the best way to assess SES is by the amount of capital one possesses. This includes financial capital such as wealth and assets, human capital such as education, and social capital such as resources that are a result of social connections. Bradley and Corwyn believe that financial capital, human capital, and social capital are all encompassing and provide an accurate assessment of SES (2002).

SES is said to be a more powerful determinant than race in academic success (Wilson, 1978 as cited in Battle & Pastrana, 2007). After controlling for demographic

characteristics, home environment, and economic capital, socioeconomic status was found to be at least ten times more powerful than race when determining academic success. Battle and Pastrana argue that increasing academic achievement with low SES students is a key way in help low SES students be more successful (2007).

While some low SES students excel academically, research shows that many low SES students perform at a lower academic level at school (Milne & Plourde, 2006). Children from low SES households start school less ready to learn and less able to use language to problem solve. Molfese, Dilalla, and Bunce (1997) postulate that the home environment is the most significant predictor of a child's intelligence from the ages three through eight years (Milne & Plourde, 2006). These students often struggle to keep up with classmates from higher SES households (Vail, 2004). While the effects of low SES vary from student to student, students that come from low SES families perform six to 13 points lower on standardized tests. Research has shown that family income is positively correlated with a child's academic success and achievement (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998). The effects of low SES have a negative effect on children's academic and cognitive skills, the effects are found to be the most harmful during a child's early years of development (Milne & Plourde, 2006).

There are a variety of reasons as to why students from low SES homes fall behind other students academically. Children that are raised in poverty conditions have do not have the same access to educational resources as higher SES children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). They also have fewer opportunities to go to libraries, museums, or cultural events. Low SES children have fewer books in the home. In addition, to fewer educational resources, low SES households are often a more crowded living environment

with many demands on the parents. As a result, parents are left with less time to work with their children to help them with the basic skills that help them excel academically (Constantin, 2005). Parents in high SES households provide more learning opportunities for their children, read to them more, and engage them in more meaningful and deeper conversations (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

The work of Milne and Plourde (2006) found that low SES and academic success could be tied to educational resources and influences, the mother's education, relationships, and similar causes of success. Six parents of second grade students who were of low SES and had children that excelled at school were questioned about how they helped make their child successful. Common themes evolved when parents spoke of making sure their child had access to educational materials at home, having a specific time allotted everyday for homework, helping their child with their school work in addition to limiting the amount of television allowed at home. Parents that were interviewed also spoke passionately about the relationship between their child and themselves. Many parents spoke about the struggle of working and trying to be there for their children. Parents spoke of the importance of quality time, doing things together and being there for their child. Parents expressed the importance of having a good relationship with their children but also clearly defining the roles of who the parent is and who the child is. While there was not a consistent level of education between the parents that were interviewed, all parents expressed that they believed that education is very important and they wanted their children to understand the importance of an education. When parents were asked about the reasons their child was successful at school, all parents spoke of the importance for support and guidance at home, talking with their

children about the importance of education, and setting clear boundaries about what is and is not optional in regards to their child's schoolwork. The work of Milne and Plourde (2006) highlighted some necessary factors in what is necessary in a child's home life to make a low SES student more successful academically.

Low SES is a strong predictor for school dropout and is one of the most common predictors that is cited as reason for school dropout (Caldwell & Ginther, 1996; Suh, Suh, Houston, 2007). Low SES students make up the largest population of students that are considered to be at-risk of dropping out (Caldwell & Ginther, 1996). Lack of academic achievement is most commonly the reason for low SES student dropout (Caldwell & Ginther, 1996; Suh, Suh, Houston, 2007).

Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) researched the three most common predictors of school drop out (SES, poor academic achievement and suspension from school) to find what variables within these three categories increase the risk of school drop out. Suh, Suh, and Houston's work found that up fifteen additional variables affect a low SES student's choice to dropout of school. The most significant variables that influence school dropout in low SES students are, low educational attainment of the maternal parent (particularly if the student lives with that parent), numerous school changes, and having sex before the age of 15. As a result of their findings, Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) recommend that school counselors reach out and offer additional academic support to students of low SES. School counselors should also reach out to new students that are considered to be at-risk. Counselors should work to help the students make a smooth transition to their new school and continue to support the student through the school year. In general, counselors can improve at-risk students' likelihood to succeed by working

with these students to help them develop a more optimistic view of the future and associating them with peers that plan to pursue college (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007).

Suh, Suh, and Houston (2007) consider helping students to develop an optimistic view of their future as the component that can be the most influential to the student. The more a student's motivation is self-determined, the less likely the student is to drop out of school (Vallerand, Fortie, & Guay, 1997). Suh, Suh, and Houston suggest that career-based classroom programming that is intended to help students develop an optimistic plan and outlook for the future prior is an effective way to address at-risk low SES school dropout. To increase effectiveness, programming should start prior to the eighth grade. Career education and exploration are directly linked to school success in middle school students. By using career development activities and continuing to improve students' future outlook, low SES students will be in less danger of dropping out of school (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007).

Low SES students are highly represented in reports of discipline referrals, and suspension rates (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Hayden, 1994; Skiba, 2002). When a student is removed from the school setting it is problematic for the student because it gradually increases social and academic disengagement. When this happens it increases instances of academic failure and school dropouts (Bakken & Kortering, 1999; DeRidder, 1991). Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger (2007) conducted a study that hypothesized that students of low SES would have higher rates of discipline related exclusion when compared to students of higher SES. The results of their study found that low SES was highly correlated with discipline related exclusion. Achilles, McLaughlin, and Croninger

(2007) also found that SES is a better predictor of suspension and expulsion than ethnicity.

People of low SES also experience higher instances of health related problems. Low SES children have higher rates of many diseases (Halfon & Newacheck, 1993) as well as higher risk factors for disease and high blood pressure. In addition, low SES individuals are more likely to smoke and have less likely to engage in adequate rates of physical activity (Escobedo, Anda, Smith, Remington, & Mast, 1990). Stress is a main factor in low SES health related issues. Low SES children are exposed to more stressful and unpredictable negative life events when compared with higher SES children (Brady & Matthews, 2002).

#### *Career Development and Socioeconomic Status*

Career planning plays an important role in career development for high school students. Too often, SES negatively effects the career planning process. For the most part, there has not been a lot research done to explore the role that social class plays in career development. Blustein et al. (2002) believe that youth that go from high school right into the work force may be undergoing one of the most challenging developmental tasks of their life. Research shows that current career development theories are not applicable to those with low SES (Blustein, 1999; Kerka, 1998; McWhirter, Crothers & Rasheed, 2000). As a result, it is important for school counselors to assist students with low SES to aid them in career development and planfulness.

Research shows that students of low SES are engaged in less deliberate career development activities, receive less guidance in school and from home regarding career (Blustein et al., 2002) and encounter barriers that prevent them from attending college

(Valadez, 1998). Research suggests that there is a gap in planning to attend college and actually attending college with low SES students. A possible explanation as to why this gap exists is that the students do not have a thorough understanding of what it takes to get to college and how to go about getting there. Typically, there is also little help and support from low SES parents in knowledge about college, academic preparation and planning for college (Fallon, 1997; Valadez, 1998). Low SES students are also more likely to make their career and educational choices based on monetary limitations and family obligations (Inman & Nayas, 1999).

Blustein et al. (2002) attempted to gain insight into the experience of the school to work transition and the challenges that accompany the process. Twenty individuals participated in a qualitative study to look deeper into the issue. The participants were made up of 10 men and 10 women that were then divided into two groups of ten. One group consisted of participants with higher socioeconomic status (HSES) and the other group consisted of participants with lower socioeconomic status (LSES). Socioeconomic status was determined based on parents' occupation. To achieve a more homogenous sample participants that were attending college full-time or had graduated from a four-year college were excluded from the group. All participants in the study were employed. Participants were interviewed on topics including support from family, teachers, counselors, co-workers and supervisors, educational and vocational decision-making, development of vocational interest, career planfulness, role models, perceived educational skills and achievements, work experiences, and overall life and job satisfaction (Blustein et al. 2002).

After data from the participants was collected and organized, the data from the two groups was organized into five categories surrounding vocational, educational, and relational aspects of the participants' lives. The categories consisted of experiences in the functions of work, self-concept crystallization and implementation, educational resources and barriers, relational resources and career adaptability. The two groups expressed different experiences in all categories that can be based on SES.

When asked about the function of work and why they work participants from the HSES group named reasons other than money. The LSES group named reasons based around survival. HSES participants talked about success and happiness in relation to the function of work. One participant went as far as saying "money just is not that important. I'd rather be happy with what I am doing, you know, and able to move forward" (Blustein et al. 2002). However, the LSES group spoke almost solely of survival, specifically of making money and meeting basic needs.

Similar results were found between the two groups regarding self-concept and crystallization and implementation. Most participants in the HSES group were able to apply their self-concept to their work while nobody in the LSES group was able to tie their self-concept to their work at that point in their lives. A lack of education to reach personal goals was a common barrier in not being able to apply self-concept at work. However, most individuals in the HSES group were involved in some kind of training to help them reach their career goals. Participants in the HSES group had a clearer idea of what their goals were and what they needed to do to achieve them. Very few individuals from the LSES group were participating or seeking out any planned action in reaching their career goals. For the most part, the group acknowledged that they wanted



something better but did not report taking any steps to reach their career goals (Blustein et al. 2002).

When participants from both groups discussed educational resources and barriers, both internal and external, little difference was found between the two groups regarding internal educational resources. Both groups had similar internal educational resources and barriers. Participants from both groups expressed that they didn't apply themselves in school and lacked interest in school. Conversely, participants from both groups also expressed that they liked school and were engaged and interested in school. This indicates that there is little difference between the two groups in regards to internal education resources and barriers (Blustein et al. 2002).

While there is little difference in internal educational resources and barriers there were differences between the groups in external resources and barriers. The individuals in the HSES group expressed that they had access to vocational and personally salient resources within their schools. HSES participants spoke about computers and books for college in their guidance office, and spoke positively about their counselors and job fairs. Participants from the LSES group also talked about their school's guidance resources but described the services as much less helpful and available than those from the HSES group. Participants in the LSES group described their experiences with their school counselor as "not the best in the world" or "they just pushed me out of there very fast, they pushed everyone out" or "no, she didn't help me" (Blustein et al., 2002, p.317). While the HSES group did experience barriers they were not as difficult to overcome as those the LSES group experienced.

When asked about parental involvement in regards to career development the individuals in the HSES group expressed that their parents were actively involved in their career planning. When talking about their career planning, participants in the HSES group described their parental support as supportive and encouraging towards career exploration. Participants in the LSES group did not report that they received help in their career exploration from their parents. While many in the group said that their parents were verbally supportive they did little to help them obtain information about career related opportunities. In general, LSES participants made decisions about their education and career without parental input (Blustein et al., 2002).

Relational disruptions play a big role in school to post graduation success and participants from the LSES group reported many more relational disruptions than those in the HSES group. Individuals in the LSES group talked about parental job loss, moving, fighting within the family, and missing school. Those that encountered relational disruptions in the HSES group did not experience as severe disruptions as the LSES group and were able to overcome the disruptions more successfully than the LSES group (Blustein et al., 2002).

In addition to the above findings, Blustein et al. (2002) looked at career adaptability (exploration and planfulness) between the LSES and HSES groups. As a result, the research found that there is evidence of a division between classes in regards to career adaptability. When asked about career exploration participants from the HSES group described a much more systematic approach to career exploration than the LSES group. An individual from the HSES group talked about wanting to be police officer, she was supported by her parents and engaged in activities outside of school to help her learn

about the profession. Some individuals in the LSES group reported that they were involved in career exploration but the activities were not as informative or structured as the HSES group. One participant in the LSES group said that he was interested in dental hygiene because he liked science and biology, and later thought he may be interested in becoming an orthopedic surgeon. However, he never did any formal exploration in either of the fields. He reporting taking year off of school after he graduated, which he now says was a big mistake. He stated that he had nobody to tell him that he should go right to college. He describes the experience saying, “I was really scared, I was afraid. I was so afraid. The last week of my senior year in high school was horrible... . It was very hard for me because I didn’t know what I wanted to do” (Blustein et al., 2002, p. 319).

Similar trends were found when participants were asked about career planfulness. Participants from the HSES group were much more likely to conduct future-oriented planning or at least saw it as an important aspect of their career development. Participants from the LSES group were significantly less likely to engage in planning for the future. Individuals from the HSES group reported planning for their retirement, having a ten-year plan, and creating a plan to reach personal goals. Individuals in the LSES group were much more oriented around short-term and present issues. When asked how far in advance they plan, one person reported planning for a couple of hours in advance while another reported planning for the next few days. One individual from the LSES group spoke of his realization of the importance of planning and regrets his lack of planning (Blustein et al., 2002).

The work of Blustein et al. (2002) presents a clear picture of the differences that SES presents in the functions of work, self-concept crystallization and implementation,

educational resources and barriers, relational resources and career adaptability as well as career exploration and planfulness. The differences in the career development experience are alarming and present a clear picture of the need for a more concentrated focus on career planning and development interventions for students with lower SES status. Specifically, HSES participants reported a clearer sense of career goals and knew what they needed to do to achieve them. They also reported more positive experiences with their school counselor in regards to career development. Based on the findings of Blustein et al. more purposeful and concentrated career development work needs to be done with low SES students (2002).

Kenny et al. (2003) researched the role that perceived barriers and relational support plays in the educational and vocational lives of urban high school students. Urban youth that live in poverty may not have ample resources available to them and face barriers such as high rates of unemployment and violence. They also may not have racial or ethnic role models in professional occupations. There is also a lack of knowledge about occupational alternatives that could help shape their goals and perceptions of their future. All of this negatively impacts career development and planning for urban youth. Kenny et al. (2003) attempted to measure the relationship between perceived barriers, kinship support, school engagement and career aspirations in low SES ninth graders in an urban setting. The Perceptions of Barriers Scale, the Kinship Support Scale, the Career Aspirations Scale, and a scale to measure school engagement was conducted with 174 urban ninth graders. As a result, Kenny et al. found that students that reported perceiving fewer barriers and had higher levels of family support also reported higher levels of school engagement and higher aspirations for their future career (Kenny et al., 2003).

The work of Kenny et al. (2003) prompted a follow up study to learn more about the developmental contextual factors that are related to the educational and vocational lives of low SES, urban youth in relation to their perceived barriers, social support, school engagement, and career development. In study two, 181 ninth graders from the same two schools that were used in the first study were given the Kinship Support Scale, School Engagement Scale, Identification With School Questionnaire, Social Provisions Scale, Career Aspirations Scale, the Work Role Salience Scale, and the Outcome Expectation Scale. The results of study two supported the work of the first study. It found that students that have general support as well as perceived family support are more engaged in both their educational and vocational lives. Students that do not feel as if they are supported are less likely to be engaged in school and have less positive attitudes towards their future careers (Kenny et al., 2003).

The work of Kenny et al. (2003) is in line with Blustein, Mchirter, and Perry's (2005) research with poor youth of color that found that barriers that are associated with SES, as well as race and ethnicity, negatively impact the individual's career development. Specifically, work salience and vocational expectations were found to be negatively impacted (Blustein, Mchirter, & Perry, 2005).

The work of Linstrom et al. (2007) researched the role that family plays in career development and also found that low SES has a direct effect on career development and vocational identity. The families that Linstrom et al. interviewed were of low SES and had a family member that had recently made a school to work transition. Most families that were interviewed did not indicate that they had done any purposeful career planning activities as their children were going through the career development process. As a

result, the majority of the participants expressed low or vague career aspirations. However, when students were asked what he or she wanted for his or her future many expressed that they did not want what their parents had, they wanted to be better (Linstrom et al., 2007).

### *Low Socio Economic Status and Career Development Theories*

Career development not only helps students plan for their future, it can also help students see the value of school and increase school engagement (Kenny et al. 2006). Research shows that low SES negatively effects career development (Blustein et al. 2002). What's more, is some career development theories may not be applicable to people of low SES, making it even more difficult to for this population to plan for their future (Brown, 2000; Kerka 1998).

Social Cognitive Career Theory highlights the importance of the interaction of personal attributes, external environmental factors and behavior in the career decision-making process. However, barriers that accompany low SES may be influenced by self-efficacy and therefore rule out possibilities that low SES individuals do not see as realistic for themselves. Life Span Theories focus on career development throughout the lifetime and career maturity. Low SES individuals are not as able to explore and plan for their career, which negatively effects career maturity. Low SES youth have lower levels of career maturity due to lack of occupational information, role models, and employment opportunities; all of this results in low career maturity (Kerka, 1998). While these theories may not be applicable to low SES career development, Social-Cognitive Career Theory has a promising theoretical framework for understanding the school to work transition (McWhiter et al. 2000).

Little work has been done regarding John Holland's Self-Directed Search (SDS) with low SES students. Despite the fact that minimal research has been done regarding the SDS and SES, the SDS is a test that is effective with many populations. The SDS is not appropriate for those with severe mental illness, are uneducated or illiterate (Miller, 1997). The SDS search is a test that aids in career counseling, it is self-administered, self-scored and self-interrupted. It is an effective tool because it allows a career or school counselor to reach a large number of people and it is a tool that can be used if an individual does not have access to or want to see a career counselor (Holland, Powell & Fritzsche, 1994). The SDS has been used successfully with a wide variety of populations, including learning disabled students (Humes, 1992).

#### Method

The literature shows a discrepancy in career planning and development in low SES students when compared to their higher SES peers. Low SES students have a higher risk of dropping out of school (Suh, Suh, Houston, 2007; Caldwell & Ginther, 1996), higher rates of disciplinary referrals (Christle, Nelson, & Jolivette, 2004; Hayden, 1994, Skiba, 2002) and often do not receive sufficient career development and planning guidance (Blustein, 1999; Kerka, 1998; McWhirter, Crothers & Rasheed, 2000). Career development activities that generate career goals can increase perceived value in school and allow the student to construct their classes in accordance to their career goals (McEachern & Kenny, 2007). Group counseling is an effective way to reach students in a high school setting. It allows a school counselor to reach multiple students at one time and group counseling creates feelings of universality, which is often important to high school students (Khattab & Jones, 2007; Webb & Bringman, 2007). For these reasons,

the researcher chose to conduct seven group-counseling sessions with low SES students with the goal of improving career development with these students. The following section provides a description of the school setting, participants, group sessions, and evaluation.

### *School Setting*

Career development in the group setting took place in a rural high school setting in the eastern part of the United States. The K-12 school participating in the study consisted of 1,692 students. 2,600 people live in the village that the school is set in but the school district encompasses five surrounding towns from which students are drawn from. Agriculture is a major industry for this area and plays a large role in the lives of many students. Two county and state correctional facilities are also key employers within the community.

Within the district there are 3,407 households, of those households 7.8 percent are single-family households. 73.8 percent of adults in the district have at least a high school diploma and 11.3 percent have at least a bachelor's degree, both of which are lower than the state average. 9.2 percent of the district's population have a household income of \$0 - \$14,999, 15.5 percent have an income of \$15,000 - \$29,000, 23.8 percent have an income of \$30,000, 28.8 percent have an income of \$50,000 - \$74,999, 12.9 percent have an income of \$75,000 - \$99,999, 7.1 percent have an income of \$100,000 - \$149,999 and 2.7 percent have a household income that is more than \$150,000.

98.5 percent of the student population within the district is made up of caucasian students, .5 percent are black, .2 percent are Hispanic, .5 percent are Asian/Pacific



Islander and .3 percent of the school population is American Indian/Alaska Native. 27.7 percent of the school population is classified as economically disadvantaged.

The student to teacher ratio within the school is 12:1 and the school's high school English and Language Arts and Math proficiency scores are higher than the state average. The school partners with a local community college to provide students with the opportunity to take college classes to earn college credit in eight different subject areas. Within the graduating class of 2007 there were 142 graduates, 62 students had plans to go on to a four year college, 55 students planned to attend a two year, 9 students entered military service and 16 planned to seek employment. The rate of seniors planning to attend a two year or four year college increased by 7.5 percent from 2006 to 2007.

#### *Participant Selection Method and Characteristics*

Ideal participants for this project were ninth through twelfth grade students that could be classified as low SES and did not have any concrete career goals or plans. For this study, students were identified as being low SES if they received free or reduced lunch or had parents that did not attend college. The counseling office identified eighteen possible students as appropriate potential candidates for the group. The students were identified as being low SES and were also believed to have few or no career goals. After speaking to all of the candidates twelve were asked to be a part of the group based on the groups purpose and goals. The students that were not asked to participate in the career group were ruled out because when asked, they reported having a career goal and knowing what they want to do after they graduate. Of the twelve students that were identified and reported that they did not have any specific or concrete career goals, nine

agreed to participate and followed through in returning their consent forms (see Appendix A) to participate in the group.

Nine students that were identified as low SES and reported that they did not have any solid career plans or goals participated in seven group counseling sessions with the goal of improving career goals. The group was made up of eight females and one male. Eight of the participants were in the tenth grade and one participant was in twelfth grade. All of the students lived in a rural setting and were of white/Caucasian ethnicity. As stated before, all participants either received free or reduced lunch or had parents that did not attend college.

### *Procedure*

The career group was scheduled to meet twice a week for three and a half weeks. After all of the participants returned their permission slips a group meeting schedule was created. All participants were called down to the counseling office to let them know that the career group was starting and to give them a schedule of the meeting dates. Participants were informed of how the group was set up and were asked if they had any questions about the way the group would run. The group was held twice a week for three and a half weeks during fifth and sixth periods. All students have lunch and study hall during fifth and sixth periods so no students were required to miss any classes to participate in the group. Because the group met during the lunch periods group participants had time to get their lunch and eat it while participating in the group. All of the career development activities that were conducted in the group sessions were from Pope and Minor's *Experiential Activities for Teaching Career Counseling Classes and for Facilitating Career Groups* (Pope & Minor, 2000).

The first session of the group consisted of setting up the rules and protocol of the group. Even though most of the group participants were familiar with each other a brief icebreaker activity was conducted to help make the participants comfortable with each other and give the researcher the opportunity to get to know the group members. After the icebreaker was complete the researcher explained the purpose of the group. The researcher explained that not only was the purpose of the group to conduct career development activities, but also to conduct a research project for the researchers Master's program thesis requirement. Participants were asked to share when they expected and wanted to get out of the group. After a brief discussion about participants' expectations the researcher shared her expectations. The main group expectations were to respect all opinions and thoughts that are shared within the group. Participants were also asked to take the group seriously and put their best effort into the activities that were planned. The researcher shared the many benefits of career development activities as well as the positive aspects that accompany career goals so group members were aware of the positive outcomes that could come from the group. The researcher also addressed the issue of confidentiality within the group. The researcher expressed that within the group setting it was important for all group members to feel safe in sharing what they were feeling or thinking; and if participants knew that their thoughts and feeling were going to be kept confidential it would help everyone be more comfortable. Lastly, the researcher shared that she hoped the group would be a fun and enjoyable experience that everyone would benefit from. The researcher stated that the group was not created to make additional work in the participants' lives, but to simply conduct activities that they would

hopefully enjoy to help them get to better know themselves, their values, and their strengths in relation to their career development.

After the group expectations were covered participants were asked to complete the pre-survey (see Appendix B). The pre-survey tracked the participant's gender, age, and grade. It also asked the following questions in a yes/no format: (1.) Have you thought about what you would like to do after graduation? (2.) Do you have plans for further education/training after high school? (2b.) If you answered no, do you have any plans for after graduation? (3.) Is there a particular occupation that you would like to pursue as a career? (3b.) If you answered yes, what is the occupation?

Following the post survey, the group participated in an activity to introduce the participants to career development and to stress the importance of career in our lives. The group participants were asked to write a list of all of the activities they had participated in within the last 24 hours. After their lists were created they were then asked to rate how much they like or dislike the activities that were listed on their sheet. Group participants were instructed to rate an activity as a one if they strongly disliked it, two if they disliked it, three if they liked it and four if they strongly liked the activity. After all of the activities were rated the participants were asked to notice if more of their activities were rated as activities they liked or disliked. The purpose of the activity was to show the participants how much of their day is made up of activities they like or dislike. A follow up discussion was conducted about the importance and value of having passion for the activities that fill a day and career development activities help an individual know what they have passion for.

The second group session focused on the participants' vocational inheritance and participants created a career genogram during the session. The session was prefaced with a discussion about how much or how little family influences personal choices and possibly career interests. The group discussed how much family member's effect personal choices, behaviors and attitudes. The researcher explained what a genogram is and how to make a genogram to represent your family. The researcher instructed the group to create a genogram as far back as their grandparents. When creating the genogram they were instructed to include their family member's occupation on the genogram and think about each family member's career, talents, personal values and attitudes. After the group had time to create and think about their genogram the researcher followed up the activity with a debriefing conversation. Participants were asked to think about and discuss the following questions: (1) What patterns of occupations/skills/attitudes do I see throughout my family? (2) Do I see any possible career choices for myself from the work that my family has done? (3) What values, interests or attitudes have I inherited from my family? (4) Am I interested in pursuing the same career as someone else in my family, if so, what draws me to that career? and (5) Does my family have an idea of what they want me to become based on our family's history?

The third session of the career group focused on personal values and how values relate to career development. Knowledge of personal values is important in relation to career development because values can play a role in what occupation an individual chooses and can effect satisfaction with an occupation. The purpose of the values activity was to help participants learn the importance of values clarification, become

aware of their personal values, and understand the importance of considering personal values when thinking about potential careers and career planning. The session began with a discussion about personal values and how participants thought values relate to career development.

After a group discussion on values, each participant was given a sheet listing potential personal values (See Appendix C). Participants were instructed to choose ten values from the list that they would consider to be their strongest personal values. Participants also had the opportunity to write in additional values if they felt the list didn't include a value that was important to them. After participants chose their top ten values they were given five strips of paper and were instructed to choose their top five values from the ten they identified on the sheet and write one value on each strip of paper. After their five values were written on the paper the researcher told they group that she was going to ask them to give up one of their values. The participants had to choose what value from their top five they were willing to give up. Once the value was chosen the researcher asked the participants to share why they had decided to give up the value they chose and what it was about the other values that were more important to them. This process continued until group participants were down to one value that was the most important to them. After the activity was complete the group debriefed about what it felt like to have to choose and give up their values and how values play a large role in career development.

The forth group session focused on developing realistic career pathways. The learning objective of this session was to help students identify steps that are needed to reach a desired career goal. Prior to the fourth session the facilitator printed off job

postings from a large, local newspaper. During the session the students were randomly given one of the job postings. After they shared the job posting with the group they were instructed to read through the posting and write down the qualifications and the steps that would be necessary to obtain the qualifications. The job postings varied from simply requiring a training program to a requiring a Masters degree with extensive experience. Students were also instructed to write down the qualifications and steps necessary for a career they were interested in. Copies of the *Enhanced Occupational Outlook Handbook* (JIST Publishing, 2005) were available for students to use if they did not already know the information. Prior to starting the activity the facilitator gave the students the example of a high school principal and went through the steps it takes to become a principal so students would have a better idea of what their task was. Lastly, students were asked to write a goal by each step they outlined for the career that they chose. For example, if they had to attend a four year college for their chosen career, a goal that they could set while they were outlining the steps could be, to the dean's list at least three times while they are in college.

After the students were given time to research and outline the career pathways, the researcher led a discussion to debrief what they had learned about the two careers that they researched. Students were asked to share with the group what job posting they were given as well as what career they had chosen. They were then asked to tell about what steps it would take to obtain both careers and share the goals they had set for themselves for the career of their choice. After all participants shared what they had learned they were then asked if they had any interest in the job description they were given and the steps it would take to get that position. They were then asked if they realized or already

knew the steps it would take to get into their chosen career. Lastly, the students were asked if they were willing to go through all of the necessary steps for their chosen career or if they were going to reevaluate what they were interested in.

The purpose of fifth session was to help students identify their personal strengths and positive qualities and learn how their personal strengths can influence their career development and future career goals. Prior to beginning the activity students were asked to share any personal strengths or positive personal qualities about themselves. After a brief discussion about positive personal strengths and qualities and how strengths are related to career development, students were given a checklist of positive personal qualities that was taken from Pope and Minor's *Experiential Activities for Teaching Career Counseling Classes and for Facilitating Career Groups* (Pope & Minor, 2000). (see Appendix D) to help them identify their personal strengths. Students were given a large sheet of paper and asked to draw four boxes on the paper and label them as school, family, friends, and work. They were then instructed to draw six circles surrounding each box. After their paper was set up they were told to look at the list of personal strengths and identify six personal strengths that they possess in the four areas of their life. Specifically, each participant was asked to identify six personal strengths in regards to school, family, friends, and work.

After participants were given enough time to think about and complete the activity they were then asked to share some of the strengths they had identified with the group. The researcher asked the group to think about and share what it felt like to have to label their personal positive strengths and qualities. After a brief discussion the researcher asked the participants to look at their paper and identify their strongest



strength in each category. Participants were then asked why they thought that was their best strength and how it would help them in their career development. Participants were then asked to identify a strength in each category that they want to improve. Lastly, participants were asked why they choose the strengths they did and how improving the identified strengths would effect their career development.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Form R of the Self Directed Search (SDS) (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1997) was administered in the sixth session and scored in the seventh session. Participants were aware that the first five sessions would consist of career development activities that would help them learn about how family influences career attitudes and choice, their personal values and strengths and realistic career goals and would conclude with taking the SDS. The SDS is a self-administered, self-scored, and self-interpreted test that is widely used in career counseling. The SDS is an inclusive inventory of vocational interests, values, competencies, avocational interests and personality. The test consists of five sections, which are, occupational daydreams, self-assessments in activities, competencies, occupations, and self-estimates. Answers are then broken down into six environments including, Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). According to the SDS most people can be categorized into one of the six RIASEC categories (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1997). After students took the test it was self-scored within the group. Students were instructed on how to score their test with step-by-step directions by the researcher. After participants scored their test and identified their three-letter RIASEC code the Occupation Finders were distributed. Student were informed as to how their RIASEC code could be used to learn the results of their test with the SDS Occupations Finder.

Participants were given time to look over their results and compare their results with other group members. Prior to the end of the session the facilitator debriefed the test results with the group. The researcher also informed the group that if they wanted to discuss their results further or further investigate a career option they were always welcome at the counseling office. Lastly, a post-survey regarding the career group (see Appendix E) was distributed, filled out, and collected prior to the end of the group.

The first edition of the SDS came out in 1971, the most recent, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, was last updated in 1994. In this case, the 1994 edition of Form R was given to the group participants. Research suggests that overall the 1994 edition of Form R is superior to the 1985 edition. The test items have been refined, the endorsement rates for males and females have improved and the internal consistency reliability has increased when compared to the 1985 Form R. Additionally, norms and the occupation finder have been updated to better-fit current use (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1997).

To test the reliability and validity of the test, the 1994 Edition of the SDS Form R was administered to 2,602 students and adults from 25 states and Washington D.C. The sample was made up of 1,600 females and 1,002 males that ranged in age from 17 to 65 years old ( $M=23.5$ ). The group consisted of 75 percent whites, 8 percent African-Americans, 7 percent Hispanics, 4 percent Asian-Americans, 1 percent Native Americans and 5 percent were from other ethnic backgrounds. The data was collected at ten high schools, nine community colleges, 19 colleges or universities, and other diverse sources. Reliability for the Activities, Competences, and Occupations scales ranged from .72 to .92 and the summary scale ranged from .90 to .94. Correlations between the two Self-Estimate Scales ranged from .37 to .84, which indicates that the ratings contain a shared

variance but also contribute a unique variance per scale. Test-retest reliability summary scales range from .76 to .89, which indicates that the summary scales have substantial stability. The standard error of measurement for the summary scales all fell within the limits of measurement error. Most interest inventories report a range of 40% to 55% hits in regards to concurrent and predictive validity. The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the SDS has an overall hit rate of 54.7% (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1997).

### *Evaluation*

The researcher planned to meet with the career group participants no less than seven sessions, two times a week. The effectiveness of the group sessions was measured with a pre and post career group survey (See Appendix B and E). Participants were informed of the group purpose during the first session and were asked to fill out the pre-survey. Participants were later asked to fill out a similar post-survey prior to leaving the last session. The survey allowed the researcher to gauge where the participants stood in their career development prior to the career group and post career group.

## Results

### *Pre and post-survey results*

The results of the pre and post-survey are outlined in the graphs below. The pre-survey was given to the participants at the beginning of the first session and the post survey was given at the end of the final session. There was no attrition in the career group and all participants filled out the pre and post-survey. Eight females and one male filled out the pre and post-survey. Eight of the participants were in tenth grade and one of the participants was in twelfth grade. Six of the participants were 15-years old, one

participant was 16-years old, one participant was 17-years old and one participant was 18-years old. The pre and post-survey results are outlined below.

**Pre-Survey Results:**

QUESTION	YES	NO
Have you thought about what you would like to do after graduation?	89%	11%
Do you have plans for further education/training after high school?	89%	11%
If you answered no, do you have any plans for after graduation?	100%	0%
Is there a particular occupation that you would like to pursue as a career?	89%	11%
If you answered yes what is the occupation?	89% Vet, Teacher, Marines, Business or Science Vet Tech, Business Veterinarian Acting or Doctor Science, Psychology Elementary School Teacher Athletic Trainer	N/A – 11%

**Post-Survey Results:**

QUESTION	YES	NO
Have you thought about what you would like to do after graduation?	100%	0%
Do you have plans for further education/training after high school?	100%	0%
If you answered no, do you have any plans for after graduation?	n/a	n/a
Is there a particular occupation that you would like to pursue as a career?	100%	0%
If you answered yes what is the occupation?	100% Vet, Teacher, Machinist,	0%

	<p>Welder/Fabricator, pre-vet,          Biologist, Anthropologist,          Stay at Home Mom, Dog          Groomer, Psychiatrist,          Genetic Counselor,          Veterinarian, Acting          Elementary School Teacher</p>	
<p>What was the most helpful part of the career group?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything, it really made me think</li> <li>• Looking at all aspects that go into a career</li> <li>• I think that finding out our genograms was very helpful. This was helpful because I could look and see what my family has done.</li> <li>• Discovering my strengths and values</li> <li>• EVERYTHING</li> <li>• It showed me that I want to be a teacher like I've always wanted to</li> <li>• Everything! It helped a lot</li> <li>• Strengths activity, because it made me realize the strengths I really have and how different they can be at different places</li> </ul>	

While the results did not change drastically, there was some change from pre to post-survey. Many participants reported that they had thought about what they would like to do after graduation prior to the group. At the end of the sessions, all participants reported thinking about what they would like to do after graduation after attending the career group. Additionally, all participants reported having plans for further education or training after high school, which was a change from pre to post-survey. Lastly, all participants reported having an occupation in mind that they would like to pursue as a career.

According to the survey results, the career group was effective in helping students think about what they would like to do after they graduate, think about their plans for

more education or training after they graduate and think about what occupations they would like to consider as possible career options. According to the survey results, some potential occupation choices remained the same throughout the sessions and some participants saw changes in their potential career options. The participants that saw changes in their career choices attributed it to know themselves better as a result of the career group activities. Other students were able to narrow down the choices in the field of work they were interested in and others used the group to validate a career interest. For example, one participant narrowed her career choice down from something in the field of science to genetic counselor. Another participant began the group without any idea about what he wanted to do after high school. The participant reported leaving the group with a clear idea about what he wants to do as a career as well as in post high school training/education.

The post-survey asked students to identify what part of the career group they found the most helpful. While there wasn't one particular activity that stood out as the most helpful, many of the responses identified the whole program as being effective in helping the students think about and explore their future careers. One participant reported that all of the activities helped because they made her think about her career in ways she hadn't in the past. Two other participants responded that everything about the career group was helpful to them in regards to their career development. Many respondents stated that they thought it was helpful to learn about their strengths and values in relation to their career development. One respondent reported that the career genogram was the most helpful activity for him because he could look back and see what his family had done regarding their careers.

The researcher had predicted to see larger percentages of change from pre to post-survey. Specifically the researcher did not expect the participants to report that they had thought much about their career and post-graduation plans. Different wording in the survey may have provided more insight about where they participants were in their career development process.

#### *Anecdotal results*

In an effort to learn more about the participants' experiences in the career group, the researcher asked the participants to provide anecdotal information regarding what they thought about the career group. All participants were very positive about their experience in the career group and reported that they valued the work that was done in the group sessions. Many participants expressed that they wished the group would have lasted longer.

The career group addressed the role that individual strengths, values and family history play in career development. When the researcher asked the participants if they thought it was important to address these factors. When talking about career all participants reported that they liked that those aspects were included in the group sessions. Many participants said that they had never thought about how family, values and strengths play a role in exploring and choosing a career. One participant stated that she will think about her future career possibilities in a much different way now that she is more aware of and in-tune with her values. Some participants stated that the activity regarding personal values made reevaluate an interest in a specific career that they thought may not be in-tune with their personal values.

Some participants stated that they were more aware of their strengths at the end of the group. Participants reported that knowing their personal strengths would not only help them when thinking about their future careers but also in the college application process. One of the group discussions centered on the importance of knowing personal strengths. With the help of the researcher as a facilitator, the group discussed the importance of being able to identify and verbalize individual strengths. The participants and the researcher had a discussion about the number of people that struggle with identifying and verbalizing their personal strengths. Participants left the group more aware of their personal strengths. The participants stated that they thought they would be better able to capitalize on and continue to improve their strengths as a result of the career group. As a whole the group reported that thinking about personal values and strengths will influence their future career choices in a positive manner. The participants reported that as a result of the group they know themselves better, which will help them decide on a career that is well-suited to them.

When participants were asked if they enjoyed working on their career development in the group setting all participants reported enjoying the group setting. The participants reported that they enjoyed working on the session activities as a group and enjoyed comparing their results with the other participants. Participants also stated that they enjoyed the discussions the group had in regards to all of the aspects of career development that the group addressed. The students stated that the group discussions helped them think about their career development in different ways and consider other points of view that were brought up by other students. When asked if they would participate in a similar group in the future all participants reported that they enjoyed



working in the group setting and would participate in a group again if they had the opportunity.

### Discussion

This paper reported on the importance of career development with low SES students and career development interventions that could be effective with this population. A seven-session career development counseling group was conducted with nine low SES students to increase career development and help the students develop career goals. The effectiveness of the career development interventions were measured using a pre and post-survey; anecdotal results from the participants were captured as well.

Overall, the results of the career group appeared to be effective and it seemed to be a promising technique to conduct career development activities. Participants reported that they felt the group was useful and helped them more clearly think about and develop their career goals. According to the post-survey, as well as the participants' anecdotal results, utilizing a group format to work with students regarding career development is an effective way to reach multiple students to conduct career development interventions.

### *Interpretation of Findings*

The results of this study contribute to the effectiveness of career development with low SES students in the group setting. The research suggests that students of low SES are less engaged in deliberate career development activities and receive less guidance in school and from home regarding their career goals (Blustein et al., 2002). The results of this study indicate that a group format comprised of seven career development sessions is an effective way to reach low SES students to aid them in developing personal career goals. The format included deliberate career development

activities implemented in the school setting to engage the participants in developing their career goals. Specifically, the career group sessions focused on career development in relation to the importance of career development, a career genogram, personal strengths and values in relation to career development, developing realistic career pathways, and the administration and results of the Self-Directed Search.

Low SES students often do not receive sufficient career development and planning guidance (Blustein, 1999; Kerka, 1998; McWhirter, Crothers & Rasheed, 2000). In an effort to improve career development with low SES students, the career group was limited to only students that were identified as low SES. The career group was designed specifically to address the lack of career development with low SES students. The researcher purposefully chose unique career development activities and worked to be creative in the implementation. Every effort was made to prevent the group from operating like a class and it was important to the researcher that the activities not create additional work or stress for the participants. The researcher believed that it was important to make the experience enjoyable so the participants could get the most from the group. As a result, all participants were enthusiastic and put a lot of effort during the sessions. Additionally, they created and participated in deep conversations about who they are and what they want for their future. The results of the career group indicate that the techniques and materials that were utilized was an effective way to reach low SES to aid them in their career development.

Research indicates that career development is crucial to developing career goals, increases perceived value in school and allows students to construct their classes in accordance to their career goals (McEachern & Kenny, 2007). The group participants

indicated that the career group sessions helped them develop and refine their career goals. Although the participants stated that they benefited from all of the sessions, they reported that they benefited the most from the personal values and strengths activities. One student reported that he did not have any career goals when he began the group, however, the values and strengths activities helped him begin to develop career goals. The participant realized that when he was asked to rate his values in relation to career he valued being active and being outside when it came to his career aspirations. He also became more aware of his personal strengths after completing the strengths session. This student was not one that would be traditionally viewed as a great student, but after learning that he had many personal strengths he began to connect his strengths with his values and was able to begin to develop career goals. The results of this study relate to the research in the fact that the group sessions were effective in not only providing deliberate career development activities for low SES students, but also in aiding students in developing career goals, which is accompanied by many positive factors as the research of McEachern and Kenny has shown (2007).

Group counseling allows a counselor to reach more students at one time and is an effective way to conduct programming in the high school setting (Khattab & Jones, 2007). Additionally, students may gain insight into their own lives by participating in a group with their peers (Veatch & Gladding, 2007). When asked, the participants reported that they enjoyed working on their career development in the group setting. They stated that they enjoyed comparing and contrasting their personal findings as they worked to further develop their career goals. Research shows that counseling groups in high schools are a great way to help students grow and become more comfortable with

themselves and the world they live in (Veatch & Gladding, 2007). Often students think they are the only ones experiencing specific thoughts and feelings. Group work with high school students allows them to see that they are not alone in what they are experiencing. Therapeutic factors such as cohesion and universality are effective in the group setting with high school students (Yalom, 1995). The students indicated that they enjoyed learning about their own career goals at the same time as the rest of the group members were. The participants also reported that not having clear career goals is stressful and it was helpful in knowing that they were not alone in regards to their career development. In this case, cohesion and universality were effective therapeutic factors in the group setting. This study indicated that group counseling was an effective way to deliver career development interventions to students of low SES.

### *Limitations*

The survey that was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the career group was the primary limitation of the study. The researcher developed the survey and it was not measured for reliability or validity. Because the survey did not have reliability or validity, caution should be used when citing the results of the group based on the survey.

A further limitation of the study was the wording that was used when the survey was developed. More specific questions should have been asked regarding the participants level of career development. The wording on the current survey was too general and did not provide the insight the researcher was hoping for. The results of the question regarding if the participant had thought about their post-graduation plans were much higher than the researcher had expected. In the future, the survey should be revised to provide a more accurate understanding of each participant's career

development and goals. A likert scale versus a yes/no answer may have provided more insight on how much the participants had thought about what they want to do after graduation or to what degree they had thought about post-graduation or educational plans. More specific questions on the survey may also provide a clearer understanding of participant's level of career development from pre to post-survey.

Additionally, two of the career group sessions revolved around personal strengths and values in relation to career development. The survey that was used did not include any questions that provided insight as to whether the participants felt that strengths and values were valuable aspects to include when discussing career goals. The researcher did obtain anecdotal results regarding the inclusion of strengths and values in regards to career development but survey results may provide more insight than anecdotal results would. Also, a question regarding whether or not the participants felt that career development activities helped them feel more invested in school or would help them choose their classes based on their career goals may provide results that further justify the importance of a career development group.

Another possible limitation of the study was the students that participated in the career group. The career group was developed to provide low SES students with career development interventions with the goal of helping the students develop and realize their career goals. The students that participated in the group were all of low SES but most of the students participated in the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound is a college preparation program for low SES students. The program conducts many activities to prepare students for college and the program participants are typically more in-tune with

their future plans than many students. Had the career development group been conducted with another group of low SES students, different results may have ensued.

### *Counseling Implications*

The results of this study are relevant to professionals working in the school setting, particularly school counselors working with middle or high school students. This study was implemented with high school students but the interventions could also be used with middle school students. While ideally, counselors should conduct career education activities beginning in elementary school (Battles, Dickens-Wright & Murphy, 1998), the activities conducted in the career group would not be appropriate for elementary aged students. The basis of activities could be used, with some modifications, with students as young as middle school and are ideal for high school aged students.

Research shows that students of low SES engage in less deliberate career development activities and receive less guidance in school and from home regarding career development (Blustein et al., 2002). Based on this research, there is a need for school counselors to be proactive in working with low SES students to aid them in their career development. This study is relevant to school and career counselors in their efforts to provide career development interventions to low SES students. It is important for school counselors to be aware of the role that low SES can have on a student both academically and personally (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Singh & Yu, 1996; Wight, Botticello, & Aneshensel, 2006). This study provides support of one way in which school counselors can aid low SES students in their career development.

This study implicates that career group counseling is an effective way to reach multiple students to aid them with their career development. Students in this study

responded well to a career development group. The results of this study support using group career counseling as a way to reach multiple students at one time to conduct career development interventions. This study was conducted with low SES students; however, results do not indicate that career group counseling would be effective with low SES students only. While it is vital that low SES students receive deliberative career guidance (Blustein, 1999; Kerka, 1998; McWhirter, Crothers & Rasheed, 2000), it is also important for the general school population to receive career development guidance (Lapan, Aoyagi, & Kayson, 2007). The study results implicate that school counselor could successfully utilize the techniques from this study to implement career counseling in the group setting with low SES students as well as students of higher SES.

Caution needs to be used when targeting low SES students in the school setting. Students may be sensitive about their SES and efforts should be taken to maintain confidentiality when targeting this population. Utilization of the free or reduced lunch records is a good way to identify this population while maintaining their confidentiality. School counselors should make efforts to help low SES students in their career development (Blustein et al., 2002) but also work to maintain confidentiality when working with this population.

#### *Further Research*

This study provides no definite claims regarding the effectiveness of career counseling in the group setting with low SES students. The information from this study should be used to support further research. Limited research has been conducted regarding career development with low SES students. Minimal research has been conducted regarding career development in the group counseling setting. This study

supports further research for career development in the group setting with low SES students.

Further research could provide a deeper understanding of the importance of career development with low SES students. It could also provide insight on the long-term results of proper career development with low SES students during their high school year.

In order to obtain further results, future research should be conducted with more participants and an evaluation tool that is well researched. In addition to a larger population, future research should also be conducted with a more diverse population. A well-researched evaluation tool may provide more realizable results as well as provide more detail about the effectiveness of the career development intervention.

In summary, the results of this study support working with low SES to assist these students in effective career development. Additionally, this study supports delivering career development interventions with low SES students in a structured, seven session group format. Because there is little research on career development interventions with low SES students, this area of study denotes an exciting opportunity that may influence further practice.



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## Appendix A

**STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR MINORS**

Dear Student,

This form describes a research study being conducted with adolescents. The purpose of this research is to improve career goals through career development activities with students that have not indicated any career goals. You are being asked to participate in this research. If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in an eight-week program that will meet during study hall on a weekly basis to conduct career development activities with the goal of helping you identify career goals. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill out two questionnaires, complete the Self-Directed Search (the Self-Directed Search is an interest inventory that may help connect personal interests and future career possibilities) and participate in career development activities. Career development activities will focus on the importance of career in our lives, assessment and values clarification, career issues and occupational information resources.

Mrs. Hoffman, a school counselor intern, is conducting this project. A possible risk of being in this study that some questions asked of you may be of a personal nature. There are no other anticipated risks. If any questions or activities make you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer or participate if you do not want to. You will be able to refuse to answer any question for any reason. You will have the opportunity to discuss any questions you have about the study with Mrs. Hoffman at any point in the study.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information will be learned to help professionals to better aid students in career development and creating career goals. A possible benefit for you is that you may gain an increased knowledge of your career goals.

Any written information that you give in this study remains confidential and will be known only to Mrs. Hoffman. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires will be given a code number and students' names will not be on them. However, because the project will be administered in a group setting, anything you share with the group will be heard by other group participants. Keeping confidentiality within the group will be a rule of the group that will be discussed in the first group session. If publications in scientific journals arise from this research, results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that you cannot be identified.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to change your mind at any point in the study and there will be no penalty.

You are being asked whether or not you want to participate in this study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

*Primary Researcher:* Megan Hoffman, (585) 591-0400

*Faculty Advisors Department of Counselor Education, SUNY College at Brockport*

Dr. Patricia Goodspeed Grant, (585) 395-5493

Dr. Thomas Hernandez, (585) 395-5398

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate as a participant in this project.

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Signature of participant

Date

**STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS OF  
MINORS**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

This form describes a research study being conducted with adolescents. The purpose of this research is to improve career goals through career development activities with students who have not indicated any career goals and qualify for free or reduced lunch and/or have parents that did not pursue education beyond high school. You are being asked to give permission for your son/daughter to participate in this research. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, he/she will participate in an eight-week program that will meet during study hall on a weekly basis to conduct career development activities with the goal of helping your child identify career goals. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to fill out a consent form, two questionnaires, complete the Self-Directed Search (the Self-Directed Search is an interest inventory that may help connect personal interests and future career possibilities) and participate in career development activities. Career development activities will focus on the importance of careers in our lives, assessment and values clarification, career issues and occupational information resources.

Megan Hoffman, a school counselor intern, is conducting this project. A possible risk associated with this study is that some questions asked may be of a personal nature. Questions that may be of a personal nature may be about your child's interests, values and goals. There are no other anticipated risks associated with participation in this study. Your child will not have to answer any question(s) he/she does not want to. You will be able to discuss any questions you have about the study with the researcher at any time throughout the study.

The possible benefit from being in this study is that information will be learned to help professionals better aid students in career development and creating career goals. A possible benefit for your child is that he/she may gain an increased knowledge of his/her career goals.

Any written information that your child gives in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the researcher. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires will be given a code number and students' names will not be on them. However, because the project will be administered in a group setting, anything your child shares with the group will be heard by other group participants. Keeping confidentiality within the group will be a rule of the group that will be discussed in the first group session. If publications in scientific journals arise from this research, results will be given anonymously and in group form only, so that you and your child cannot be identified.

Your child's participation in this project is completely voluntary. Your child is free to change his or her mind at any point in the study and there will be no penalty.

Your son/daughter will be asked whether or not he/she wants to participate in this study. If your child wishes to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, your son/daughter may change his/her mind at any point and withdraw from the study. Your child can refuse to participate even if you as parent/guardian give permission for your child to participate.

If you have any questions you may contact:

*Primary Researcher:* Megan Hoffman, (585) 591-0400

*Faculty Advisors Department of Counselor Education, SUNY College at Brockport*

Dr. Patricia Goodspeed Grant, (585) 395-5493

Dr. Thomas Hernandez, (585) 395-5398

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to have my child \_\_\_\_\_ participate.

---

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Appendix B

**PRE-SURVEY FOR CAREER GROUP**

The following questions will help Mrs. Hoffman determine what you learn from the group. Your responses are completely confidential and are not associated with your name.

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Have you thought about what you would like to do after graduation?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Do you have plans for further education/training after high school?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If you answered no, do you have any plans for after graduation?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Is there a particular occupation that you would like to pursue as a career?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If you answered yes, what is the occupation?

Appendix C

Values Sorting Activity

- \_\_\_\_\_ Good family relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial security
- \_\_\_\_\_ Job security
- \_\_\_\_\_ A world that is free of discrimination
- \_\_\_\_\_ Creativity
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having a set routine
- \_\_\_\_\_ Time by myself
- \_\_\_\_\_ Community activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Physical activities
- \_\_\_\_\_ An attractive physical appearance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Variety
- \_\_\_\_\_ Power
- \_\_\_\_\_ Recognition
- \_\_\_\_\_ Prestige
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom from stress
- \_\_\_\_\_ Associating with people I like
- \_\_\_\_\_ Success
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom to live where I choose
- \_\_\_\_\_ Leisure time
- \_\_\_\_\_ Fame
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strong religious faith
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adventure
- \_\_\_\_\_ World peace
- \_\_\_\_\_ Helping others
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having children
- \_\_\_\_\_ Good health
- \_\_\_\_\_ A beautiful home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Autonomy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Personal Strengths Worksheet

**Achievement-oriented:** aspires to accomplish difficult tasks, maintains high standards, and works toward distant goals

**Adventurous:** seeks out exciting, novel or dangerous experiences; willing to take risks and meet new challenges

**Aesthetic:** aware of the importance of attractive pleasant surroundings; able to design and develop visually attractive or stimulating elements; concerned with comfort and pleasure of others

**Ambitious:** shows a great deal of effort at tasks; has a strong desire for fame and power

**Analytical:** seeks to understand things or people by breaking them down into their component parts and investigating their meaning

**Assertive:** persistently positive or confident in insisting on one's rights, in expressing thoughts and feelings, or being recognized

**Autonomous:** independent and self-governing; able to complete tasks on one's own

**Calculating:** able to assess risks, rewards, and outcomes in a proposal or plan

**Clever:** smart, bright, intelligent, quick to understand

**Competitive:** enjoys engaging in activities in which rivalry and competition are important; likes to win and surpass one's previous performance and that of others

**Conscientious:** meticulous, hard-working, meets deadlines, and always completes tasks

**Conservative:** respects established traditional values and ideas; understand others' resistance to change

**Cooperative:** has the ability to work together with others, combining efforts and talents in a harmonious, helpful way

**Courteous:** is polite and considerate and displays good manners in dealing with others

**Courageous:** daring and brave under threatening or dangerous circumstances

**Critical:** able to analyze strengths and weaknesses of people and ideas



**Dominant:** able to control environment and influence or direct others; enjoy the role of leader

**Efficient:** produces desired results with minimum possible time, expense, or waste

**Empathic:** perceptive and understanding of other's thoughts and feelings

**Energetic:** active and industrious, approaches tasks and situations with zeal, vigor, and intent

**Expressive:** articulate, verbal and non-verbal interactions with others; shows intensity of feeling or meaning

**Flexible:** adapts readily to changes in environment

**Forthright:** direct and frank about one's feelings, values, and opinions, etc.,

**Friendly:** sociable; interactions with others express kindness, congeniality, and interest

**Generous:** willing to give or share; unselfish

**Honest:** trustworthy; is open and genuine in dealing with others

**Humorous:** comical and amusing, witty and entertaining

**Imaginative:** creative, inventive, original in one's ideas, combines elements in a new way

**Individualistic:** behaves, thinks and feels in a highly personalized and distinct way

**Inquisitive:** curious about one's environment; likes to experiment and investigate

**Intellectual:** interested in acquiring knowledge, in understanding phenomena or being inventive or creative

**Modest:** shows a high degree of humility; not vain or boastful, share credit or success

**Open-minded:** unprejudiced, willing to consider new ideas

**Organized:** concerned with keeping personal effects, surroundings, and schedules in order; dislikes confusion

**Patient:** endures pain, trouble, etc. without complaining; calmly tolerates delay, confusion; able to persist toward a goal

**Perfectionist:** concerned with producing a result that is flawless or foolproof

Preserving: has stamina and endurances; patient and unrelenting in work habits

Practical: matter-of-fact, concerned that actions or objects be useful, realistic, concrete

Rational: sensible, makes judgments based on intellectual reasoning, actions and feelings are based on logic and objectivity

Relaxed: free from tension, frustration, and worry

Risk-taking: able to move ahead boldly in an uncertain situation

Self-confident: secure and self-assured, believes in own ability to accomplish most tasks undertaken

Strong: having a character that is steadfast and determined, even in the face of great difficulty

Tactful: takes care to avoid offending in communications with others; diplomatic

Thorough: always completes tasks and approaches them in a precise, meticulous way

Appendix E  
**POST-SURVEY FOR CAREER GROUP**

The following questions will help Mrs. Hoffman determine what you have learned from the group. Your responses are completely confidential and are not associated with your name.

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Have you thought about what you would like to do after graduation?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Do you have plans for further education/training after high school?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If you answered no, do you have any plans for after graduation?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Is there a particular occupation that you would like to pursue as a career?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If you answered yes, what is the occupation?

What do you think was the most helpful part of the Career Group?