OH THE PLACES YOU COULD GO:

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF EARLY CAREER EXPOSURE

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

OH THE PLACES YOU COULD GO:
THE IMPACT OF EARLY CAREER EXPOSURE

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OH THE PLACES YOU COULD GO: THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF EARLY
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceived impact of a college and career readiness program,

Missouri Connections, on decisions made during high school. The research questions

were as follows:

1. What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on
   the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school
   students?

2. What perceived impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on
   planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students
   who went through the program?

 Thirty-five high school seniors took part in this study, which utilized a survey consisting

of both open and Likert type questions. The researcher analyzed the data using open

coding and frequencies. The study's findings revealed that, overall, the program had

little to no impact on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. The findings also

indicated little to no impact on planning, exploring, and deciding when it came to college

and career plans. The findings indicated that changes should be considered to the current

career development program.

SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION

Introduction

According to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) 2016 Compendium Report, 2.6 million 16 to 24 year-olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential (NCES, 2016). This represents 6.8 percent of the 38.8 million noninstitutionalized, civilian 16 to 24 year olds living in the United States (NCES, 2016).   Policy analysts have called the dropout rate the "silent epidemic" (Perry & Wallace, 2012). According to Perry and Wallace (2012), while this silent epidemic has been improving, the rate of improvement is too slow. To accelerate the pace, many initiatives have gained attention, particularly college and career readiness (CCR).

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) used the following definition on their webpage for college and career readiness:

> College and career readiness means that a high school graduate has the necessary English and mathematics knowledge and skills—including, but not limited to, reading, writing, communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving—either to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing two- or four-year college courses without the need for remedial coursework, or in workforce training programs for his/her chosen career that offer competitive, livable salaries above the poverty line, offer opportunities for career advancement, and are in a growing or sustainable industry.

Data from the DESE showed only 42.2% of Missouri graduates met or exceeded standards for CCR (DESE, 2017). These statistics leave employers with a workforce that lacks essential skills along with academic preparedness to succeed in a competitive

market. Schools are then challenged with finding a cost-effective and sustainable solution with high impact in the effort of preparing students for life beyond PK-12.

Perry and Wallace (2012) proposed that school-based career programs have the capacity to address the most pressing problems facing education. In tandem with other academic and nonacademic programs, career programs can assist students in creating both short-term and long-term goals to keep them motivated and focused on their education. If given the opportunity early on to explore interests, abilities, and career options, more students may find themselves at or above standards for CCR (Hirschi, 2010).

Career development starts in elementary schools with career awareness. Students are made aware of career clusters or groups of occupations and understand the role of work. Young children often think about career choices based on associations with heroes, roles models, or other imaginary combinations (Howard & Walsh, 2010). According to Hirschi (2010), adolescence is a crucial period to study career aspirations. During this period, interests crystallize and stabilize, and career goals and aspirations become more realistic in terms of adaptation to personal and environmental characteristics (Hirschi, 2010). Students also make decisions at this level that impact their high school experience and post-high school educational and career opportunities.

Missouri Connections provides a comprehensive, online career development and planning program that is funded by DESE. The program is designed to help students learn about their talents, skills, and interests to help make a connection between planning for future education and work. The program includes assessments, career and college planning, as well as financial aid resources.

While multiple indicators lend themselves to the national dropout rate and a wide range of initiatives are engaged to improve the completion rate, the impact of a comprehensive CCR program is worthwhile to investigate. Research from the National Center on Educational Statistics indicated students are falling below what is desirable to be college or career ready. However, the efforts put into delivering a CCR program may prove to have an effect on student completion and persistence into a career.

Statement of the Problem

According to Schaefer, Rivera, & Ophals (2010), students start to develop a sense of identity that includes becoming aware of their interests and abilities during adolescence. The opportunity then presents itself to tie these discovered interests and abilities to career choice and readiness. Howard and Walsh (2010) defined an approach that pairs choosing a job/career as a process that involves a dynamic interaction of self-knowledge and awareness of personal attributes. Children as young as 10-12 years of age that engage in career exploration use their interests and aptitudes to guide their learning and formulate goals in relation to the world-of-work (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005). By capitalizing on this opportunity, students can develop aspirations that, in turn, lead to making relevant decisions throughout the rest of their academic career.

Schmitz (2015) recommended that in order to see relevance in their school experiences, students need to actively explore their interests and career options. By encouraging students to explore educational and career opportunities, they become aware of the connections between schoolwork and their future goals. This connection between coursework and career goals is imperative to steer students toward achievement (Perry & Wallace, 2012). With this being said, at what point should this connection be made or

introduced? As a problem of practice, career exploration is primarily found in secondary education. Unfortunately, this may be too late for many students who have disengaged from school, often to the degree of no recovery (Perry & Wallace, 2012).

Sampson, McClain, Musch, and Reardon (2013) attributed limited knowledge of career options to a lack of readiness to make future career decisions. The self-awareness about one's skills and goals, in addition to being academically prepared, is an expectation of entry-level employees (Benz, 1996). The Missouri Connections career planning program offers the opportunity for individuals to gain self-awareness about their skills and goals. This knowledge creates a path of decision making to being academically prepared to obtain a career. While research exists about career readiness programs, a research gap remains in the outcomes of career development, particularly with specific CCR programs, such as Missouri Connections.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed study was to see what impact, if any, the Missouri Connections program, utilized for the past six years in grades fifth through eighth, has had on vocational choice and the pursuit of that choice. The premise under investigation was the relationship between exposure to interests, skills, career opportunities, and the persistence into a career. Kosine and Lewis (2008) stated "developing a career is a process, not just a destination" (p. 227). This study examined how the process of pre-high school career exploration is perceived to impact the decision of post-high school college and career choices.

Two frameworks were applied to examine the relationship between the Missouri Connections program process and the destination of a career choice or aspiration. Survey

data obtained from current high school students indicated what impact, if any, the program had on student decision-making as they plan to complete their secondary education experience and work toward a career goal. Developing effective means to assess levels of impact aided in determining the connection between participation in the Missouri Connections program and persistence into a career. The establishment of such means was imperative to the study. A strong connection between the two may promote the Missouri Connections program as a vital tool to be utilized for all students to explore interests, abilities, and career opportunities during adolescence. Children must have experiences that promote envisioning a future, exploring self, making career decisions and shaping their life career (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2008).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

3. What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students?

4. What perceived impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program?

Conceptual Framework

When asked about their future profession, middle-grade students often reflexively recite job titles such as "professional athlete," "doctor," or "lawyer" without knowledge of the skills and preparation that are involved to realize these career goals (Schaefer, Rivera, & Ophals, 2010). Literature based on CCR contends that adolescent years are a

vital time to obtain career awareness, make a plan for growth, and explore viable options for their post-secondary future. Studies also support efforts to expand interests and nurture career aspirations and goal setting in children and adolescents (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1999). With this in mind, career development theory and social cognitive career theory were suitable frameworks for this study.

Donald Super is credited as a major contributor to career development theory and practice. Super's theory of career development stated "the life stages of growth and exploration are inherent to the process of acquiring knowledge of how one's interests and abilities align with the requirements of occupations" (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Super's most important contributions have been in his work explicating those developmental tasks that involve planning, exploring, and deciding, otherwise known as readiness for making career choices (Phillips & Blustein, 1994).

Phillips and Blustein (1994) discussed the importance of planning, exploring, and deciding as it relates to career readiness. During the planning stage, individuals seek the foresight and knowledge of actions necessary to pursue desired goals (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). The planning phase of career readiness would then require students to explore their future goals and gain an understanding of what must be accomplished through education, training, and other preparation to achieve those goals. Exploring entails engaging in various activities that serve to expand knowledge of self and world of work (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). Students need the opportunity to explore their interests, values, and skills. Along with gaining knowledge of self, it is beneficial for students to explore career opportunities. Students sometimes limit opportunities to those they are familiar with and, without exposure to other options, may not pursue what might

otherwise be their ultimate goal. Lastly, "deciding includes weighing information and alternatives in a manner that yields a satisfying course of action to which the individual can commit" in order to gain their preferred career (Phillips & Blustein, 1994, p. 66). Using Super's lens of "career choice readiness," the Missouri Connections program was evaluated on its impact, if any, on preparing students through career planning, career exploring, and deciding on a career path.

Social cognitive career theory focuses on three interrelated aspects of career development that were utilized in this study. These aspects include: (1) how basic academic and career interests develop, (2) how educational and careers choices are made, and (3) how academic and career success is obtained. Social cognitive career theory also incorporates three intricately linked variables: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals that serve as the basic building blocks (Lent et al., 1999).

Self-efficacy derives from personal performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Lent et al., 1999). Outcome expectations are the beliefs about the outcome of particular behaviors. When people choose to engage in an activity, they want to see their involvement as leading to a valued, positive outcome. Lent et al., (1999) defined personal goals as one's intentions to engage in an activity or to attain a certain level of performance. Self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals all play key roles in career interest development, choice making, and performance attainment.

Design of Study

Setting

The setting of the study was at Branson High School in Southwest Missouri.

According to the district's School Information System, the 2016-2017 student body PK-12 population was approximately 4700. Of this population, 62% qualified for free or reduced lunch. The population was 78% white, 13.5% Hispanic, 1.7% black, 1.4% Asian, and 0.7% Native American (Branson Schools Information System, 2018). The career opportunities in the community largely consist of retail and tourism. These details regarding the population and community are important to the study in that it provides information on outside school experiences and exposure to career opportunities. Due to limited resources, such as transportation and Internet availability to a large part of the population, many students' only experience outside of their homes is school.

Participants

The sample for the study consisted of 35 high school seniors. According to Rogers and Creed (2011), the last three years of school have been shown to be the time when students are preparing to make college/career decisions; therefore, the research supports targeting this population. The utilization of this population lent itself toward answering the research question regarding self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and career goals. Members within the sample have had exposure to the Missouri Connections program during their intermediate and junior high years. The sample population represented the demographics of the school district as best as possible in order for the findings to be generalized to the entire school population. Potential participants were contacted during their lunch period at school by providing an information table with permission slips for the study. Due to the criteria of the study and research questions, the sample was a convenience sample in that the population used was easily accessible (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017).

Data Collection

The purpose of this program evaluation was to examine the impact, if any, that the Missouri Connections program had on career choice and aspirations. Online surveys contained both open-ended and Likert scale items. Survey data was obtained to examine the current attitudes, beliefs, practices, or opinions on the impact of the program.

The survey data was collected from a convenience sample at the site of the study. A letter was sent to the principal of the building providing details of the survey and asking permission to conduct the study. The survey was given on school computers with Internet connectivity via a commercial online tool such as Google Survey. The data gained from Google Survey was downloaded into a spreadsheet for analysis. Surveys included only student identification numbers.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Missouri approved plans in this study. Procedures for minimizing participants' risks and protecting vulnerable populations, including minors, were vital in this review. Both guardians and the research participants signed consent forms detailing the purpose and procedures for this study. Information included in this study, at no time, identified individual participants. The researcher had no direct contact with the participants, as all information collected was done online.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted utilizing Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data were analyzed through the emergence of themes. The objective of these analyses was to answer the research questions. Each research question and the corresponding analysis are addressed below.

Research question 1 (RQ1). What impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students? The data analysis process for this research question comprised interpreting both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Likert scale responses were summarized as frequencies and percentages.

Research question 2 (RQ2). What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program? The data analysis process for RQ2 comprised interpreting both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Likert scale responses were summarized as frequencies and percentages.

Closed-ended question responses were summarized as frequencies and percentages detailing the level of perceived impact that the participants indicate that Missouri Connections has had on their career development. Open-ended questions were analyzed through coding. An initial scan of the data yielded marginal notes and comments resulting in open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Categories were then constructed based on recurring patterns in the initial coding process.

Research Positionality and Research Ethics

The researcher has served as a professional school counselor for the Branson School District for the past thirteen years, serving my first four years at Branson Junior High with grades seven and eight. In the last eight years, the researcher has served as the counselor at Buchanan Intermediate, which encompasses grades four through six. As the school counselor, the researcher has been responsible for providing career development opportunities for my students. The researcher has utilized the Missouri Connections

program at both the junior high and intermediate schools.

Being an insider to this study brings both advantages and possible barriers. Among the advantages was access to the organization along with a working knowledge of both the organization and Missouri Connections. Having spent more than a decade working for the Branson School District also lends to the researchers analysis on the organizational and leadership.

Being an insider also presents the opportunity for possible barriers. One of the greatest barriers is the bias the researcher may carry towards Missouri Connections and the organization itself. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) spoke of being aware of projecting one's own beliefs and experiences into the data and putting guards into place against potential biases. Creswell (2014) provided strategies to ensure validity in research that the researcher will employ. First, the researcher clarified any bias brought to the study. Providing self-reflection and detailing how my background has shaped the data interpretations created an honest and open narrative for readers (Creswell, 2014). Second, any negative or discrepant information that did not fit in the themes was be presented. Creswell (2014) stated that "by presenting this contradictory evidence, the account becomes more realistic and more valid" (p. 202). Third, the researcher utilized an external reader to verify coding to establish inter-rater reliability. Being aware of biases and having these safeguards in place aided with the study's validity and reliability.

Significance of Study

School-based career programs have the capacity to address the most pressing problems facing education (Perry & Wallace, 2012). Career programs can start early and may lay the foundation for later successful career planning and motivation toward

academic achievement. Because many students get off track prior to the transition to high school, it is imperative that action is taken sooner rather than later (Adams, 2015). A comprehensive career exploration program can be an effective tool in bringing relevance to learning and staying on track to achieve career goals.

The intent of this study was to provide information on the perceived level of impact the Missouri Connections program had on career choice and aspiration of the population sample. The study was focused primarily on the impact career exposure, as well as discovery of one's abilities and interests at the adolescent level, had on career decision making during high school. The outcome of this study could encourage other districts to implement a comprehensive career exploration program such as Missouri Connections prior to high school. Districts may revisit policy and/or curriculum to ensure that career education is implemented early and that there is appropriate scaffolding to ensure students are moved progressively through to maximize effectiveness.

The organization involved in the study may also gain the following information:

- Is the Missouri Connections program valuable in assisting students with college and career choices?
- Is this program enough or do students feel that something different would have been more beneficial or if the current curriculum should be supplemented?

This information may aid in policy development or changes regarding career education as well as provide support to continue with the existing program or start the search for a new one.

Lastly, Missouri Connections will have research in the literature. Prior to this

study, little has been mentioned in research about the effects of specific comprehensive career programs. This research will provide evidence of the perceived level of impact of their program. Based on the outcomes, Missouri Connections will have the opportunity to utilize the research in their quest to effectively provide career education to schools in the state of Missouri.

Summary

Schools have the important task of preparing students for the future. This task reaches well beyond academic endeavors. For some, these endeavors fall short and high school completion is not attained. While numerous factors contribute to the silent epidemic known as the high school dropout rate, CCR is one initiative that is gaining attention. Student exposure to career opportunities is key in engaging and motivating students to succeed (Perry & Wallace, 2012). Schools must take the initiative early before students disengage in their education and find themselves on the path to dropping out of school.

Timing is imperative for reaching students and assisting them in setting future goals. The developmental period during adolescence may prove to be the appropriate time to begin CCR preparation (Hirschi, 2010). Self-awareness and personal identity start to develop during this developmental period. During adolescence, students start to explore their interests and abilities and how those tie into future career goals (Schaefer et al., 2010).

Comprehensive career programs, like Missouri Connections, could offer the opportunity for students to explore their personal identity and career interests. Students gain exposure to career opportunities beyond their communities that match their interests

and abilities. Do programs such as Missouri Connections have an impact on students'

career aspirations during high school and career choice after high school? What is the

impact of early career exposure particularly during adolescence? This study was

designed to answer these questions and provide research-based literature regarding

comprehensive career programs such as Missouri Connections.

SECTION TWO:

PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

In order to understand the practitioner setting of this study, it is necessary to take a closer look at the Branson School District as an organization and its leadership. Within this section, the history of Missouri Comprehensive Guidance Counseling Programs (MCGCP) and Missouri Connections will be examined to understand the connection between the two, as well as the use of Missouri Connections within the district. Analysis of both the organization and leadership will be clear through the use of scholarly literature. Finally, implications for research within the Branson School District and DESE, Office of College and Career Readiness, who is responsible for the Missouri Connections Program, will be connected to the study's research questions.

History of the Organization

"A Community Committed to Learning" is the mission statement for the Branson School District, located in Branson, Missouri. As the largest district in Taney County, the Branson School District currently serves around 4,800 students. Based on data from the Student Information System, the student population consists of approximately 70% of the students on free/reduced lunch (Branson Schools Information System, 2018). The Branson School District has a very transient population due to the nature of a tourism economy.

Enrollment trends have shown steady growth for the district. To accommodate the growth, new buildings and expansions have been made. Presently, the student population of preschool through twelfth grade is divided amongst seven buildings. Preschool through sixth grade are split between 2 campuses: the Cedar Ridge campus located on the south side of town and the Buchanan campus located on the north

side of town. Each campus consists of an elementary and an intermediate building. The elementary schools serve students in kindergarten through third grade with an approximate population of 600 students each. The elementary buildings are staffed with a principal, a half-time assistant principal, a full-time counselor, and a half-time counselor. The intermediate schools serve students in fourth through sixth grade with an approximate population of 500 students each. The intermediate buildings are staffed with a principal, a half-time assistant principal, and a full-time counselor.

It takes the commitment of educators, parents, and the community collectively to provide a quality education for the students. Due to the high transiency rate and demographic of students living in poverty, the Branson School District is presented with the task of providing a quality education for a sizable population of struggling learners. From the experience that the researcher has had with the district, the district prides itself on state achievement test performance, academic offerings, sports programs, and other accolades. Any successes the Branson School District has appears to be the outcome of the programs and the people that deliver them effectively.

The Missouri Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program (MCGCP) was designed in the late 1980's as a response to the Outstanding Schools Act (Missouri Connections, 1971-2018). The Act called for a "strong and enduring commitment to our public-school system and for the development of a tangible, concise plan to bring about educational reform in Missouri" (Missouri Connections, 1971-2018). In recognition of the important contributions of school counselors in the overall growth and development of students, the MCGCP became an integral part of Missouri school districts' total education program by the late 1990's (Missouri Connections, 1971-2018).

The MCGCP encompasses three overarching content area strands: Social/Emotional Development, Academic Development, and Career Development. The Career Development strand is designed to allow students to apply career exploration and planning skills in achievement of life career goals, know where and how to obtain information about the world of work and post-secondary training/education, and apply skills for career readiness and success. Within the strand are grade-level expectations utilized to facilitate career awareness, exploration planning, decision-making, and preparation at developmentally appropriate periods throughout a student's educational career.

First introduced in Oregon in 1971, Career Information System (CIS) now known as "*intoCareers,*" produces Missouri Connections (https://portal.missouriconnections.org/aboutus/). Provided free of charge through funding by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri Connections is a comprehensive, online career development and planning program. Missouri Connections supports career development efforts of schools, adults, community organizations, and adult job seekers through the use of career assessments, career and college planning information, as well as financial aid resources. The goal of the program is to help individuals learn about their talents, skills, interests, and opportunities in relation to the world of work.

In order to implement a comprehensive guidance and counseling program and meet the career development needs of students, the Branson School District incorporated the use of what is now known as Missouri Connections during the 2010-2011 school year. Missouri Connections is an Internet based resource designed to help Missouri

citizens, school age to adulthood, determine their career interests, explore occupations, create education plans, develop job search strategies, and create resumes. Missouri Connections provides current career information resources, free of charge, to students, parents, educators, guidance counselors, and job seekers through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The program assessments are designed for both self-awareness and career awareness. Users can explore careers in all the 16 career clusters, watch videos containing information, and gain information on the education and training requirements for those careers

Currently, Missouri Connections is utilized in grades five through eight to systematically develop a plan prior to entering high school. Through collaboration, Branson School District counselors divided activities for career exploration and awareness, as well as taking inventories to prepare students throughout their development, in order to assist students in making connections between their education and the world of work. Students also utilize the program to assist in preparing their four-year plan for high school.

Starting their fifth grade year, Branson School District students are introduced to Missouri Connections by doing the Reality Check activity. Reality Check allows users to choose a place to live in Missouri, add up their expected living expenses, and compare their expenses to their expected income with the career of their choice. In the sixth grade, students at Branson School District create their portfolio with a unique username and password. Sixth graders then complete an interest inventory. The interest inventory is designed to help users match their interest with a wide variety of careers. Users can bookmark and make notes regarding careers to be saved within their portfolios.

Information is sent home during the sixth grade year to encourage parents to explore Missouri Connections with their students and start the conversation regarding future career plans.

The portfolios created during their sixth grade year follows students through junior high and high school as they complete more assessments and plan their educational/career path. During their junior high years, Branson students take assessments regarding career clusters, skills, and learning styles. The results of these assessments are utilized in conversations as they begin to develop their four-year plan for high school. During their sophomore year at Branson High School, students complete the career cluster inventory and Reality Check activities again. They are then encouraged to use the results from the inventory to research their top career to see the job outlook, pay, and educational requirements.

The Problem

Results from the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) Advanced Questionnaire (Table 1) given in 2010 displayed a need for improvement in the area of college and career readiness. The survey has not been repeated to yield more current data. According to the results, a little over half of the students surveyed in grade 9 and older felt they had been encouraged at school to establish career or educational goals and that teachers were connecting what students learned to the real world. Unfortunately, only a little over one third of the sample felt that guidance counselors played a role in assisting them with educational or career plans as well as Career-Technical education as an essential part of the district's program of study (MSIP 2010).

Table 1

Secondary Student Scale for Career Education from MSIP Advanced Questionnaire 2010

Statements from Advanced Questionnaire	*N*	Mean	*std_dev*	Percentile
I have been encouraged to establish career or educational goals at school.	1159	3.79	1.01	65
A guidance counselor has assisted me in creating a plan to reach my educational and/or career goals.	1167	3.15	1.23	35
Teachers connect what students are learning with the real world.	1163	3.30	1.04	63
Career-Technical education is an essential part of the district's program of studies.	1164	3.26	0.97	38

In addition, while some research exists about career readiness programs, a gap remains in the outcomes of career development, particularly with specific CCR programs, such as Missouri Connections.

Organizational Analysis

When analyzing organizations, it is beneficial to consider the different frames that make up an organization. Bolman and Deal (2016) provided four frames that make up an organization: (a) structural, (b) political, (c) human resource, and (d) symbolic. For the purpose of this analysis, the human resource and symbolic frame will be the focus.

Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame focuses on organizations and people, particularly what they do to and for each other (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame also contends that organizations exist to serve human needs. These needs include roles, skills, interactions, values, and interests.

This frame aligns well with Branson School District's commitment to meet needs and educate its students even with the known challenges and barriers of the demographics. In order to meet academic standards, the district must assess the needs of its students to prepare them to learn successfully. The needs of the students of the Branson School District are as unique as the population, and it takes a district and community effort to remove the barriers from learning.

To meet the needs of an individual, one must understand what they are. Numerous students within the Branson School District come from homes that lack basic resources of food, electricity, and adequate shelter; many share a hotel room with numerous people. According to recent data, over 57% of the students in the district are consider socio-economically deprived (Appendix G). Socio-economic deprivation measures the disadvantage or lack of basic necessities of an individual or group in relation to the community. In addition, many students qualify as unoccupied youth, are in foster care, or qualify as homeless for various other living situations. There are issues of domestic violence, substance abuse, and incarcerated parents. These various experiences are referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (Hunt, Slack, & Berger, 2017). The original ACE Study was a major American medical study linking the effects of traumatic life experiences during the first 18 years of life on later well-being, social function, health risks, and disease burdens (Feltitti & Anda, 2008). The study was carried out in Kaiser Permanente's Department of Preventative Medicine in San Diego. The researchers partnered with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct their first study. There were ten categories of ACE's studied. From the findings, it was concluded that exposure to trauma prior to the age of 18 can have impact

on biological, psychological, and social adaptions. Biologically, exposure to ACE's can increase the likely hood that an individual will have problems with addiction, whether it is smoking, alcohol, or drug use (Felitti & Anda, 2008). The psychological effects can range from increased risks of depression, hallucinations, and suicide attempts (Felitti & Anda, 2008). An increased score on ACEs can affect social adaption behaviors such as teen sexual behaviors and impaired work performance. (Felitti & Ana, 2008).

Social functions can also lend themselves as boundaries to learning. According to D' Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, and van der Kolk (2012) there have been numerous studies that have documented that exposure to interpersonal trauma during childhood is related to an "increase incidence of affect and impulse dysregulation, alterations in attention and consciousness, disturbances of attributions and schema, and interpersonal difficulties (p. 6). All of which are boundaries to learning.

Recent legislature has brought the idea of trauma to the forefront of Missouri schools. Missouri Senate Bill 638 established the trauma-informed schools initiative in 2016 (DESE). The implementation is an ongoing process of organizational change and has a four-fold purpose. The first is for schools to "realize the widespread impact of trauma and understand the potential paths for recovery" (DESE, 2019). Second, trauma-informed schools "recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in students, teachers and staff" (DESE, 2019). Third, trauma-informed schools "respond by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into its policies, procedures, and practices" (DESE, 2019). Lastly, trauma-informed schools "seek to actively resist re-traumatization" (DESE, 2019).

Like many of Missouri Schools, the Branson School District is working to combat the biological, psychological, and social effects of trauma for its students in order to give them a chance at a better future. Through professional development, the district is working towards an increased understanding of the corrosive impacts resulting from chronic trauma. These impacts can include difficulty paying attention in class, behavior outbursts, and difficulty getting along with peers. By gaining knowledge and integrating effective practices, programs, and procedures into all aspects of our organization and culture, Branson Schools is working to respond to the needs of our trauma exposed population (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016).

The school district, with help from community partnerships, strives to and is well equipped to meet the basic needs of our student population. Food, clothing, medical services, and money for rent or utilities are common daily resources that are provided for many families within the district. The district is fortunate to have social workers staffed and recently has partnered with Burrell Health to provide on site mental health services to both students and families. Burrell also acts as a resource for teachers working with students who have been impacted by trauma. The district and community share a common goal to give every student a chance at success.

Beyond educating students with the basic knowledge and skills necessary to graduate, the Branson School District incorporates additional programs such as Missouri Connections to equip students to meet their most basic needs and more. Missouri Connections allows students to check their reality when it comes to what it takes to meet basic physiological needs and how their future plans play a role. Students have the opportunity to compare the costs of basic physiological needs such as food, shelter, and

water with the average salary for the career they aspire to obtain. The program provides videos and activities that reach out to the esteem of students as they develop vision for their future.

Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame focuses on the values of a group and the creation of a culture to support the vision of the group's future (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The Branson School District shares stated values within their 2017-2018 handbook:

> [We] believe in the type of education that should equip children to understand themselves, to realize their own value and position in society, and to adjust to change. Education should further aid our children in the development of self-discipline and courage. (Branson School District, p. 6)

These values drive the Branson School District's core ideology and sense of purpose and develop an image of the future (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The district supports its core ideology through providing numerous opportunities for students to be involved. From sports, to clubs, to a long list of electives and other extracurricular activities, the students at Branson School District have many avenues through which to explore who they are as individuals and within a larger group. These opportunities also provide students with growth in self-discipline and courage that will benefit their future.

The symbolic frame reinforces a shared culture that influences decisions. The decisions that are made bring stories of what matters to the organization. As previously stated, the Branson School District strives for the success of all students and equipping students with what they need for their future. The symbols of these successes come with graduation, college admission, or career attainment.

Leadership Analysis

Leadership is conceptualized in different ways, depending on the organization and the function of the organization. Northouse (2016) defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6). This analysis of leadership will break down leadership at the Branson School District in terms of influence and creating vision for change. The analysis comes from the observations and experiences that the researcher has had with the leadership in the Branson School District.

Influence

Influence in leadership is concerned with how a leader affects followers (Northouse, 2016). Influence in leadership is not a one-time event. It is a process, and, if done well, it is an investment in the organization. Leadership brings the existence of influence. It is up to leaders how to use it. Some leaders influence through power while others influence through relationships. The leadership at the Branson School District utilizes a combination of both power and relationships to influence those in the organization.

According to Northouse (2016), power and influence go hand-in-hand. Leadership brings with it the power of position. People with power have the ability to influence the attitudes and actions of others (Northouse, 2013). The type of power that leadership in the Branson School District possesses is personal power. Northouse (2013) defined personal power as "the influence capacity a leader derives from being seen by followers as likable and knowledgeable" (p. 12). By taking

time to get to know each employee in the Branson School District, the leadership models the importance of relationship building within the organization.

When it comes to influence through relationships, the superintendent and assistant superintendents lead by example. Schultz (2010) spoke about how the act of caring invokes a desire to take responsibility for others. The leadership of Branson School District demonstrates a level of caring for the faculty and staff that creates a caring environment where school members look out for the wellbeing of each other and the students. Faculty and staff take the time to get to know one another beyond sharing a common profession. Success is celebrated and the burdens of hardships are never left to one person to bear alone. Leader at Branson School District make it a point to know their employees by more than just a name. Details such as family and other personal inquiries are made when encounters happen between district leadership and faculty or staff.

The needs of the students are put above all else as an educational community. Leaders set the example by putting student needs first. By taking care of the students and their families, relationships are formed, which influences a cooperative partnership in educating the youth. The students are the responsibility of the district and fostering these relationships aides in the success of the students and the district as a whole.

Creating Vision for Change

According to Kotter (2011/1990), setting a direction for change is a fundamental part of leadership. As in many fields, change is a necessary component in education. The need for change comes from data, programs, relationships, and

progress. Effective leaders do not produce plans for change; they create vision and strategies (Kotter, 2011/1990).

Leadership in the Branson School District recognizes the need to change to stay competitive in a global society. The administrators create a desire and provide support to the school community to aspire faculty to try new things to provide the best education possible for the students. Leaders do not control changes within the organization; instead they involve others in the decision making process on how to achieve the vision of the organization. This involvement comes in the form of strategic planning committees, community forums, and student advisory groups.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Emphasis on career development and career education has had a presence in the Branson School District for more than a decade. Due to using Missouri Connections during this time, both the school and DESE Office of College and Career Readiness could benefit from this study.   The results could help both organizations determine the impact of this program on meeting students' college and career development goals.

Results from this study may help Branson School District in planning appropriate programming and activities at different developmental levels for career guidance. Those planning career guidance activities may use the data to design and make necessary changes to the current practice. District wide conversations can be held regarding the impact of the current programming and the implications of continuing with the status quo or creating a vision for change.

Results of this study may also aid DESE and the Office of College and Career Readiness in evaluating the use and impact of their Missouri Connections Career

program. Currently, there are no publications regarding the impact of this program. The information gained from this study could aid DESE in marketing this program for use or make revisions based on the findings.

Additionally, the findings will be submitted for journal publication and for presentation at local or state counselor conferences. Because Missouri Connections is a free program for use in any Missouri school, as well as available for parent use at home, it could prove beneficial to provide the results of this study in professional development settings for both counseling and career education professionals.

Summary

It is beneficial to the findings of this study to understand the setting for the research. Taking a closer look at the Branson School District as an organization as well as the leadership will help in applying the findings to other organizations with similar structures. It is also imperative to understand the background and structure of MCGCP and Missouri Connections when considering similar programs to compare to this study. Analyzing the organization through the human resource and symbolic framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2013) illustrated the uniqueness of the Branson School District. Finally the analysis of Branson School District leadership brings awareness to how the needs of the organization are met. This analysis of the practitioner setting helps to provide reason why this study was conducted and the possible implications it may have.

SECTION THREE:

SCHOLARLY REVIEW

When asked about future career goals, middle grade students often reflexively recite job titles such as "professional athlete," "doctor," or "lawyer" without knowledge of the skills and preparation involved to realize these career goals (Schaefer, et al., 2010). Literature based on college and career readiness (CCR) contends that adolescent years are vital in obtaining career awareness, making a plan for growth, and exploring viable options for their post-secondary future. One of the core components of adolescent career preparation is the "achievement of a well-developed career-choice readiness, which can be defined as the readiness and ability of a person to reach a well-founded career decision" (Hirschi, 2011, p. 40). Without a comprehensive CCR experience, students are left to maneuver a path toward a career that might be unobtainable.

According to Kosine and Lewis (2008), a lack of attention has been given to the process that is required for thoughtful, thorough career development. At an early age, students are confronted with substantial career and life decisions with limited opportunities for career exploration (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Upon entering high school, students are expected to plan and follow a program of study that prepares them with the skills needed to either further their education or enter the workforce.

This scholarly review will begin by giving a historical overview of career guidance and development followed by defining career development in contemporary terms. Research supporting the focus of career development during adolescence as well as Super's Career Development Theory and Social Cognitive Career Theory follow. Next, stages of career preparation and career pathway research will be reviewed. Lastly, the benefits of a comprehensive career program and contextual influences such as the effects of poverty will be discussed.

Historical Pendulum of Career Guidance and Development in Schools

The value of career guidance in our schools can be dated back to our nation's founding fathers. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin believed education served a purpose of fostering economic development and citizenry to conduct a democratic government (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). Sharing their belief, Frank Parsons (1909) has been credited as the developer of the first career counseling model in the early 1900's. Parsons believed there was "no part of life where the need for guidance is more emphatic than in the transition from school to work, - the choice of a vocation, adequate preparation for it, and the attainment of efficiency and success" (Parsons, 1909, p. 4). Concurrently in the late 1800's and early 1900's, Jesse Davis has been credited with developing the first comprehensive school counseling program (Schenck et al., 2012). Since the beginning of the 1900's, career counseling and school counseling "have breathed the same air and walked down the same road together, sometimes holding hands and sometimes not, but never far from each other" (Schenck et al., 2012, p. 223).

For more than a century, the emphasis on career development in public schools has swung like a pendulum. In the 1930's, career guidance was narrowly defined as occupational choice. A split developed between career guidance (examining all career options) and career counseling (helping students get into postsecondary education). By the late 1940's, career guidance was set aside to focus on personal-social issues only to reemerge a decade later. With the launch of Sputnik 1 on October 4, 1957, came the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Pub. L. 85-864) (Schenck et al., 2012). This act provided funding to American schools to promote postsecondary education. School

counselors were identified as the professionals to test students to identify those with the aptitude, specifically in science, and encourage them to enter college.

The emphasis on career development continued through the 1970's. More and more occupations started requiring at least some postsecondary education. Existing jobs that previously only required a high school diploma demanded higher skills for entry. The pendulum swung back at the beginning of the 1980's. The publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report, *A Nation at Risk*, brought the focus back to academics (Schenck et al., 2012). The number of academic courses required to graduate from high school increased. Since vocational programs counted primarily towards electives, their existence started to erode.

Educational attention turned back to career education in the 1990's due to two major national initiatives. The United States Department of Labor published a report in 1991 titled, *What Work Requires of Schools*. This report "brought attention to the importance of employability skills, and for the first time, educators were urged to integrate academic and affective education in the areas of basic skills thinking skills, and personal qualities" (Stone & Dahir, 2006, p. 333). The second initiative, the *School-to-Work Opportunities Act* (Pub. L. 103-239) pushed educators to not only prepare high school graduates for the workplace, but also for postsecondary education (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997).

With the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Pub. L. 107-110), the pendulum swung back again. Career development activities were seen as time taken away from core academic programs. Pressure on states and districts to perform meant any flexible dollars were dedicated to academic improvements rather than career

guidance and education. The *Carl D. Perkins Act*, passed in 2006, made an attempt to introduce the concept of an academically and technically rigorous program of study that prepared students for a double purpose - college and careers (Bottoms & Sundell, 2017). However, adjustments made for inflation decreased the funding allocated to this initiative significantly.

In less than a decade, a new shift came with Race to the Top. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. Part of this legislation invested billions of dollars in education. Race to the Top called for students to be prepared for success in college and careers by adopting standards and assessments that allow them to compete in the global economy.

Although the level of emphasis placed on career guidance has gone through many swings of the pendulum through the last century, the challenge of successfully preparing students to enter the workforce remains. The future of emphasis is uncertain. What is certain is that with the ever changing world, there will be necessity for another educational evolution on how to meet the career guidance and development needs of today's students (Schenck et al., 2012).

Career Development Defined

Phillips and Blustein (1994) defined career development as the "readiness and ability of a person to reach a well-founded career decision" (p. 63). The concept of readiness requires that an individual considers their career choices with both attitudinal and cognitive factors (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). Attitudinal factors include planning and exploring, while cognitive factors incorporate decision making and informational knowledge. Sampson, McClain, Musch, and Reardon (2013) also added the measures of

capability and complexity to the concept of career readiness. Capability represents those internal factors that an individual possesses to apply to an occupation. Complexity represents the external variables such as family, social, economic, and organizational factors that influence the ability to make appropriate career choices (Sampson et al., 2013). These measures of vocational maturity or readiness all lend heavily to the start of the career development process. Readiness to make career decisions is not static as individuals and circumstances change.

Career development is a process. Many factors play a part, in varying degrees, in the development of one's career path. These factors include gender, ethnicity, ability, personality, socioeconomic status, family, geography, and opportunity (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). These factors lend to experiences and opportunities that create different paths during career development. While the path may look a little different for each person, the stages toward development are similar. Planning, decision-making, problem solving/confidence, and exploration are components of competent career development (Savickas, 2002 & 2005; Rogers & Creed, 2011). Kosine and Lewis (2008) described developing a career not as a destination but a process. This process involves the readiness, a path, and stages to move through in order to be prepared to make a well-founded career decision.

Career Development Theory

Donald Super is credited as a major contributor to career development theory and practice. Super's theory of career development stated that the "life stages of growth and exploration are inherent to the process of acquiring knowledge of how one's interests and abilities align with the requirements of occupations" (Kosine & Lewis, 2008, p.

227). The growth stage begins as children and adolescents are introduced to a variety of occupations and begin to develop their career self-concept.

Super viewed career development as a series of specific vocational tasks that should be accomplished in a defined and predictable sequence (Rojewski & Kim, 2003). For example, an early stage is characterized by narrowing career options from fantasy to tentative options. His most important contributions have been in his work explicating those developmental tasks that involve planning, exploring, and deciding, otherwise known as readiness for making career choices (Phillips & Blustein, 1994).

While Super proposed that career development occurs throughout the lifespan starting with vocational exploration and ending with the decline of a career, he asserted that the process of career exploration and decision-making is central to adolescence (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). This was greatly in part due to the link between career development and self-concept. As identity formation is the primary task of adolescence, career exploration and development help to largely shape that identity as it relates to future self and plans (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Super also recognized occupational choice is not definitive during adolescence but is a time to start developing career maturity (Wallace-Brocious, Serafica, & Osipow, 1994).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Complementary to Super's career development theory is Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1999) social cognitive career theory. Based on Albert Bandura's general social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory postulates that a variety of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors influence the process of career choice (Rogers & Creed, 2011). Social cognitive career theory is a widely used theory for

understanding career choices and career development (Stipanovic, Stringfield, & Witherell, 2017).

Three variables serve as the basic building blocks of social cognitive career theory. Self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals are believed to have influences on career planning and exploration (Rogers & Creed, 2011; Rojewski & Kim, 2016). This triadic model plays a substantial role in influencing a person's career development and career decision-making.

Self-efficacy, an individual's personal beliefs about his or her capabilities to achieve, has been given credit in determining aspirations and subsequent behavior. If students do not possess strong self-efficacy beliefs in their chosen career field, they will not build positive outcome expectations and their performance will be negatively impacted (Stipanovic et al., 2017). Outcome expectations are the anticipated consequence to an action. Individuals will choose a career that offers the most positive outcome expectations (Stipanovic et al., 2017). Students will often weigh education or training requirements against anticipated salary. Both self-efficacy and outcome expectations directly influence the final building block of social cognitive career theory, which are goals. Individuals are more driven if their personal goals align with their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (Stipanovic et al., 2017).

Social cognitive career theory also provides a tentative explanation for how occupational aspirations develop over time, the influences of contextual influences, and the relationship between academic and occupational aspirations (Rojewski & Kim, 2016; Rogers, Creed & Glendon, 2008). The aim of this theory is to explain three interrelated aspects of career development: (1) how basic academic and career interests develop, (2)

how educational and career choices are made, and (3) how academic and career success is obtained. Like career development theory, social cognitive career theory also theorized that career development occurs in stages.

Influencing Where Children See Themselves in Careers

Children as young as age four begin making judgments about careers and the suitability of various types of occupations (Howard & Walsh, 2009). How children view themselves and the world around them plays an important role in their development. The people they spend the majority of their developmental period with, family and the school, play a vital role in shaping these views of their current and future selves.

While both school and family provide information and guidance, (directly or indirectly) to influence a young person's choice of careers, school teachers have far less influence on career choice than that of parents (Kniveton, 2004). School-teachers can identify aptitudes and abilities and encourage students to take certain subject options, or take part in work experience, or employment visits (Kniveton, 2004). However, it is the family members that play a constant role in their children's lives that have a greater influence on future career aspirations (Kniveton, 2004).

Children will usually see themselves as reflections of the adults in their lives. Parents play a vital role in influencing what children learn about the world of work and their future in it through the examples they set. Research has shown that parent-adolescent relationships and parent career attitudes affect the career development, exploration, aspirations, occupational plans, gender stereo-typing, and attitudes towards job success for young adolescents (Keller & Whiston, 2008). Parents also offer appropriate support for certain occupations, which tend to follow their own (Kniveton,

2004). Research studies also indicated that children would choose occupational levels

that match their parents' expectations or that corresponded with the mother's occupation

(Watson & McMahon, 2005). Children tend to learn more about their mother's

occupation rather than their father's (Trice & Knapp, 1992).

Cultural and gender stereotypes often formulate from these relationships.

Although occupational gender stereotyping has declined in recent decades, career choice

can be influenced by aspects of family life that are gender assigned such as caring

responsibilities being designated to the females (Watson & McMahon, 2005; Kniveton,

2004). According to Kniveton (2004), the influence of popularity and maintaining

appearance for adolescence girls also led to an avoidance of science-related careers.

Popular images in media also play a role in career choice, sending out messages of what

is attractive, feminine, and masculine when it comes to careers (Kniveton, 2004).

How children describe careers changes over time. In elementary schools, children

are more likely to describe occupations in terms of their behaviors and activities. They

tend to fantasize about careers. Older children are more realistic and will link careers to

their interests, aptitudes, and abilities (Watson & McMahon, 2005). Regardless the

period of development children are in, the external influences in their lives impact how

and where they see themselves in a future career.

Importance of Career Development in Adolescence

While career development occurs across the lifespan, a major developmental task

of adolescence is career preparation (Rogers & Creed, 2011; Skorikov, 2007). While

theories stress the importance of career choice, adolescent career readiness development

is not clearly specified. Historically, little attention has been given to career-development

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needs of non-college bound youth due to the general goals of public education and the societal goals that favor college attendance (Rojewski & Kim, 2003). This population still has the potential for career success if given the opportunity to acquire vocational self-concept and maturity. Rojewski and Kim (2003) also stated "little is known about the early development and influence of occupational aspirations on the transition from school to adult life for work-bound adolescents" (p. 91).

It should not be overlooked that children engage in the process of career exploration. From their experiences, they are exploring the world of work, examining themselves, and how the two are related. Younger children view occupations in terms of the activities and behaviors associated with them. Older children and adolescents start to view occupations in a more sophisticated way in terms of variables such as interests and the steps involved to prepare for them (Hartung et al., 2005).

Research indicates career exploration typically begins in adolescence. During this time, individuals in this age range seek opportunities to explore careers through education and work experiences as they begin to develop their vocational self-concept (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). These endeavors also aid in the development of interests, abilities, beliefs, and values.

Hartung et al., (2005) suggested that adolescents are able to use their interests, abilities, beliefs, and values to guide how and what they learn, as well as the occupational goals they formulate in relation to the world-of-work. Arrington (2000) stated "for students to think about their career plans with any depth, they must have a foundation of career awareness and career exploration experiences" (p. 103). This foundation should be laid prior to entering high school.

During their eighth grade year, students begin to schedule their four years of high school courses. According to Arrington (2000) "eighth-grade students may be unaware of the choices available or the courses they need to take if they are interested in a particular career" (p. 107). Students need to know the full range of options that are available as well as how the decisions they make now will influence their future. The consequences of not planning a successful high school path can be great and limit future opportunities indefinitely.

According to Adams (2015), while young people do not physically drop out until high school, they mentally disengage in middle school. Research supports that waiting until high school to intervene is too late (Adams, 2015; Arrington, 2000). Because of this, it is critical that exposure and an early sense of career options are provided so students understand the relevance of what they are learning and stay on track to graduate. It is the hope that exposure to careers may inspire students to be engaged in what they are learning, take rigorous courses, and increase the likelihood they will pursue college to increase their career opportunities and marketability. If college is not the path of choice, then students still have the opportunity to obtain the knowledge and skills that make them marketable in the workforce upon graduation.

The importance of finding the right fit in a career cannot be overstated. Our work, in some ways, defines who we are. Our lifestyle, habits, personality, and peer group have close ties to our vocation (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). The choices we make impacts not only the present, but also the future.

Student Disengagement and Early Risks of Dropping Out

While the nation keeps a close eye on the high school dropout rate, we are distracted from a more pervasive problem - student disengagement (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). Balfanz, Herzog and Mac Iver (2007) defined school disengagement as "a higher order factor composed of correlated subfactors measuring different aspects of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to school and to school completion" (p. 224). It is clear the majority of high school dropouts begin to disengage from school long before entering high school. According to Balfanz et al., (2007), the early signs of dropping out can be identified during the middle grades. The combination of becoming an adolescent and moving into new organizations of school with more complex academic and social demands can deter students from previous academic and life goals (Balfanz et al., 2007). Making the decision not to attend school regularly, misbehaving, or expending little to no effort on academic tasks are all indicators of a student's growing disengagement from school and are thus strongly predictive of dropping out of school. There are many push-and-pull factors that affect adolescents, making it imperative that supports are there to push and pull them toward success.

Unfortunately, more than ever, young people feel that who they are and what they want to become does not matter (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). With the current structure of our schools, curriculum and culture have become more restrictive. Rather than trying to fit the school to our students, students are forced to try to fit into the school. Along with the number of students who physically drop out, many stay but drop out in

their heads. They "pass the tests, get passing grades, but they limp to a tainted graduation and diploma that papers over their lack of readiness for successful postsecondary learning and work" (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014, p. 8). These students stayed off the radar for early warning signs of dropping out, but their talents and potential were sadly ignored. While there is a call for many fundamental changes to engage students in learning and reaching for academic achievement, career guidance may offer relevance to learning and encouragement to persist to graduation.

Stages of Career Development

Super's career development theory identified five stages of career development: growth, exploratory, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1999) social cognitive career theory focuses only on two stages: exploration and planning. While different theorists call the stages of career development by different names, each stage is arguably vital in giving students what they need to make key decisions while navigating their educational path towards the future they aspire to have.

Career development starts in the younger grades with career awareness. This first stage of career development involves making students aware of career clusters or groups of occupations and understanding the role of work. This is often through guidance lessons and career day formats, but it may also come from family, community, media, and other sources. According to Lewis (2007), students will limit their job market selection tremendously and their potential in a successful career if they do not know about career opportunities. Young children often think about career choices based on associations with heroes, role models, or other imaginary combinations (Howard &

Walsh, 2010). They often aspire to be astronauts, princesses, firemen, or other characters from storybooks.

Adolescence is the crucial period for the study of career aspirations (Hirschi, 2010; Skorikov, 2007). At this period, interests crystallize and stabilize, and career goals and aspirations become more realistic in terms of adaptation to personal and environmental characteristics (Hirsch, 2010). To develop career awareness, schools should offer a comprehensive career development program along with exposure to soft skills such as professionalism, enthusiasm for work, integrity, ethics, and initiative (Lewis, 2007; McCale, 2008). Arrington (2000) offered strategies to assist in career awareness such as career infusion into the academic curriculum. These strategies take the first stage of career awareness and embed it into the everyday classroom activities.

The second stage of career development is career growth or career exploration. During this stage, students begin to develop a sense of identity that includes becoming aware of their interests and abilities. According to Schaefer, Rivera, and Ophals (2010), students start to develop a sense of identity that includes becoming aware of their interests and abilities during adolescence. Howard and Walsh (2010) defined an approach that pairs choosing a job/career as a process that involves a dynamic interaction of self-knowledge and awareness of personal attributes. Discovering one's interests then leads to the development of goals that are also directly influenced by self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and contextual influences proximal to choice behavior (Hirschi, 2010). The self-awareness about one's skills and goals, in addition to being academically prepared, is an expectation of employers on entry-level employees (Benz, 1996).

The final stage, career planning, allows students to explore careers based on the discovery of their abilities and interests and how they fit into the world of work. This stage is characterized by developing only tentative career and self-concepts (Skorikov, 2007). Stringer, Kerpelman, and Skorikov (2011) highlighted two dimensions of career exploration: exploration in breadth and exploration in depth. Exploration in breadth includes seeking information among a wide array of options whereas exploration in depth is a focused exploration of a chosen option (Stringer et al., 2011). Career exploration can take many forms. Career days, job shadowing, and interviewing professionals are just some of the common forms utilized in schools. These experiences aid young people in developing a sense of autonomy. As they better understand their own interests and abilities, they begin to develop work-related habits and identify relevant role models (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Planning takes place in the form of selecting high school courses, participating in career interest-related internships, and laying out post-graduation plans. Regardless of the differing in stages, youth need a path to follow to assist them in making informed career decisions.

Career Pathways

According to Klein and Mills (2018), "a comprehensive career pathways system offers youth an awareness of the world of work starting early in life" (p. 51). Career pathways provide guidance and support to navigate career decision making, training, and attainment with a new approach to learning throughout the middle grades and high school. Focus on career awareness, career exploration, and career planning starts early (Stipanovic et al., 2017). Individualized graduation plans are also a component of a fully implemented career pathways system.

Programs in career pathways provide students with both academic and occupational knowledge and skills to prepare students for future employment (Stipanovic et al., 2017).   Schools committed to utilizing career pathways at its fullest take a project based approach to learning. Students are in charge of their learning and become creators, not just consumers of information (Bottoms & Sundell, 2017).

Career pathways assist students with identifying their interests, aptitudes, and planning for life after high school. These programs provide students with a broad introduction into various careers and engage them in thinking about careers and their academic goals (Stipanovic et al., 2017). The learning experiences are contextual and engaging with the hopes to empower students to use what they learn in the real world (Bottoms & Sundell, 2017).

A recent study conducted by Stipanovic et al., (2017) found that students who were involved in a fully implemented career pathways program felt more motivated to come to school, and it influenced their effort in school by helping them see the connection between the knowledge and skills gained in school and the later influence on their career. In the study, students stated the program motivated them and "pushed them in the right direction" (Stipanovic et al., 2017, p. 215). The study also found that engagement in a career pathways program influenced students' beliefs and behaviors. Students reported higher levels of confidence and had a desire to take on more challenging courses. They also believed their actions were helping them attain their goals, such as attending college. Overall, the study found career-focused programs "enhanced students' sense of preparedness for college and/or work and encourages

students to put forth more effort in school, meet academic challenges, and take more challenging courses" (Stipanovic et al., 2017, p. 218).

Other Benefits of Career Preparedness

The importance of one's work has been recognized by philosophers and scholars throughout the ages and finding a vocation attested to be one of life's most challenging tasks (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). As with any challenging task, the more preparation that goes into it, the better the chances are for a positive outcome. A study conducted by Skorikov (2007) indicated the long-term effects of career preparation were stronger than the short-term effects. Effects included adjustment, positive life and self-perceptions, social adaptations, emotional stability, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Having access to a desired occupation, earn an income, achieve independence, and improve one's competencies are benefits worth pursuing (Walker & Tracey, 2012).

According to Kosine and Lewis (2008), students who engaged in career development activities showed a more realistic sense of academic self-efficacy and possessed better strategies for engaging in academic tasks. Additionally, these students were more likely to be engaged in competitive employment one year after graduation from high school (Kosine & Lewis, 2008).

Contextual Influences

As they grow and develop, "children's aspirations and expectations become more consistent with their abilities, values, and interests and take account of the barriers and opportunities in their environment" (Hartung et al., 2005, p. 394). Some students tend to be more prepared to make career decision than others. According to Lent et al., (1994), contextual influences support or put up barriers to the development and pursuit of an

individual's career path as they have a direct influence on choice goals and choice actions. Parents, teachers and friends play an important role in the development of career aspirations as well as supporting career exploration. Parents and other family members appear to have a strong impact on occupational development (Hirschi, Niles, & Akos, 2011). Children watch their parents earn an income as well as engage in conversations about the meaning of hard work. Other than emotional and moral support, financial support from family may be necessary in fulfilling career goals. Finances may also be a barrier to career aspirations as well as the need to leave home to further education (Rogers & Creed, 2011). According to Rojewski and Kim (2003), "socioeconomic status had considerable influence on determining both occupational aspirations and postsecondary transition status (p. 89).

Variables such as literacy and learning disabilities can also have an impact on a student's career development (Sampson et al., 2013). Practitioners should also keep academic ability in mind when selecting or designing a career development program in order to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Taking a comprehensive approach may prove problematic with the large number variables involved.

In order to make good career decisions, students need a planful attitude that focuses on their future. In their 2012 study, Walker and Tracey studied how a lack of a future time perspective acts as a barrier to career development. Future time perspective focuses primarily on the extent that one thinks about and places importance on their future (Walker & Tracey, 2012). This focus regulates behaviors, establishes goals and expectations, and motivates towards the achievement of goals. Some students have difficulty understanding how current actions relate to the attainment of future

goals. This, in turn, limits opportunities early on in the career development process. For example, if a student does not understand the importance of schoolwork, their academic record may shorten the list of career possibilities.

Understanding the contextual influences is essential to delivering an effective career development program (Sampson et al., 2013). Recognizing the supports provides opportunities to build a foundation for career exploration and goal setting. Not paying mind to barriers may contribute to low readiness and result in negative consequences for our students' career goals and success.

Children of Poverty and Careers

More than half of the nation's public school children now come from families living below, at, or not far above the poverty line (Suitts, 2015). Long term trends show in the world of education, students who live in poverty fall behind their middle to high-income household peers in both standardized test scores and high school graduation rates (ACT, 2015; Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Additionally, they also lack college and career readiness (ACT, 2015; Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The short term effects of poverty are concerning however; the ripple effects that have far reaching consequences that shape the entire course of one's whole life need attention when working with youth in poverty.

Most often, when people think of poverty, they think of the lack of basic needs such as food and sustainable shelter. The psychological consequences of poverty can be just as, or more, damaging long term. Poverty shapes the way people think, the actions they take and the decisions they make (Helmer, 2015). Therefore, careers may not be selected based on choice but by their given circumstances and the need for basic survival.

Low-income youth are markedly less likely to transition from secondary to postsecondary education than their economically advantaged peers (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). They also lack the supports for career planning and decision-making that college typically requires and affords. Students who live in poverty may have limited exposure to career role models who are progressing on a career path (Newell, 2013). It is common for young people to look for those who are similar to them as role models. With the majority of their time spent between school and home, the family members of students in poverty have a significant effect on the way their children view their occupational futures (Johnson, 2017). A number of studies have shown that parental employment and earnings have important relationships to youths' thoughts about their own economic futures (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). Families who experience economic hardships are more pessimistic about their children's future. They feel less confident about helping their child prepare for a career. These attitudes and work-related preparations are so vital for youth prior to completing or leaving high school.

Lower income youth report lower educational and occupational expectations and aspirations (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). According to Helmer (2015), youth who are thought of as being poor are associated with stereotypes and negative stigma which influences the way they feel about themselves. Lack of self-worth may lead individuals to believe they cannot learn or succeed. With lower self-esteem and lack of belief in themselves, they often aim low and settle for a career with base requirements and tend to be poorly paid.

Students who grow up in poverty also perceive more barriers to future successes than their middle-class counterparts (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). Their resources and

supports are fewer. In order to get adequate training needed for one's dream job there must be financial resources available. The absence of these resources leads young people to settle for something less than they envisioned. Wealthier counterparts can also easily recover or change careers if they are not happy with their decisions. The consequences of a change like this would have a more significant effect on the lives of those living in poverty.

Children living in poverty present a profound challenge to today's educators and counseling professionals (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The stress, fatigue, and instability in their lives can make it difficult to set goals, develop, and follow through with plans (Helmer, 2015). This lack of readiness may be due to limited exposure or the family's views on doing better. In an uncertain global economy, individuals may find that may be beneficial to maintain an impoverished status.

Conclusion

The literature has made it clear that career development begins early in the life span. What children learn about work and occupations has a profound impact on the decisions they make throughout their educational journey and ultimately on their future career (Hartung et al., 2005). According to Kosine and Lewis (2008) "evidence supports the importance of growth and exploration in helping individuals develop their vocational identities and engage in thoughtful career making" (p. 232).

Career development is a process that requires thoughtful, thorough attention. Students are confronted at a very early age to make decisions that ultimately impact their future. If students are not ready to make firm choices about their future, how can they be asked to do so? For students to make these choices and set future goals, there

must have been opportunities and experiences that expose them to careers and allow them to discover their own interests, abilities, and beliefs. Failure to provide opportunities can have a dire effect. Career development must be a deliberate process that begins early in a student's educational experience.

The gap that remains for this study to address is in the outcome of career development, particularly with specific CCR programs such as Missouri Connections. Are CCR programs, such as Missouri Connections, making an impact on secondary and post-secondary decisions? What other contextual factors influence students to pursue certain careers? Do students give credit for their career choices to the career development opportunities that take place during their adolescent years such as career awareness, career growth, and the opportunities for career exploration?

A comprehensive CCR program, such as Missouri Connections, may offer students opportunity for career awareness, growth, and exploration. The literature reviewed stresses the importance of implementing CCR heavily during the adolescent years. The area of CCR could benefit from a study that solicits feedback from students on the impact or lack of impact of the career awareness, growth, and exploration opportunities that took place during their adolescent years, particularly for non college-bound students. According to Rojewski and Kim (2003), career development theories focus primarily on economically and educationally advantaged youth. According to Rojewski and Kim (2003) "negative cultural perceptions or societal expectations may impose lower status and a devalued role on some adolescents. This may, in turn, result in limited career aspirations reflected by narrow, stereotypical employment possibilities" (p. 91).

The preceding literature review supports the basis and the framework for this study. The main focus of this work was to examine the role of career development at the pivotal stage of adolescence. Theories by both Super (2008), Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1999) provide the framework for the study. The stages of career development were explored in order to relate back to theory and apply to the Missouri Connections program. Contextual influences must also be considered as impactful to both career development and career decision as part of the study.

SECTION FOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

To be presented to Branson School District

Executive Summary – Oh the Places You Could Go: The Perceived Impact of Early Career Exposure

Statement of the Problem

Career exploration is typically found in secondary education. At this point, many students have already disengaged from school. Missouri Connections Career Program, which is currently being used starting in the 5th grade, does not have research in the literature in regards to impact on career development.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact, if any, Missouri Connections has on vocational aspiration and goals. It was also designed to examine how the process of pre-high school career exploration may impact the decisions of post-high school college and career choices.

Framework

Super's Career Development Theory – life stages of growth and exploration are inherent to the process of acquiring knowledge of one's interest and abilities aligned with the requirements of occupations. The stages are planning, exploring, and deciding. (Phillips & Blustein, 1994).

Social Cognitive Career Theory – Self efficacy, outcome expectation, and goals are building blocks of career development (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1999).

Design of Study

- **Setting** – Branson High School.
- **Participants** – 35 high school seniors. The study was open to all seniors.
- **Data Collection** – Likert and open-ended questions delivered through Google Survey.
- **Data Analysis** – Percentages and open coding.

Research Questions

- What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students who went through the program?
- What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program?

Findings RQ1

- MO Connections had little to no impact on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals.
- Students felt confident in their abilities and goals to be successful after high school.

Findings RQ2

- MO Connections had little impact on career planning and deciding.
- MO Connections had some value with exploring careers.

Implications

- Conversations and planning to enhance/change in the current career education approach.
- Students are and will continue to be impacted by other factors assisting them with College and Career Readiness.

Limitations

- Research Bias – Insider perspective
- Transferability

Recommendations

- Conduct pre-and-post surveys of students starting in elementary grades regarding CCR programs and needs.
- Analyze the student feedback as a means of program evaluation.
- Meet as a district counseling group to make needed changes and align CCR opportunities to better meet the needs of the student population.

Oh The Places You Could Go: The Percieved Impact of Early Career Exposure

STACY HAGS TON

DR. KIM FINCH, DISSERTATION SUPERVISOR

Where are we heading? Definition of College and Career Readiness

"College and career readiness means that a high school graduate has the necessary English and mathematics knowledge and skills – including, but not limited to, reading, writing, communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving – either to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit bearing two- or four-year college courses without the need for remedial coursework, or in workforce training programs for his/her chosen career that offer competitive, livable salaries above the poverty line, offer opportunities for career advancement, and are in a growing or sustainable industry."

- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Where are we arriving?

- 2.6 million 16 to 24 year olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential. This represents 6.8 percent of this population (NCE, 2016).

- Of those who graduate from high school, only 42.2% of Missouri graduates met or exceeded the standards for College and Career Readiness (DESE, 2017).

How do we know where we want to go?

Problem of Practice

▶ 1. Career exploration is typically found in secondary education. At this point, many students have already disengaged from school (Perry & Wallace, 2012).

▶ 2. Missouri Connections, a career exploration program, does not have research in the literature regarding the impact on career development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to:

▶ Examine the impact, if any, Missouri Connections has on vocational aspiration and goals. Children must have experiences that promote envisioning a future, exploring self, making career decisions, and shaping their life career (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2008).

▶ Examine how the process of pre-high school exploration may impact the decisions of post-high school college and career choices.

Significance of the Study

The Significance of the Study is to:

▶ Provide research to make or change current career education program/practices at Branson Public Schools.

▶ Put Missouri Connections in the literature.

Super's Career Development Theory

Planning

"Planning involves the foresight and knowledge of actions necessary to pursue desired goals."

Students must give thought to their future goals and what is required of them through education, training, and other forms of preparation in order to achieve these goals.

Exploring

"Exploring entails engaging in a variety of activities that serve to expand the individual's knowledge of self and the world of work."

Students need the opportunity to explore their interests, values, and skills and how those relate to occupational choice.

Deciding

"Deciding includes weighing information and alternatives in a manner that yields a satisfying course of action to which the individual can commit."

Students need guidance and support weeding through career options and information to make a choice that is doable for them.

Phillips & Blustein, 1994, p. 66

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Self-Efficacy

- An individual's personal beliefs about his or her capabilities to achieve

If students do not possess strong self-efficacy beliefs in their chosen career path, they will not build positive outcome expectations and their performance will be negatively impacted.

Outcome Expectations

- Anticipated consequence to an action

Individuals will chose a career that offers the most positive outcome expectations. Students will often weigh education or training requirements against anticipated salary.

Goals

- One's intentions to engage in an activity or to attain a certain level of performance

Individuals are more driven if their personal goals align with their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations.

Stipanovic, Stringfield, & Witherell, 2017

Research Questions

To address the overall purpose of the study, the following research questions were used:

1. What impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program has on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students?

2. What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program?

Study Design

Setting – The study took place at Branson High School.

Participants – The sample consisted of 35 high school students in grade12. According to Rogers and Creed (2011), the last three years of high school have been shown to be the time when students are preparing to make college/career decisions.

Data Collection - Likert and Open-ended questions delivered through Google Survey

Data Analysis – Data will be analyzed through:
- Frequencies and percentages
- Open Coding

Study Design - Demographics

▶ Of the 35 students that participated in the study:
  ▶ 38.9% Male, 52.8% Female, 8.3% Other/Prefer not to answer
  ▶ 79.9% White, 5.7% Black, 5.7% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2.9% Biracial, 2.9% Hispanic, 2.9% Prefer not to answer
  ▶ 52.8% Full-lunch status, 11.1% Reduced-lunch status, 36.1% Free-lunch status
  ▶ 91.7% reports having Internet access at home.

Practitioner Setting for the Study

District Profile – Branson School District

- ▶ Current population – approximately 4,800
- ▶ 60% receive free or reduced priced lunch
- ▶ Extremely transient due to tourism economy
- ▶ 2 elementary schools, 2 intermediate schools, 1 junior high, & 1 high school
- ▶ 8.2% considered homeless
- ▶ 11 school counselors
- ▶ 95% graduation rate

Practitioner Setting for the Study

Program – Missouri Connections

- ▶ Provided to Missouri Schools, free of charge, through Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- ▶ Offers career assessments, career and college planning information, and financial aid resources.
- ▶ Goal of program is to help individuals learn about their talents, skills, interests and opportunities in relation to the world of work.
- ▶ Missouri Connections

Sample Questions – Likert Scale

▶ How would you rate the impact of the Missouri Connections program on your current career aspirations?

▶ How much impact did Missouri Connections have in helping you understand the required training, education, and salary expectations when it comes to your career aspirations?

▶ How much impact did Missouri Connections have on your goals for completing your high school education?

Sample Questions – Open-Ended

▶ What impact, if any, did Missouri Connections have on your current academic goals?

▶ What, or who, influenced college/career plans that you have made for your future?

▶ What else could the Branson School District provide to help you prepare for college or plan for a future career?

Scholarly Review

- Career Development
  - Kosine and Lewis (2008) – "Developing a career is a process, not just a destination.
- Career Development Theory – Donald Super
  - Wallace-Brocisou, Serafica, and Osipow (1994): Super recognized that occupational choice is not definitive during adolescence but is a time to start developing career maturity.
- Social Cognitive Career Theory – Lent, Brown, & Hackett
  - Rojewski and Kim (2016) – Self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals are believed to have influences on career planning and exploration.
- Importance of Career Development in Adolescence
  - Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2005): Adolecents are able to use their interests, abilities, beliefs, and values to guide how and what they learn, as well as the occupational goals they formulate in relation to the world-of-work.

Scholarly Review

- Student Disengagement and Early Risks of Dropping Out
  - Washor and Mojkowski (2014): Along with the number of students who physically drop out, many stay but drop out in their heads. They pass the tests, get passing grades, but they limp to a tainted graduation and diploma that papers over their lack of readiness for successful postsecondary learning and work.
- Stages of Career Development and Career Pathways
  - Klein and Mills (2018): A comprehensive career pathways system offers youth an awareness of the world of work starting early in life.
- Contextual Influences
  - Rojewski and Kim (2003): Socioeconomic status has considerable influence on determining both occupational aspirations and postsecondary transition status

Scholarly Review

- Children of Poverty and Careers
  - Helmer (2015): Poverty shapes the way people think, the actions they take and the decisions they make.
  - Purtell and Mcloyd (2013): Low-income youth are markedly less likely to transition from secondary to postsecondary education than their economically advantaged peers. They also report lower educational and occupational expectations and aspirations. Parental employment and earnings have important relationships to youths thoughts about tiehr own economic futures.
  - Newell (2013): Students who live in poverty may have limited exposure to career models who are progressing on a career path.

Findings

- RQ 1: What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on the **self-efficacy**, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students?
  - 61.1% of students surveyed indicated that Missouri Connections had little to no impact on the belief that they would be successful after high school.
  - 36.1% indicated some to much impact. 2.8% indicated high impact.
- Open Ended Responses: Students felt confident in their success, as they perceived it, after high school.
  - "I think I can be successful, I really didn't have any purpose or goals after high school a few months ago, I just felt lost but thankfully I found something that I'm gonna enjoy and make money out of."
  - "I believe that I have what it takes to be successful in what I want to have as a career as long as I keep trying to do what's best for me."

Findings

▶ RQ 1: What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on the self-efficacy, **outcome expectations**, and goals of current high school students?

    ▶ 61.1% of students surveyed indicated that Missouri Connections had little to no impact on helping them understand the required training, education, and salary expectations when it came to their career aspirations.

    ▶ 38.9% indicated some to much impact. 0% indicated high impact.

Findings

▶ RQ 1: What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and **goals** of current high school students?

    ▶ 61.1% of students surveyed indicated that Missouri Connections had little to no impact on their goals for completing their high school education.

    ▶ 30.5% indicated some to much impact. 8.3% indicated high impact.

▶ Open Ended Responses: Students felt Missouri Connections had little to no impact on the goals they set for themselves to complete high school.

    ▶ "It helped me know what I need to do to get where I want to be."

    ▶ "Knowing that I'm always going to push myself to be what I want to be."

    ▶ "I am wanting to attend college, that had always been a goal, but this helped enforce it."

    ▶ "My grades reflect on how I was raised and how I focus on my school work, I do not remember much from what the Missouri Connections told me."

Findings

- RQ 2: What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on **planning**, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program?
  - 66.7% of students surveyed indicated that Missouri Connections had little to no impact on their college and/or career plans.
  - 33.4% indicated some to much impact. 0% indicated high impact.
- Open Ended Responses: Students felt Missouri Connections had little to no impact on choosing high school courses to plan for their future career.
  - "Honestly not much because I picked the subjects that I knew I could handle and enjoy."
  - "It helped me choose what would help me most in my career."
  - "My classes were based on what was the most rigorous courses available."

Findings

- RQ 2: What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on planning, **exploring**, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program?
  - 44.4% of students surveyed rated the valued of the opportunity to explore different career option through Missouri Connections with no to little value.
  - 44.4% indicated some to much value. 11.1% indicated high value.

Findings

- RQ 2: What perceived impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on planning, exploring, and **deciding** on a career of current high school students who went through the program?
- Open Ended Responses: When asked how they decided upon a career path, students surveyed indicated more real world experience having an impact. Credit was given to family and teachers as the influences towards career paths.
  - "Through job shadowing and influences in my life."
  - "Once I joined the yearbook class here at the school, I really knew that picture taking was something special to me and I wanted the pictures that I took to make an impact on others."
  - "I discovered my interest by connecting my past to my current skills."

Implications and Limitations

- Implications
  - Conversations and planning will take place to enhance current career education program in the early grades at the Branson School District.
  - Students are and will continue being impacted by other factors that are assisting them with college/career readiness.
- Limitations
  - Researcher Positionality – Insider Perspective and bias
  - Transferability – due to unique demographics and size of the population surveyed.

Recommendations

- One – Conduct pre and post surveys of students starting in elementary grades regarding college/career development programs.
- Two – Analyze the student feedback as a means of a program evaluation.
- Three – Meet as a counseling group to make changes and align college and career readiness opportunities to better meet the needs of the student population.
- Four – Further investigation should be done on the program's impact with the data split by demographics.

"So be sure when you step, step with care and great tact.
And remember that life's a great balancing act.
And will you succeed?
Yes! You will, indeed!
(98 and ¾ percent guaranteed)
Kid, you'll move mountains."

-Dr. Suess

QUESTIONS?

SECTION FIVE:

CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

OH THE PLACES YOU COULD GO:

THE IMPACT OF EARLY CAREER EXPOSURE

By Stacy Hagston

To be submitted to *Journal of Career Development*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine what, if any, perceived impact Missouri

Connections had on college/career development and choices for high school seniors. The

research questions that guided the study were as follows: What impact, if any, has

Missouri Connections had on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of

current high school students? What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections

program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school

students? Findings indicated the program, overall, had little to no impact on students in

regards to their college/career development and decisions. Students felt relationships and

other experiences played the biggest role in their college/career development. Students

did find the program had some value in giving them opportunity to explore career

opportunities and found it to be beneficial to use with future students.

Key Words

College and Career Readiness, Career Development Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory

According to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) 2016 Compendium Report, 2.6 million 16 to 24 year-olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential (NCES, 2016). This represents 6.8 percent of the 38.8 million noninstitutionalized, civilian 16 to 24 year olds living in the United States (NCES, 2016). Policy analysts have called the dropout rate the "silent epidemic" (Perry & Wallace, 2012). According to Perry and Wallace (2012), while this silent epidemic has been improving, the rate of improvement is too slow. To accelerate the pace, many initiatives have gained attention, particularly college and career readiness (CCR).

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE, 2018) used the following definition on their webpage for college and career readiness:

> College and career readiness means that a high school graduate has the necessary English and mathematics knowledge and skills—including, but not limited to, reading, writing, communications, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving—either to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing two- or four-year college courses without the need for remedial coursework, or in workforce training programs for his/her chosen career that offer competitive, livable salaries above the poverty line, offer opportunities for career advancement, and are in a growing or sustainable industry.

Data from the DESE showed only 42.2% of Missouri graduates met or exceeded standards for CCR (DESE, 2017). These statistics leave employers with a workforce that lacks essential skills along with academic preparedness to succeed in a competitive market. Schools are then challenged with finding a cost-effective and sustainable

solution that will yield high impact in the effort of preparing students for life beyond PK-12.

Perry and Wallace (2012) proposed that school-based career programs have the capacity to address the most pressing problems facing education. In tandem with other academic and nonacademic programs, career programs can assist students in creating both short-term and long-term goals to keep them motivated and focused on their education. If given the opportunity early on to explore interests, abilities, and career options, more students may find themselves at or above standards for CCR (Hirschi, 2010).

Missouri Connections aims to provide a comprehensive, online career development and planning program that is funded by DESE. The program is designed to help students learn about their talents, skills, and interests to help make a connection between planning for future education and work. The program includes assessments, career and college planning, as well as financial aid resources. In order to implement a comprehensive guidance and counseling program and meet the career development needs of students, the Branson School District incorporated the use of what is now known as Missouri Connections during the 2010-2011 school year. Missouri Connections is an Internet-based resource designed to help Missouri citizens, school age to adulthood, determine their career interests, explore occupations, create education plans, develop job search strategies, and create resumes. Missouri Connections provides current career information resources, free of charge, to students, parents, educators, guidance counselors, and job seekers through DESE. The program assessments are designed for both self-awareness and career awareness. Users can explore careers in all the 16 career

clusters, watch videos containing information, and gain information on the education and training requirements for those careers.

 Currently, Missouri Connections is utilized in grades five through eight to systematically develop a plan prior to entering high school. Through collaboration, Branson School District counselors divided activities for career exploration and awareness, as well as taking inventories to prepare students throughout their development, in order to assist students in making connections between their education and the world of work. Students also utilize the program to assist in preparing their four-year plan for high school.

Starting their fifth grade year, Branson School District students are introduced to Missouri Connections by doing the Reality Check activity. Reality Check allows users to choose a place to live in Missouri, add up their expected living expenses, and compare their expenses to their expected income with the career of their choice. In the sixth grade, students at Branson School District create their portfolio with a unique username and password.   Sixth graders then complete an interest inventory. The interest inventory is designed to help users match their interest with a wide variety of careers. Users can bookmark and make notes regarding careers to be saved within their portfolios. Information is sent home during the sixth grade year to encourage parents to explore Missouri Connections with their students and start the conversation regarding future career plans.

The portfolios created during their sixth grade year follow students through junior high and high school as they complete more assessments and plan their educational/career path. During their junior high years, Branson students take

assessments regarding career clusters, skills, and learning styles. The results of these assessments are utilized in conversations as they begin to develop their four-year plan for high school. During their sophomore year at Branson High School, students complete the career cluster inventory and Reality Check activities again. They are then encouraged to use the results from the inventory to research their top career to see the job outlook, pay, and educational requirements.

While multiple indicators lend themselves to the national dropout rate and a wide range of initiatives are engaged to improve the completion rate, the impact of a comprehensive CCR program is worthwhile to investigate. Research from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated students are falling below what is desirable to be college or career ready. However, the efforts put into delivering a CCR program may prove to have an effect on student completion and persistence into a career.

Literature Review

This scholarly review examines the historical overview of career guidance and development as well as providing research that supports the focus of career development during adolescent years. Literature surrounding Super's Career Development Theory and Social Cognitive Theory are included and stages of career preparation and career pathways are reviewed. Lastly, the benefits of a comprehensive career program and contextual influences such as the effects of poverty are discussed.

Historical Pendulum of Career Guidance and Development in Schools

The value of career guidance in schools can be dated back to our nation's founding fathers. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin believed education served a purpose of fostering economic development and citizenry to conduct a

democratic government (Schenck, Anctil, Smith, & Dahir, 2012). Sharing their belief,

Frank Parsons (1909) has been credited as the developer of the first career counseling

model in the early 1900's. Parsons believed there was "no part of life where the need for

guidance is more emphatic than in the transition from school to work, - the choice of a

vocation, adequate preparation for it, and the attainment of efficiency and success"

(Parsons, 1909, p. 4). Concurrently in the late 1800's and early 1900's, Jesse Davis has

been credited with developing the first comprehensive school counseling program

(Schenck et al., 2012). Since the beginning of the 1900's, career counseling and school

counseling "have breathed the same air and walked down the same road together,

sometimes holding hands and sometimes not, but never far from each other" (Schenck et

al., 2012, p. 223).

For more than a century, the emphasis on career development in public schools

has swung like a pendulum. In the 1930's, career guidance was narrowly defined as

occupational choice. By the late 1940's, career guidance took a back burner to personal-

social issues only to reemerge a decade later. With the launch of Sputnik 1 on October 4,

1957, came the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (Pub. L. 85-864) (Schenck et al.,

2012). This act provided funding to American schools to promote postsecondary

education. School counselors were identified as the professionals to test students to

identify those with the aptitude, specifically in science, and encourage them to enter

college.

The emphasis on career development continued through the 1970's. More and

more occupations started requiring at least some postsecondary education. Existing jobs

that previously only required a high school diploma demanded higher skills for

entry. The pendulum swung back at the beginning of the 1980's. The publication of the

National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report, *A Nation at Risk*,

brought the focus back to academics (Schenck et al., 2012). The number of academic

courses required to graduate from high school increased. Since vocational programs

counted primarily towards electives, their existence started to erode.

Educational attention turned back to career education in the 1990's due to two

major national initiatives. The United States Department of Labor published a report in

1991 titled, *What Work Requires of Schools*. This report "brought attention to the

importance of employability skills, and for the first time, educators were urged to

integrate academic and affective education in the areas of basic skills thinking skills, and

personal qualities" (Stone & Dahir, 2006, p. 333). The second initiative, the *School-to-*

Work Opportunities Act (Pub. L. 103-239), pushed educators to not only prepare high

school graduates for the workplace, but also for postsecondary education (Worthington &

Juntunen, 1997).

With the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Pub. L. 107-110),

the pendulum swung back again. Career development activities were seen as time taken

away from core academic programs. Pressure on states and districts to perform meant

any flexible dollars were dedicated to academic improvements rather than career

guidance and education. The *Carl D. Perkins Act*, passed in 2006, made an attempt to

introduce the concept of an academically and technically rigorous program of study that

prepared students for a double purpose - college and careers (Bottoms & Sundell, 2017).

However, adjustments made for inflation decreased the funding allocated to this initiative

significantly.

In less than a decade, a new shift came with *Race to the Top*. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*. Part of this legislation invested billions of dollars in education. *Race to the Top* called for students to be prepared for success in college and careers by adopting standards and assessments that allowed them to compete in the global economy (Schenck et al., 2012).

Although the level of emphasis placed on career guidance has gone through many swings of the pendulum through the last century, the challenge of successfully preparing students to enter the workforce remains. The future of emphasis is uncertain. What is certain is that with the ever changing world, there will be necessity for another educational evolution on how to meet the career guidance and development needs of today's students (Schenck et al., 2012).

Career Development Defined

Phillips and Blustein (1994) defined career development as the "readiness and ability of a person to reach a well-founded career decision" (p. 63). The concept of readiness requires that an individual considers their career choices with both attitudinal and cognitive factors (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). Attitudinal factors include planning and exploring, while cognitive factors incorporate decision making and informational knowledge. Sampson, McClain, Musch, and Reardon (2013) also added the measures of capability and complexity to the concept of career readiness. Capability represents those internal factors that an individual possesses to apply to an occupation. Complexity represents the external variables such as family, social, economic, and organizational factors that influence the ability to make appropriate career choices (Sampson et al.,

2013). These measures of vocational maturity or readiness all lend heavily to the start of the career development process. Readiness to make career decisions is not static, as individuals and circumstances change.

Career development is a process.   While the path may look a little different for each person, the stages toward development are similar. Planning, decision-making, problem solving/confidence, and exploration are components of competent career development (Savickas, 2002 & 2005; Rogers & Creed, 2011). Kosine and Lewis (2008) described developing a career not as a destination but a process. This process involves readiness to explore careers, a path, and stages to move through in order to be prepared to make a well-founded career decision.

Career Development Theory

Donald Super is credited as a major contributor to career development theory and practice. Super's theory of career development stated that the "life stages of growth and exploration are inherent to the process of acquiring knowledge of how one's interests and abilities align with the requirements of occupations" (Kosine & Lewis, 2008, p. 227). The growth stage begins as children and adolescents are introduced to a variety of occupations and begin to develop their career self-concept.

Super viewed career development as a series of specific vocational tasks that should be accomplished in a defined and predictable sequence (Rojewski & Kim, 2003). For example, an early stage is characterized by narrowing career options from fantasy to tentative options. Super's most important contributions have been in his work explicating those developmental tasks that involve planning, exploring, and deciding, otherwise known as readiness for making career choices (Phillips & Blustein, 1994).

While Super proposed that career development occurs throughout the lifespan, starting with vocational exploration and ending with the decline of a career, he asserted that the process of career exploration and decision-making is central to adolescence (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). This was greatly in part due to the link between career development and self-concept. As identity formation is the primary task of adolescence, career exploration and development help to largely shape that identity as it relates to future self and plans (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Super also recognized occupational choice is not definitive during adolescence but is a time to start developing career maturity (Wallace-Brocious, Serafica, & Osipow, 1994).

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Complementary to Super's career development theory is Lent, Hackett and Brown's (1999) social cognitive career theory. Based on Albert Bandura's general social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory postulates that a variety of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors influence the process of career choice (Rogers & Creed, 2011). Social cognitive career theory is a widely used theory for understanding career choices and career development (Stipanovic, Stringfield, & Witherell, 2017).

Three variables serve as the basic building blocks of social cognitive career theory. Self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals are believed to have influences on career planning and exploration (Rogers & Creed, 2011; Rojewski & Kim, 2003). This triadic model plays a substantial role in influencing a person's career development and career decision-making.

Social cognitive career theory also provides a tentative explanation for how occupational aspirations develop over time, the influences of contextual influences, and

the relationship between academic and occupational aspirations (Rojewski & Kim, 2016; Rogers, Creed & Glendon, 2008). The aim of this theory is to explain three interrelated aspects of career development: (1) how basic academic and career interests develop, (2) how educational and career choices are made, and (3) how academic and career success is obtained. Like career development theory, social cognitive career theory also theorized that career development occurred in stages (Rogers & Creed, 2011; Rojewski & Kim, 2003).

Influencing Where Children See Themselves in Careers

Children as young as age four begin making judgments about careers and the suitability of various types of occupations (Howard & Walsh, 2010). How children view themselves and the world around them plays an important role in their development. The people they spend the majority of their developmental period with, family and the school, play a vital role in shaping these views of their current and future selves.

While both school and family provide information and guidance, (directly or indirectly) to influence a young person's choice of careers, school teachers have far less influence on career choice than that of parents (Kniveton, 2004). School-teachers can identify aptitudes and abilities and encourage students to take certain subject options, or take part in work experience, or employment visits (Kniveton, 2004). However, it is the family members that play a constant role in their children's' lives that have a greater influence on future career aspirations (Kniveton, 2004).

Children will usually see themselves as reflections of the adults in their lives. Parents play a vital role in influencing what children learn about the world of work and their future in it through the examples they set. Research has shown that parent-

adolescent relationship and parent career attitudes affects the career development, exploration, aspirations, occupational plans, gender stereo-typing, and attitudes towards job success for young adolescents (Keller & Whiston, 2008). Parents also offer appropriate support for certain occupations, which tend to follow their own (Kniveton, 2004). Research studies also indicated that children would choose occupational levels that match their parents' expectations or that corresponded with the mother's occupation (Watson & McMahon, 2005).

Importance of Career Development in Adolescence

While career development occurs across the lifespan, a major developmental task of adolescence is career preparation (Rogers & Creed, 2011; Skorikov, 2007). While theories stress the importance of career choice, adolescent career readiness development is not clearly specified. Historically, little attention has been given to career-development needs of non-college bound youth due to the general goals of public education and the societal goals that favor college attendance (Rojewski & Kim, 2003). This population still has the potential for career success if given the opportunity to acquire vocational self-concept and maturity.

Research indicates career exploration typically begins in adolescence. During this time, individuals in this age range seek opportunities to explore careers through education and work experiences as they begin to develop their vocational self-concept (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). These endeavors also aid in the development of interests, abilities, beliefs, and values.

Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek, (2005) suggested that adolescents are able to use their interests, abilities, beliefs, and values to guide how and what they learn, as well

as the occupational goals they formulate in relation to the world-of-work. Arrington (2000) stated "for students to think about their career plans with any depth, they must have a foundation of career awareness and career exploration experiences" (p. 103). This foundation should be laid prior to entering high school.

During their eighth grade year, students begin to schedule their four years of high school courses. According to Arrington (2000), "eighth-grade students may be unaware of the choices available or the courses they need to take if they are interested in a particular career" (p. 107). Students need to know the full range of options that are available as well as how the decisions they make now will influence their future. The consequences of not planning a successful high school path can be great and limit future opportunities indefinitely.

According to Adams (2015), while young people do not physically drop out until high school, they mentally disengage in middle school. Research supports that waiting until high school to intervene is too late (Adams, 2015; Arrington, 2000). Because of this, it is critical that exposure to careers and an early sense of career options are provided so students understand the relevance of what they are learning and stay on track to graduate. It is the hope that exposure to careers may inspire students to be engaged in what they are learning, take rigorous courses, and increase the likelihood they will pursue college to increase their career opportunities and marketability. If college is not the path of choice, then students still have the opportunity to obtain the knowledge and skills that make them marketable in the workforce upon graduation.

The importance of finding the right fit in a career cannot be overstated. Our work, in some ways, defines who we are. Our lifestyle, habits, personality, and peer

group have close ties to our vocation (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). The choices we make

impacts not only the present, but also the future.

Student Disengagement and Early Risks of Dropping Out

While the nation keeps a close eye on the high school dropout rate, we are

distracted from a more pervasive problem - student disengagement (Washor &

Mojkowski, 2014). Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) defined school disengagement

as "a higher order factor composed of correlated subfactors measuring different aspects

of the process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations,

reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from a commitment to

school and to school completion" (p. 224). It is clear the majority of high school

dropouts begin to disengage from school long before entering high school. According to

Balfanz et al., (2007), the early signs of dropping out can be identified during the middle

grades. The combination of becoming an adolescent and moving into new organizations

of school with more complex academic and social demands can deter students from

previous academic and life goals (Balfanz et al., 2007). Making the decision not to attend

school regularly, misbehaving, or expending little to no effort on academic tasks are all

indicators of a student's growing disengagement from school and are thus strongly

predictive of dropping out of school. There are many push-and-pull factors that affect

adolescents, making it imperative that supports are there to push and pull them toward

success.

Unfortunately more than ever, young people feel that who they are and what they

want to become does not matter (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). With the current

structure of our schools, curriculum and culture have become more restrictive. Rather

than trying to fit the school to our students, students are forced to try to fit into the school. Along with the number of students who physically drop out, many stay but drop out in their heads. They "pass the tests, get passing grades, but they limp to a tainted graduation and diploma that papers over their lack of readiness for successful postsecondary learning and work" (Washor & Mojkowski, 2014, p. 8). These students stayed off the radar for early warning signs of dropping out, but their talents and potential were sadly ignored. While there is a call for many fundamental changes to engage students in learning and reaching for academic achievement, career guidance may offer relevance to learning and encouragement to persist to graduation.

Stages of Career Development

Super's career development theory identified five stages of career development: growth, exploratory, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). Lent et al., (1999) social cognitive career theory focuses only on two stages: exploration and planning. While different theorists call the stages of career development by different names, each stage is arguably vital in giving students what they need to make key decisions while navigating their educational path towards the future they aspire to have.

Career development starts in the younger grades with career awareness. This first stage of career development involves making students aware of career clusters or groups of occupations and understanding the role of work. This is often through guidance lessons and career day formats, but it may also come from family, community, media, and other sources. According to Lewis (2007), students will limit their job market selection tremendously and their potential in a successful career if they do not know

about career opportunities. Young children often think about career choices based on associations with heroes, role models, or other imaginary combinations (Howard & Walsh, 2010). They often aspire to be astronauts, princesses, firemen, or other characters from storybooks.

Adolescence is the crucial period for the study of career aspirations (Hirschi, 2010; Skorikov, 2007). At this period, interests crystallize and stabilize, and career goals and aspirations become more realistic in terms of adaptation to personal and environmental characteristics (Hirsch, 2010). To develop career awareness, schools should offer a comprehensive career development program along with exposure to soft skills such as professionalism, enthusiasm for work, integrity, ethics, and initiative (Lewis, 2007; McCale, 2008).

The second stage of career development is career growth or career exploration. During this stage, students begin to develop a sense of identity that includes becoming aware of their interests and abilities. According to Schaefer, Rivera, and Ophals (2010), students start to develop a sense of identity that includes becoming aware of their interests and abilities during adolescence. Howard and Walsh (2010) defined an approach that pairs choosing a job/career as a process that involves a dynamic interaction of self-knowledge and awareness of personal attributes. Discovering one's interests then leads to the development of goals that are also directly influenced by self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and contextual influences proximal to choice behavior (Hirschi, 2010). The self-awareness about one's skills and goals, in addition to being academically prepared, is an expectation of employers on entry-level employees (Benz, 1996).

The final stage, career planning, allows students to explore careers based on the discovery of their abilities and interests and how they fit into the world of work. This stage is characterized by developing only tentative career and self-concepts (Skorikov, 2007). Planning takes place in the form of selecting high school courses, participating in career interest-related internships, and laying out post-graduation plans.

Career Pathways

According to Klein and Mills (2018), "a comprehensive career pathways system offers youth an awareness of the world of work starting early in life" (p. 51). Career pathways provide guidance and support to navigate career decision making, training, and attainment with a new approach to learning throughout the middle grades and high school. Focus on career awareness, career exploration, and career planning starts early (Stipanovic et al., 2017). Individualized graduation plans are also a component of a fully implemented career pathways system.

Programs in career pathways provide students with both academic and occupational knowledge and skills to prepare students for future employment (Stipanovic et al., 2017).   Schools committed to utilizing career pathways at its fullest take a project based approach to learning. Students are in charge of their learning and become creators, not just consumers of information (Bottoms & Sundell, 2017).

Career pathways assist students with identifying their interests, aptitudes, and planning for life after high school. These programs provide students with a broad introduction into various careers and engage them in thinking about careers and their academic goals (Stipanovic et al., 2017). The learning experiences are contextual and

engaging with the hopes to empower students to use what they learn in the real world (Bottoms & Sundell, 2017).

A recent study conducted by Stipanovic et al., (2017) found that students who were involved in a fully implemented career pathways program felt more motivated to come to school, and it influenced their effort in school by helping them see the connection between the knowledge and skills gained in school and the later influence on their career. In the study, students stated the program motivated them and "pushed them in the right direction" (Stipanovic et al., 2017, p. 215). The study also found that engagement in a career pathways program influenced students' beliefs and behaviors. Students reported higher levels of confidence and had a desire to take on more challenging courses. They also believed their actions were helping them attain their goals, such as attending college. Overall, the study found career-focused programs "enhanced students' sense of preparedness for college and/or work and encourages students to put forth more effort in school, meet academic challenges, and take more challenging courses" (Stipanovic et al., 2017, p. 218).

Contextual Influences

As they grow and develop, "children's aspirations and expectations become more consistent with their abilities, values, and interests and take account of the barriers and opportunities in their environment" (Hartung et al., 2005, p. 394). Some students tend to be more prepared to make career decision than others. According to Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), contextual influences support or put up barriers to the development and pursuit of an individual's career path as they have a direct influence on choice goals and choice actions. Parents, teachers, and friends play an important role in the development

of career aspirations as well as supporting career exploration. Parents and other family members appear to have a strong impact on occupational development (Hirschi, Niles, & Akos, 2011). Children watch their parents earn an income as well as engage in conversations about the meaning of hard work. Other than emotional and moral support, financial support from family may be necessary in fulfilling career goals. Finances may also be a barrier to career aspirations as well as the need to leave home to further education (Rogers & Creed, 2011). According to Rojewski and Kim (2003), "socioeconomic status had considerable influence on determining both occupational aspirations and postsecondary transition status" (p. 89).

Variables such as literacy and learning disabilities can also have an impact on a student's career development (Sampson et al., 2013). Practitioners should also keep academic ability in mind when selecting or designing a career development program in order to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Taking a comprehensive approach may prove problematic with the large number variables involved.

In order to make good career decisions, students need a planful attitude that focuses on their future. In their 2012 study, Walker and Tracey studied how a lack of a future time perspective acts as a barrier to career development. Future time perspective focuses primarily on the extent that one thinks about and places importance on their future (Walker & Tracey, 2012). This focus regulates behaviors, establishes goals and expectations, and motivates students towards the achievement of goals. Some students have difficulty understanding how current actions relate to the attainment of future goals. This, in turn limits, opportunities early on in the career development process. For

example, if a student does not understand the importance of schoolwork, their academic record may shorten the list of career possibilities.

Understanding the contextual influences are essential to delivering an effective career development program (Sampson et al., 2013). Recognizing the supports in place provides students with opportunities to build a foundation for career exploration and goal setting. Not paying mind to barriers may contribute to low readiness and result in negative consequences for our students' career goals and success.

Children of Poverty and Careers

More than half of the nation's public school children now come from families living below, at, or not far above the poverty line (Suitts, 2015). Long term trends show in the world of education, students who live in poverty fall behind their middle to high-income household peers in both standardized test scores and high school graduation rates (ACT, 2015; Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). Additionally, they also lack college and career readiness (ACT, 2015; Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The short term effects of poverty are concerning however, the ripple effects that have far reaching consequences that shape the entire course of one's whole life need attention when working with youth in poverty.

Most often, when people think of poverty, they think of the lack of basic needs such as food and sustainable shelter. The psychological consequences of poverty can be just as or more damaging long term. Poverty shapes the way people think, the actions they take, and the decisions they make (Helmer, 2015). Therefore, careers may not be selected based on choice, but by their given circumstances and the need for basic survival.

Low-income youth are markedly less likely to transition from secondary to postsecondary education than their economically advantaged peers (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). They also lack the supports for career planning and decision-making that college typically requires and affords. Students who live in poverty may have limited exposure to career role models who are progressing on a career path (Newell, 2013). It is common for young people to look for those who are similar to them as role models. With the majority of their time spent between school and home, the family members of students in poverty have a significant effect on the way their children view their occupational futures (Johnson, 2017). A number of studies have shown that parental employment and earnings have important relationships to youths' thoughts about their own economic futures (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). Families who experience economic hardships are more pessimistic about their children's future. They feel less confident about helping their child prepare for a career. These attitudes and work-related preparations are vital for youth prior to completing or leaving high school.

Lower income youth report lower educational and occupational expectations and aspirations (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). According to Helmer (2015), youth who are thought of as being poor are associated with stereotypes and negative stigma which influences the way they feel about themselves. Lack of self-worth may lead individuals to believe they cannot learn or succeed. With lower self-esteem and lack of belief in themselves, they often aim low and settle for a career with base requirements and tend to be poorly paid.

Students who grow up in poverty also perceive more barriers to future successes than their middle-class counterparts (Purtell & Mcloyd, 2013). Their resources and

supports are fewer. In order to get adequate training needed for one's dream job there must be financial resources available. The absence of these resources leads young people to settle for something less than they envisioned. Wealthier counterparts can also easily recover or change careers if they are not happy with their decisions. The consequences of a change like this would have a more significant effect on the lives of those living in poverty.

Children living in poverty present a profound challenge to today's educators and counseling professionals (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007). The stress, fatigue, and instability in their lives can make it difficult to set goals, develop, and follow through with plans (Helmer, 2015). This lack of readiness may be due to limited exposure or the family's views on doing better. In an uncertain global economy, individuals may find that sometimes serve to maintain an impoverished status.

Conclusion

The literature has made it clear that career development begins early in the life span. What children learn about work and occupations has a profound impact on the decisions they make throughout their educational journey and ultimately on their future career (Hartung et al., 2005). According to Kosine and Lewis (2008) "evidence supports the importance of growth and exploration in helping individuals develop their vocational identities and engage in thoughtful career making" (p. 232).

Career development is a process that requires thoughtful, thorough attention. Students are confronted at a very early age to make decisions that ultimately impact their future. If students are not ready to make firm choices about their future, how can they be asked to do so? For students to make these choices and set future goals, there

must be opportunities and experiences that expose them to careers and allow them to discover their own interests, abilities, and beliefs. Failure to provide opportunities can have a dire effect. Career development must be a deliberate process that begins early in a student's educational experience.

The gap that remains for this study to address is in the outcome of career development, particularly with specific CCR programs such as Missouri Connections. Are CCR programs, such as Missouri Connections, making an impact on secondary and post-secondary decisions? What other contextual factors influence students to pursue certain careers? Do students give credit for their career choices to the career development opportunities that take place during their adolescent years such as career awareness, career growth, and the opportunities for career exploration?

A comprehensive CCR program, such as Missouri Connections, may offer students opportunity for career awareness, growth, and exploration. The literature reviewed stresses the importance of implementing CCR heavily during the adolescent years. The area of CCR could benefit from a study that solicits feedback from students on the impact or lack of impact of the career awareness, growth, and exploration opportunities that took place during their adolescent years, particularly for non-college bound students. According to Rojewski and Kim (2003), career development theories focus primarily on economically and educationally advantaged youth. According to Rojewski and Kim (2003), "negative cultural perceptions or societal expectations may impose lower status and a devalued role on some adolescents. This may, in turn, result in limited career aspirations reflected by narrow, stereotypical employment possibilities" (p. 91).

The preceding literature review supports the basis and the framework for this study. The main focus of this work was to examine the role of career development at the pivotal stage of adolescence. Theories by Super, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1999) provide the framework for the study. The stages of career development were explored in order to relate back to theory and apply to the Missouri Connections program. Contextual influences must also be considered as impactful to both career development and career decision as part of the study.

Research Design and Analysis

Based on the ideas of career development, this study used Super's Career Development Theory and Social Cognitive Theory to guide the research. The study examined the perceived impact of the current use of the Missouri Connections Career Program on post-high school college and career decisions.

Setting

The setting of the proposed study took place at Branson High School in Southwest Missouri. According to the district's School Information System, the 2016-2017 student body PK-12 population was approximately 4700. Of this population, 62% qualified for free or reduced lunch. The population was 78% white, 13.5% Hispanic, 1.7% black, 1.4% Asian, and 0.7% Native American (Branson Schools Information System, 2018). The career opportunities in the community largely consist of retail and tourism. These details regarding the population and community are important to the study in that it provides information on outside school experiences and exposure to career opportunities. Due to limited resources, such as transportation and Internet availability to a large part of the population, many students' only experience outside of their home is

school.

Participants

The sample for the study consisted of 35 high school seniors. Of the sample population, 38.9% were male, 52.8% were female, and 80% identified as white; 47.2% of the students surveyed reported paying a reduced price or received free lunch. Members within the sample have had exposure to the Missouri Connections program during their intermediate and junior high years. The sample population represented the demographics of the school district as best as possible in order for the findings to be generalized to the entire school population. Potential participants were contacted during their lunch period at school by providing an information table with permission slips for the study. Due to the criteria of the study and research questions, the sample was a convenience sample in that the population used was easily accessible (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017).

Data Collection

The survey data were collected from a convenience sample at the site of the study. A letter was sent to the principal of the building providing details of the survey and asking permission to conduct the study. The survey was given on school computers with Internet connectivity via a commercial online tool, such as Google Survey. Online surveys contained both open-ended and Likert scale items. Survey items were guided by the theories behind the study. Survey data were obtained to examine the current attitudes, beliefs, practices, or opinions on the impact of the program.

Data Analysis

Closed-ended question responses were summarized as frequencies and percentages detailing the level of perceived impact the participants indicated that

Missouri Connections had on their career development. Open-ended questions were analyzed through coding. An initial scan of the data yielded marginal notes and comments resulting in open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Categories were then constructed based on recurring patterns in the initial coding process. Each research question and the corresponding analysis are addressed below.

     Research question 1 (RQ1). What impact, if any, has the Missouri Connections program had on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students? The data analysis process for this research question was comprised of interpreting both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Likert scale responses were summarized as percentages.

     Research question 2 (RQ2). What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program? The data analysis process for RQ2 was comprised of interpreting both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Likert scale responses were summarized as percentages.

Research Positionality and Research Ethics

     The researcher has served as a professional school counselor for the Branson School District for the past thirteen years. She spent her first four years at Branson Junior High with grades seven and eight. In the last eight years, she has served as the counselor at Buchanan Intermediate, which encompasses grades four through six. As the school counselor, the researcher has been responsible for providing career development opportunities for the students. She has utilized the Missouri Connections program at both the junior high and intermediate schools.

Being an insider to this study brings both advantages and possible barriers. Among the advantages is access to the organization along with a working knowledge of both the organization and Missouri Connections. Having spent more than a decade working for the Branson School District also lends to the researcher take on the organizational and leadership analysis.

Being an insider also presents the opportunity for possible barriers. One of the greatest barriers is the bias the researcher may carry towards Missouri Connections and the organization itself. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) spoke of being aware of projecting your own beliefs and experiences into the data and putting guards into place against potential biases. Creswell (2014) provided strategies to ensure validity in research that the researcher will employ. First, the researcher clarified any bias brought to the study. Providing self-reflection and detailing how the researcher's background has shaped the data interpretations will create an honest and open narrative for readers (Creswell, 2014). Second, any negative or discrepant information that does not fit in the themes has been presented. Creswell (2014) stated that "by presenting this contradictory evidence, the account becomes more realistic and more valid" (p. 202). Third, the researcher utilized an external reader to verify coding to establish inter-rater reliability. Being aware of the biases and having these safeguards in place aided with the study's validity and reliability.

Findings

Findings from this research were derived from the online surveys taken by the sample population. Two research questions were used to drive the study: What impact, if any, did Missouri Connections have on the self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals of current high school students? What impact, if any, did the Missouri Connections

program have on planning, exploring, and deciding on a career of current high school students who went through the program? Two themes emerged from analyzing data from the open ended question: (a) exploring career possibilities and (b) getting a "grasp" on plans. The findings are also discussed in six parts based on the three terms in each of the research questions.

Exploring Career Possibilities

One theme present from the qualitative data was exploration. With the demographics and socio-economics of the students at Branson Public Schools, many may experience limited exposure to careers beyond their own households. Limited exposure can also create the attitude that career possibilities are also limited.

When asked what students remembered most from Missouri Connections, their responses supported that they favored the opportunity they were given to explore career possibilities. One student stated, "I remember we got to look through job descriptions to see what different careers do." Others remembered learning about career paths or career clusters and watching the videos about different careers. This opportunity to explore alone may have opened doors that might have otherwise not been approached. Career exploration experiences can improve academic performance for students who have set realistic goals to pursue for their future career path.

Getting a "Grasp" on Plans

A second theme that appeared from the analysis of qualitative data revolved around planning. Students gave some credit to Missouri Connections in regards to planning, such as understanding what they needed to do to prepare for certain careers from choosing classes during high school and the required preparation after high school.

One student stated that Missouri Connections "helped me chose what would help me most in my career". Another stated that the program led them to take more computer classes. The program helped them formulate a path during high school to aid in their career plans.

Some students who participated in the study gave Missouri Connections credit for their plans beyond high school. One student stated, "I am wanting to attend college, that had always been a goal, but this helped enforce it." Another echoed that response by stating that it "helped me know what I need to do to get where I want to be."

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is described as an individual's personal beliefs about his or her capabilities to achieve. Without a strong sense of self-efficacy, students may limit their aspirations and exhibits behaviors that inhibit achievement. Students involved in the study stated having strong beliefs in their capabilities to be successful after high school. One student stated, "I believe that I have what it takes to be successful in what I want to have as a career as long as I keeping trying to do what is best for me." Although students claimed to believe in their abilities to be successful in the future, many did not attribute those beliefs to their experiences with Missouri Connections. A little less than 40% of the sample population felt that Missouri Connection had an impact on their self-efficacy. Over 60% of the students surveyed stated Missouri Connections had little to no impact on their beliefs that they would be successful after high school.

Outcome Expectations

Outcome expectations are the anticipated consequences to an action. When it comes to career choice, students often weigh education or training requirements with

expected salary. A little less than 40% of the sample population indicated Missouri Connections had impact on their outcome expectations. Over 60% of the students surveyed stated Missouri Connections had little to no impact in helping them understand the required training, education, and salary expectations when it came to their career aspirations.

Goals

As students head towards graduation, the hope is that their efforts lead them to a desired result or goal. When asked if Missouri Connections had any impact on their current academic goals, one student stated that Missouri Connections "helped me know what I need to do to get where I want to be." A little less than 40% of the sample population indicated that Missouri Connections had impact on their goals to complete their high school education. Approximately 36% stated that Missouri Connections had impact on their current career goals.

Planning

When asked what impact, if any, did Missouri Connections have on choosing classes during high school, the majority of the students surveyed responded that the program did not have any. Students responded that the courses they choose were based on "rigor" and what they "enjoyed." Over 67% indicated that Missouri Connections had little to no impact on their college and/or career plans.

Exploring

Students need time to identify their interests and skills as they apply to the world of work. Matching those interests and skills to a career can aid them be successful and happy with their future career choice. As far as the opportunity to explore different

career options through Missouri Connections, over 55% of the sample population indicated they found the experience valuable.

Deciding

After weighing career options and alternatives, students use the information they have gained to commit to a course of action. Based on the open-ended survey questions, students did not give Missouri Connections credit for the decisions they were making regarding a future plan. One student responded, "My family has really pushed me to be on the right path." A minority disagreed. Some did give Missouri Connections credit for helping them with their decision-making, "It helped a lot, I have decided what I want to do as a career after high school."

Summary of Findings

Based on this study, the current use of Missouri Connections at Branson Schools had perceived impact on the college/career development of a small proportion of the sample population (Table 1). Students indicated benefits from different components of the program but did the research did not indicate this program as a primary resource for their career development. Students found impact in their development and decisions from relationships and real-world experiences, but still felt the need for more support. Students stated they needed more one-on-one experiences with counselors and career mentors to help support their decisions about their future plans. Students also indicated they would like more variety with classes starting in junior high. They felt the emphasis on math and science hindered opportunities to develop skills based on individual interests and goals.

Table 1

Percent Percieved Impact Indicated by Sample Population (N = 35)

Item	No Impact	Little Impact	Some Impact	Much Impact	High Impact
Self Efficacy	38.9%	22.2%	19.4%	16.7%	2.8%
Outcome Expectations	47.2%	13.9%	30.6%	8.3%	0%
Goals	47.2%	16.7%	30.6%	2.8%	2.8%
Planning	55.6%	11.1%	30.6%	2.8%	0%
Exploring	33.3%	11.1%	36.1%	8.3%	11.1%

Note. Actual survey items were worded to reflect the language of the students.

Discussion

These findings can be reviewed through both Super's career development theory and social cognitive career theory. Super asserted that the process of career exploration and decision-making is central to adolescence (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). This was largely in part due to the link between career development and self-concept. As identity formation is the primary task of adolescence, career exploration and development help to largely shape that identity as it relates to future self and plans (Kosine & Lewis, 2008). The exploration piece that the study participants recalled from Missouri Connections appeared to feel important to them at that point in their development. The act of exploring career options may have led to a different plan in regards to the choices made both during high school and for after graduation.

Social cognitive career theory is used for understanding career choices and career development with three variables that serve as basic building blocks: self-efficacy,

outcome expectations, and goals. The data that emerged from this study indicated

Missouri Connections may have impacted these building blocks of career choice and

career development in our students, as well as other factors. Hartung, Porfeli, and

Vondracek, (2005) suggested that adolescents are able to use their interests, abilities,

beliefs, and values to guide how and what they learn, as well as the occupational goals

they formulate in relation to the world-of-work. Arrington (2000) stated "for students to

think about their career plans with any depth, they must have a foundation of career

awareness and career exploration experiences" (p. 103). This foundation should be laid

prior to entering high school. For these reasons, Branson Public Schools may want to

shift some focus of career development towards the interests, abilities, beliefs and values

of the students early on to help formulate the readiness for career awareness and career

exploration experiences.

Lastly, both the literature and the data indicated the impact of relationships and

contextual influences on children's career development. Children often see themselves as

reflections of the adults in their lives and will first formulate their views of the world of

work and how they fit into it from those adults (Watson & Mahon, 2005). Study

participants gave a lot of credit to family, friends, and teachers for influencing their goals

and career paths. This information could lend itself to a greater utilization of mentors and

more exposure to first-hand career experiences such as career days and job shadowing.

Implications

While the findings revealed that many students who participated in the study felt

the current use of Missouri Connections is having little to no perceived impact on

college/career development and decisions, others found benefit in components of the

program. Students indicated benefit from the exploration piece of the program and that it helped them to make plans in both high school and for after high school. While not a stand-alone program, Missouri Connections may continue to benefit Branson Public Schools students in their college and career development endeavors. The other factors such as relationships and real-world experiences help to build a supportive foundation for them to achieve the success they hope for their futures.

Recommendations

Based on the research four recommendations were made as a result of this study. Pre-and-post surveys should be given to students, parents, and teachers at every grade level regarding the impact of current college/career development programs. A program evaluation should be conducted each year utilizing the results of the surveys. The counseling team at Branson Schools needs to adjust and aligned college and career development opportunities to continually meet the needs of their student population. Lastly, this research would benefit from data disaggregated by demographics. The difference in responses between students who are on free/reduced lunch status versus full lunch status could paint a very different picture in regards to the impact of the district's current college/career readiness programs.

Limitations

There exists the possible bias within the research due to insider perspective. Many safeguards were put in place in order to best avoid this possible limitation. Secondly, due to the demographics and limited size of the sample population the transferability of the findings is limited. The author acknowledges the uniqueness of the sample population and use of the Missouri Connections program within the site study, but

also believes the findings to be beneficial in encouraging the conversation of impact on students from the early career exposure opportunities through career education programing.

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SECTION SIX

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

Brene' Brown, a New York Times bestselling author stated, "courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen." My ability to be courageous and allow myself to been seen has not only been tested and influenced by the dissertation process, but also throughout my entire doctoral journey. Coursework, class discussions, and learning beside other educational leaders has both encouraged and shaped who I have become as an educational leader and scholar.

Dissertation Influence on Being an Educational Leader

Reflecting on the dissertation experience, it brought to mind three ideas. These ideas were: (a) giving voice to those who may go unheard, (b) who I currently am as a leader, and (c) who I hope to become as a leader.

When deciding upon a dissertation topic, I knew it needed to be about someone and something I felt passionate about for it to be worthwhile. College and career readiness was a perfect fit for me due to the role that I play in my organization as a school counselor, but I also wanted to hear from those that are not often heard from. Choosing students as my study sample was a risk, but an exciting risk. I wanted to hear from them. After all, it is their future; those at the helm of the programs and practices should hear from them on how we are doing at preparing them.

Working with students during my dissertation engaged the authentic side of leadership within me. Northhouse (2016) spoke about authentic leaders being concerned with the collective good and having passion for their work. When speaking with the students about my research, I recognized faces that I had in my building just six years prior. My goal and driving force when I had them was to give them what they needed to reach the success they desired when they arrived at the point they were getting ready to

step out in the world. I was both anxious and excited to give voice to them to learn if what we were doing as an organization was impactful for the collective good or if the passion outweighed impact.

Levi (2014) and Northouse (2016) spoke of leadership as a transformational process. The journey through my dissertation has been a truly transformational process. Again, as I reflect on this process, I still find myself keyed in on authentic leadership. Northouse (2016) spoke of four key psychological attributes that impact authentic leadership: confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience. I found confidence in knowing that I had been prepared for this process through coursework and could persevere when obstacles presented themselves either professionally or personally. Hope kept me moving forward; setting goals with the end in mind. I remained optimistic that my future was forever changed for the better due to this opportunity as long as I could remain resilient through any doubts and struggles I had. While I waivered in all four of these at different moments in this process, I found that each have played a role in getting me through my dissertation and are a strong part of who I am as a professional and personally.

The authentic leader in me also allowed me to be genuine with others during this process. I have always loved to share stories and hear stories from others. Through my dissertation writing, I was able to connect with other leaders and strengthen relationships based on sharing our experiences (Northouse, 2016). I found strength in supporting each other with our stories and encouragement. It was sort of like joining a new club due to a shared experience. I feel that these connections will carry over into other areas of our professional roles.

In my desire to continue to grow as a leader, the dissertation process pushed me towards transformational leadership. While I possess some attributes of this style of leadership, I desire to grow more. I believe that I possess what Northouse (2016) called individualized consideration idealized influence. Through my role, I consistently act as an advisor to my co-workers by providing a supportive environment for them to communicate their needs and collaboratively come up with a way to meet their needs (Northouse, 2016). I also feel that I possess the emotional component or idealized influence of transformational leadership. I conduct myself with very high standards of moral and ethical conduct. I can be relied upon to do the right thing and those who work with me trust me.

Two factors of transformational leadership that I hope to grow more in are inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. I would admit that I am timid in communicating high expectations and motivating others. The process of the dissertation has encouraged me to speak up and be confident in the knowledge and experience that I have obtained in order to motivate others to reach their potential. I believe it is hard to have high expectations for our students if we do not have them first for ourselves and for those we work with. The final factor that I feel that I am developing is that of intellectual stimulation. Northouse (2016) wrote about transformational leaders challenging followers' beliefs and encouraging them to be creative. I have challenged myself in a leadership role with my building's Problem Solving Team. We meet collaboratively with teachers to discuss student issues and come up with interventions. Through this role, I encourage others to try new approaches and think outside of the box to deal with student

issues. I am gaining more confidence in myself through this and I believe that others are gaining confidence in my as a leader in this role.

The dissertation process challenged and changed my role as an educational leader in many ways. While I struggled with doubting myself at times, I believe I grew through that self-doubt and my ability to be resilient. I am proud that I used this process to give a voice to those that might not otherwise have been heard. I enjoyed utilizing leadership skills when working with the students who were my sample group. I also benefited from knowing who I was as a leader and applying the skills I possessed as well as trying out skills that I hoped to continue to grow in.

Dissertation Influence on Being a Scholar

Just as the dissertation process had positive impact on my growth as an educational leader, it also had positive impact on my scholarship. As I have come to the end of this process, there are three areas of scholarship that have been the most reflective to me. They are as follows: (a) the need for scholarship in my role as an educational leader, (b) my ability to understand and enjoy academic writing, and (c) my ability to produce academic writing.

The world of education is ever changing. I understand the necessity of this to meet both student and global needs. With that being said, one of the best ways to stay abreast of the changes is through academic scholarship. I will admit, that not so long ago, any time I received any type of academic literature, it went to the "maybe later" stack. I didn't doubt its importance, I just felt that it was overwhelming and that they could not relate to what I was trying to accomplish with my students. However, through

learning about policy and the dissertation process, I realize it is my duty to be informed of what was going on in the educational world.

The need for academic scholarship in my role as an educational leader is vital. In order to make decisions that are best for our students, it is important to stay on top of policy changes and innovative ideas that can be found in literature. In order to have conversations with other stakeholders, it is important to be informed of what is going on. I believe it also raises confidence in my leadership abilities to be as knowledgeable as possible in various realms of educational practices and policies. Academic scholarship provides opportunity for all of this. I feel that understanding this need and taking the time to read academic scholarship has made me a well-rounded leader.

When I first started the Ed.D program and reading scholarly articles, I found myself "in over my head." Looking back now, I chuckle at the time I spent looking up terms and asking others for explanations. My lack of exposure had led to a lack of understanding. Through the dissertation process along with a lot of reading, writing, thinking and talking, I have built an expanded vocabulary and knowledge base when it comes to the world of education. I am far more comfortable reading and having conversation regarding academic scholarship. I also found that I could enjoy reading this type of literature as well. As I have opened myself up to other ideas and viewpoints, I have found pleasure in learning things beyond my scope of practice. The more I know about the world of education, the more tools I have in my toolbox as an educational leader.

If you went back and asked my fifth grade teacher, she would have told you that I would be a writer when I grew up. I loved to write and felt confident writing when I was

younger. Somewhere, I lost that. Throughout the Ed.D program, most of what I wrote was collaborated with a peer. When the dissertation came along, I had to write as an island. That being said, the dissertation process was very challenging. I found myself in many mind battles over whether I could do it or not. I found encouragement from my peers who went before me, my committee, advisor, and from reading other dissertations. I learned many "do's" and "don't" when it comes to academic writing from each of these. I now feel that, through this process, I could do it all over again. I could possibly do it better. While my dissertation will likely not gain any accolades, there is reward that I finished this journey and I produced academic writing.

Conclusion

I would like to say that a lot of blood, sweat, and tears went into this dissertation, however there was no time for that. This was a huge process of change. Change as an educational leader, as an academic scholar, as a co-worker, friend, wife, and mother. I am amazed at the change that has taken place since starting the program in 2015.

I remember feeling like an outsider when I first started and wondering if I could ever fit in. I wanted to emulate the great leaders I had met and I wanted to do something important. This was important, and while it was so uncomfortable at times, I did it. I started this reflection with a quote from Brene' Brown (2017) who has encouraged me through this journey. She also sums up this journey for me when she said,

> "I want to be in the arena. I want to be brave with my life. And when we make
> the choice to dare greatly, we sign up to get our asses kicked. We can choose
> courage or we can choose comfort, but we can't have them both. Not at the same
> time" (p. 4).

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Appendix A

Letter to Organization

October 23, 2018, 2018

Mr. Jack Harris

Principal, Branson High School

935 Buchanan Road

Branson, MO 65616

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Mr. Harris:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at Branson High School. I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri in Columbia, MO, and I am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled "Oh the Places You Could Go: The Perceived Impact of Career Exposure During Adolescence."

I hope the school administration will allow me to recruit seniors to anonymously complete a brief online survey (copy enclosed). Interested students, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed (copy enclosed). If they are a minor a consent form is also required to be signed by their parent or guardian (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the survey process.

If approval is granted, student participants will complete the survey in a classroom or other quiet setting on the school site. The survey process should take no longer than 10 minutes.   The survey results will be pooled for the dissertation project and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by the school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week, and I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address: stacyhagston@gmail.com.

If you agree, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on the schools' letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at Branson High School.

Sincerely,

Stacy Hagston

Parental Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Researcher's Name: Stacy Hagston, Counselor, Branson School District

Study Title: Oh the Place You Can Go: The Perceived Impact of Career Exposure During Adolescence

Introduction

I ask for permission that your child be allowed to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to gauge the impact the Missouri Connections career program has had on your child's career aspirations. You have the right to be informed about the study procedures, so you can decide whether you want to consent for your child to participate in this research study. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information you do not understand.

You have the right to know what your child will be asked to do so, you can decide whether or not to include your child in the study. Your child's participation is <u>voluntary</u>. They do not have to be in the study if they do not want to participate. You may refuse for your child to be in the study and nothing will happen. If your child does not want to continue to be in the study, they may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before allowing your child to participate in this study.

Description of the Research

Your child has been invited to be in this study because they fit the criteria for the sample population. Students in their last three years of high school are typically preparing to make college/career decisions. This research aims to determine the impact, if any, that the Missouri Connections program had on their decisions.

Procedures of the Study

If you agree to have your child be a part of the study, they will be asked to do the following things: take an online survey at school and possibly be a part of a follow-up interview.

How Long Will My Child be in the Study?

This study will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your child can stop participating at any time without penalty.

How Many People Will Be in this Study?

All members of the senior class will be invited to participate in this study.

What are the Benefits of the Research?

Your child's participation will benefit the district in keeping or changing policy and/or curriculum to ensure that career education is implemented early and that there is appropriate scaffolding to ensure students are moved through progressively to maximize effectiveness. Furthermore, information regarding the value of the Missouri Connections program in assisting students with college and career choices will be obtained. Students will have the opportunity to provide information regarding the impact or lack of for this program.

What are the Risks of the Research?

There are no foreseeable risks for the participants involved in this research.

Participation is Voluntary

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to allow your child to participate or withdraw your child from the study at any time. Your child may also refuse to participate or withdraw themselves at any time. Your child will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to allow your child to participate or to withdraw your child from this study.

Will My Child Be Paid?

Your child will not be compensated for the completion of the study.

Confidentiality

I will do my best to make sure your child's answers to these questions are kept private. Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's file and identified by a code number only. The code key connecting your child's name to specific information will be kept in a separate, secure location. Information contained in your child's records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify your child without your written consent, except as required by law.

Who Can I Talk to About the Study?

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like additional information, please call Stacy Hagston at (417)699-3555 or email at stacyhagston@gmail.com

You may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) if you have questions regarding your child's rights as a participant and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll your child or to continue to participate in this study. The IRB can be reached directly by telephone at (573)882-9585.

Consent

I have read this parental consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my permission for my child to participate in this study. I understand that, in order to for my child to participate, they will need to be able to give their consent also. I understand participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw my child at any time without being penalized.

Parent/Guardian signature_____

Date: _____

Child's Name: _____

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

Minor Assent Form to Participate in a Research Study

Researcher's Name: Stacy Hagston, Counselor, Branson School District

Study Title: Oh the Place You Can Go: The Perceived Impact of Career Exposure During Adolescence

Description of the study

This is a study about the impact the Missouri Connections career program you participated in during grades five through eight had on your current career aspirations and plans.

Why YOU are invited

You are invited to be in this study because you attended Branson Schools during grades five through eight and have created a career portfolio in Missouri Connections. Now that you are in your last three years of high school, it is likely you are thinking about future college and/or career plans.

What will happen?

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following: take a short online survey at school. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes.

Can anything good happen to me?

There is no compensation for being a part of the study. The results of this study could help your school in better assisting students like you with career development and college/career decision-making.

Can anything bad happen to me?

There are no foreseeable risks in being a part of this study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable participating, you should let your parents know that you wish to discontinue.

What if I don't want to do this?

If you say you do not want to be in the study, you just have to tell me. No one will be upset at you. You can also say yes and later if you change your mind, you can quit the study. The choice is up to you and your parent(s).

Will anyone know how I answer the questions I am asked?

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. This means your name and any other identifying information will not be tied to any information provided. The Branson School District will get the results from this study, but your name will not be included. Your parents may request to hear the audio recording should you be interviewed.

Who can I talk to about the study?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to me or you can talk to someone else, at any time during the study. Here is the telephone number to reach me 417-699-3555. Stacy Hagston, School Counselor, Branson Public Schools.

<div align="center">

Do you want to be in the study?

YES   *NO*

</div>

_____   _____

<div align="center">

Signature of Child   **Date**

</div>

Appendix D

Survey Questions

(Likert Scale)

1. How would you rate the impact of the Missouri Connections career program on your current career goals?

1	2	3	4	5
No Impact	Little Impact	Some Impact	Much Impact	High Impact

2. Self-efficacy is described as an individual's personal beliefs about his or her capabilities, such as how strongly you believe you will be successful after high school. How would you rate the impact of the Missouri Connections career program on your belief you will be successful after high school?

1	2	3	4	5
No Impact	Little Impact	Some Impact	Much Impact	High Impact

3. How much impact did Missouri Connections have in helping you understand the required training, education and salary expectations when it came to your career aspirations?

1	2	3	4	5
No Impact	Little Impact	Some Impact	Much Impact	High Impact

4. How much impact did Missouri Connections have on your goals for completing your high school education?

1	2	3	4	5
No Impact	Little Impact	Some Impact	Much Impact	High Impact

5. How much impact did Missouri Connections have on your college and/or career plans?

1	2	3	4	5
No Impact	Little Impact	Some Impact	Much Impact	High Impact

6. How would you rate the value of the opportunity to explore different career options through the Missouri Connections program?

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Little Value	Some Value	Much Value	High Value

7. How valuable do you feel Missouri Connections is for future students to use to help them with career planning?

1	2	3	4	5
No Value	Little Value	Some Value	Much Value	High Value

Appendix E

Survey Questions

(Open-Ended)

1. What you remember about Missouri Connections from your 5th-8th grade

   years.

2. What impact, if any, did Missouri Connections have on choosing classes during

   high school?

3. What impact, if any, did Missouri Connections have on your current academic

   goals?

4. What impact, if any, did Missouri Connections have on college/career plans

   that you have made?

5. If you have decided on a career path, which path is it?

6. How did you choose that career path?

7. What, or who, influenced college/career plans that you have made for your

   future?

8. How would you describe your belief in your capabilities?

9. Where do you think/feel those beliefs came from?

10. What else could the Branson School District provide to help you prepare for

    college or plan for a future career?

Appendix F

Demographic Questions

In order to make the data generalizable to subgroups, please answer the following

questions about yourself.

1. What is your gender?

    Male   Female

2. What race do you identify?

    Hispanic   White   Black   Asian

    American Indian or Alaskan Native   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific

    Islander   Other

5. What is your school lunch status?

    I pay full price for lunch I pay a reduced price for lunch

    I get free lunch

6. Do you have Internet access at home?

    Yes   No

January Building Data
*Data through January 17, 2018

Building	% EL Students *only RCV students*		% Homeless Students		% Socio-Economic Deprivation *Completed end of each year*	% Free & Reduced Lunch	% Mobility *Taken from Pulse*
	%	# of Students	%	# of Students	%	%	%
Cedar Ridge Primary	17% K Students only	30 out of 175 K Students only	11% PK and K Students	40 out of 366 PK and K Students	69.72%	66.85%	14.75%
Cedar Ridge Elementary	12%	68 7 Newcomers	14%	79 out of 549	65.58%	65.77%	28.18%
Cedar Ridge Intermediate	8%	46 2 Newcomers	14%	79 out of 583	63.18%	59.15%	32.42%
Buchanan Elementary	3%	23 0 Newcomers	9%	59 out of 660	62.36%	61.69%	25.34%
Buchanan Intermediate	2%	10 0 Newcomers	5%	26 out of 524	55.62%	58.14%	24.62%
Junior High	4%	26 2 Newcomers	7%	53 out of 717	55.00%	53.86%	24.16%
High School	4%	51 4 Newcomers	6%	79 out of 1405	47.63%	45.61%	23.08%
District	6%	254 45 Newcomers	9%	415 out of 4804	57.01%	58.72%	

***EL Numbers and Percentages** reflect only those that are marked as RCV. Students who are MY1 and MY2 are no longer tested on Access and are not considered part of the ESL caseload.
***Newcomers**- English Language Students who have been in the US less than 12 months, they require more assistance and time from our ELL staff.

VITA

Stacy Hagston graduated from Exeter High School in 1997 and has continued grow as a professional and life-long learner since that time. She earned her bachelors degree in elementary education from College of the Ozarks in 2002. After graduation, she became a middle school math teacher and volleyball coach at a small rural school in Missouri. In 2006, she obtained her masters degree in counseling from Missouri State University.

In 2006, Stacy started a position as a school counselor at the Branson School District. She is still currently employed in that role at Branson. She will complete her EdD in May of 2019 and continue to grow as an educational leader and scholar. Stacy is looking forward to the next steps in her professional career.