

High School Career Planning and Exploration Through a Study of English Language Arts at the Grade 10 Level

Kerry Bernes and Karissa Horne

Introduction

All too often, and with expressions of growing complacency in middle and secondary grades, students articulate that education has a lack of purpose or meaning to practical life application. Statistical evidence of complacency toward education is markedly apparent when one considers the three-year high school completion and dropout rate in Alberta. Although the rate has improved, from 77.9 per cent in 2016 (Government of Alberta 2018) to 83.2 per cent in 2021 (Government of Alberta 2023), this information does not indicate the reasons why a significant number of students do not complete the three years of high school. Among those that do complete high school in three years, it is also unclear whether they do so with a sense of preparedness to take on an active and considered approach to their careers. In the process of completing high school, students must address numerous, and sometimes competing, concerns around (a) choosing the right occupation to work toward; (b) choosing the right training for the occupational direction they select; (c) life satisfaction and purpose; (d) fear of failure and the implications of career commitment; and (e) the consequences of making a wrong choice (Code et al. 2006).

Educating and preparing students for a few potential careers that they might pursue upon completing their education is an approach that is no longer necessary, adequate or educationally responsible. It is difficult to deny that “the contemporary world of work ... generally favours a more flexible, considerate, self-reflective approach to career commitments. As a consequence, one’s vocational identity may become more dynamic over the life course compared to the typical case in the 20th century” (Porfeli and Lee 2012). As teachers of

twenty-first century learners seek to increase their effectiveness to help prepare their students for the future, the central idea is to teach students *how* to think rather than *what* to think. This *process over product* approach can be applied beyond academic pursuits to other dimensions of life, such as career paths. Career planning can no longer be the product of a few brief conversations, interactions or activities, where the selection between limited options presented to students might suffice. It is imperative to prepare students for a career in the fast-paced twenty-first century world of work that changes quickly to adapt to the demands of a seemingly volatile job market. Career planning needs to include a process of periodic reflection and information gathering as students begin to understand themselves better throughout their educational experience, during their transition from high school to the outside world and throughout their varied work experience. A relevant and necessary part of high school education must involve time for students to develop a process where they refine their self-reflective abilities through the work that they do. This means that students need to be not only introduced to the idea of career planning but also to the ongoing career planning process, which involves developing the skills of self-reflection, evaluation and confident decision making (Code et al. 2006). Students will find the greatest benefit from instruction when academic pursuits emphasize the maximization of their self-awareness through learning.

Though it is certainly a daunting task, “schools can serve as a centralized hub for the coordination and delivery of career programming” (Perry and Wallace 2012, 33), and teachers have the capacity to aid in this process through nearly every lesson they teach. However, the suggestion for teachers

is not to take on the facilitation of career planning in addition to the expectation of covering existing outcome-based lessons, but rather to use the expertise they bring to their disciplines to combine academics with the instruction of “learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills, and life and career skills” (Perry and Wallace 2012, 35). This would create concrete connections between schoolwork and

... it was evident that career planning was a critical aspect that was absent from students’ educational experiences in southern Alberta.

students’ eventual life work. According to Meeder and Pawlowski (2020), engaging in career-related learning can help students connect their learning in the classroom to real-world experiences. In return, such learning will support students in feeling better prepared with the appropriate knowledge, skills and experiences needed to navigate through their life and career after high school. Supporting students in meaningful career planning could be significant enough to enhance the overall experience and applicability of classroom lessons to career and life matters. Taken together, this paper seeks to explore various ways in which teachers can connect learning experiences in a high school English class with the development of self-awareness and the process of intentional, meaningful career planning.

Background

To provide context for the current research, an overview of how career planning was incorporated into the Alberta curriculum is presented. A comprehensive career needs survey (CCNS) was developed by Magnusson and Bernes (2002) to attain further understanding of students’ career needs. The CCNS is a collaborative initiative between the Southern Alberta Centre of Excellence for Career Development at the University of Lethbridge’s Faculty of Education, the Chinook Regional Career Transitions for Youth Project and the South-Western Rural Youth Career Development Project. The objective of the survey was to gather

students’ perceptions of career development and planning needs, in addition to perceived gaps in existing services (Magnusson and Bernes 2002; Witko et al. 2006). The survey encompassed both quantitative and qualitative measures that were distributed by classroom teachers to 54 junior and senior high schools in southern Alberta.

The survey’s results revealed that some of the most prominent needs for junior and senior high school students were identifying their interests and abilities, finding their passions, garnering support for their career plans and postsecondary education and gaining financial information (Magnusson and Bernes 2002). Moreover, the surveys suggested that commencing career planning earlier could be more effective in supporting students through career decision making (Witko et al. 2006). In considering the results, it was evident that career planning was a critical aspect that was absent from students’ educational experiences in southern Alberta.

Based on the results obtained from the CCNS, a career education pilot project, Career Coaching Across the Curriculum, was created and implemented (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014). Alberta Education and the Canadian Career Development Foundation supported the project by providing funding to train 50 preservice teachers in career education, which would afford them the opportunity to enter schools in Alberta and implement career education across the K–12 curriculum. The pilot project consisted of two components. First, the Career Education course was provided to the preservice teachers over four weekends. The first three weekends focused on the knowledge and skills necessary for integrating career interventions into the regular curriculum, and the fourth weekend allowed preservice teachers to share the lesson plans, unit plans and school-wide interventions they developed with their classmates. Second, after successfully completing the four-weekend Career Education course, students completed a 12-week internship where they could transfer their newly acquired knowledge and skills into elementary, middle or high school settings in southern Alberta. The larger data set has already been published (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014); thus, the current paper aims to emphasize one of the specific classroom implementations from the larger study and explore the research question, “What is the effectiveness of the career planning unit in Grade 10 ELA [English Language Arts]?”

Context of the Teaching Environment

Career Planning intervention was offered to three groups of students in Grade 10 English classes at an urban high school in central Alberta. The school served approximately 1800 students. This intervention specifically employed ELA as a means to implement career planning instruction. This unit was modified and implemented for students operating at the English 10-1 Advanced Placement (10AP), 10-1, 10-2 and 10-4 levels. The groups varied slightly in size, from a class of 38 English 10AP students to a one of 28 10-1 students and a class of 27 students: 26 in 10-2 and 1 in 10-4. Given the large group size, there were a wide range of diverse learning needs. The English 10AP class had one student identified as gifted, and one student identified as coping with anxiety issues. Several other students in the class displayed evidence of anxiety in their approach to learning. The English 10-2 class also had four students who had just completed English Language Learner (ELL) instruction at the end of the previous school year and were still working to build their English communication skills. Moreover, there were nine students in the English 10-2 class with categorically moderate learning disabilities, which translated into difficulty completing work due to challenges with motivation to complete assignments, comprehension of texts, following directions, general organization and written communication.

Cross-curricular Integration

Opportunities for intentional, meaningful career planning integrated well into ELA lessons at the high school level for this Career Planning intervention. The Alberta learning outcomes used in this intervention included those that encouraged exploration, reflection and response. The specific learning outcomes from the Program of Studies for ELA for Grade 10 students (Alberta Education 2015) used in connection with this intervention can be found in Appendix A.

Detailed Description of the Intervention

Due to the ongoing nature of this intervention

and its connection to general English instruction throughout the study semester, much of the time was spent solely on Career Planning instruction, involving the exploration of meaning and personal identity as an approach to career planning. Furthermore, each lesson involved themes from the online video, *The Last Lecture* by Dr Randy Pausch (Carnegie Mellon University 2007). Each lesson included a small clip from *The Last Lecture* that was relevant to the lesson's topic. With the aid of the original lecture, viewed via YouTube, students engaged in activities that contributed to the process of becoming aware of their identity and developing a sense of personal value and self-worth. In this lecture, Pausch—drawing full attention to his recent diagnosis of terminal pancreatic cancer—spoke about the most important things he had learned in his life as he examined his accomplishments. While he mentions his professional accomplishments, he emphasizes the personal attributes he possessed or developed that made his life story one that he was proud to share, reminding everyone who listened that “we cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand” (Pausch and Zaslow 2008, 17).

Lesson 1: The Elephant in the Room

As an introductory activity, this lesson's presentation sought to illuminate the importance for adolescents to engage in a process of career planning. Students viewed a segment from the movie *Say Anything*, where Lloyd shared his future career plans with Mr Court in which he was uncertain of what he wanted to do after high school. With the idea of adulthood in mind, students evaluated their progress toward adulthood in various aspects of their lives. Students began the activity by brainstorming and generating a list of attributes they believed would be useful in adulthood and then created a word cloud. From the word cloud, students could clearly see which attributes were more commonly valued, as the most repeated words and phrases were shown in larger text. Students then selected a minimum of five attributes and self-rated their current level of progress toward them. This activity exposed students to the importance of self-reflection and the need to contemplate on one's development and potential to progress.

Lesson 2: Make Me Earn It—Viewing Guide for The Last Lecture

An entire period was dedicated to viewing the entirety of Pausch's *The Last Lecture* (Carnegie Mellon University 2007). To engage thoughtfully with the lecture, students were given questions to consider before and after the viewing. Prior to viewing the lecture, students answered the following questions:

Do you think it is important to achieve your childhood dreams? Why or why not?

What have you learned from experiences with failure?

How open are you to feedback from others? Do you think feedback is helpful? Why or why not?

What is the most important life lesson you've learned so far?

At the end of Pausch's lecture, students were asked to respond to the following questions:

If you were asked to give a "last lecture," what would you talk about? What important messages would you want to communicate to others?

Why is it important to work well as a member of a team?

Have you ever encountered a "brick wall"? How did you handle it?

At the end of his lecture, Randy Pausch sums up his beliefs about life. The notion of life, as Randy Pausch describes it, suggests that the shape of our lives is linked to a system of cause and effect—in other words, what you get out of life is connected to what you put into it. Do you agree with the notion of karma that Randy Pausch shares? Why or why not?

Upon completing these questions, the class discussed Pausch's lecture and its connection to the unit. Students were encouraged to share their thoughts and discuss the themes presented and were then asked to connect these themes to potential career paths. To close the activity, students wrote a reflection to catalogue their thoughts about Pausch's *The Last Lecture* and about their thoughts concerning career planning and the self-reflective processes they were beginning to engage in.

Lesson 3: Childhood Dreams

In *The Last Lecture*, Pausch described his childhood and addressed the theme of success and failure with respect to achieving his childhood dreams. To do this, he displayed a series of pictures of himself as a child. Inspired by this, students were asked to bring in pictures of themselves as children. Using their personal pictures as prompts to reflect upon their childhood, students created a small, collage-like poster that included words and pictures that represented their childhood hopes and dreams. In creating a visual representation of their childhood dreams, students took the opportunity to undergo a process of self-reflection by responding to worksheet questions that required them to consider the extent to which their childhood goals had changed over time. They could also examine the challenges they might encounter in achieving their current goals. The following questions were asked:

Did you find it easy or difficult to document your dreams? Why do you think it was easy or difficult for you to do?

Have you achieved any of your childhood dreams so far? How does it feel to know that you've already achieved those dreams? Does it make achieving your other dreams seem more possible? How so?

Which of your dreams do you think will be the most difficult to achieve? Next to each challenging dream, outline the next few steps or the habit(s) you will develop and use to work toward achieving each challenging dream.

Lesson 4: Brick Walls

Pausch used brick walls to metaphorically represent obstacles, which might help an individual understand how badly they desired to attain what lay on the opposite side of the figurative wall (Carnegie Mellon University 2008). In this activity, students engaged in a process where they identified potential barriers to personal progress toward achieving their dreams. Students identified personal barriers, which they shared through discussions within small groups. To complete their work in this task, they created a visual representation of their personal obstacles by naming them on bricks printed on paper. The picture of the brick

wall contained a blank space where students either wrote or drew a picture of the goals they wanted to achieve (ie, the goals on the “other side”).

Lesson 5: Bring Something to the Table

In conjunction with the Brick Walls activity, students identified the skills and attributes they possessed that might support them in overcoming adversity (ie, their “brick wall”). Each student was given a printed image of a conference table. The teacher explained that in most organizations, a special chair was reserved at the head of the conference table for the chairperson of the organization. The special chair represented the student’s heart and mind, which they used to make decisions; the other seats represented the individual’s skills, talents and characteristics. Students were instructed to write down, next to each chair, what they thought were skills, attributes or characteristics that they possessed that might help them achieve their dreams. Upon completing the conference table activity, students were placed into small groups. Each student shared a story about a time in which they took pride, a time that showed evidence of their personal strengths and how they could work together to achieve something or overcome a personal obstacle. As other group members listened, they wrote down skills, attributes and personality traits that the speaker made apparent through sharing their own story. From the list generated by group members, individual students selected five to ten words that provided evidence of their personal strengths when put in challenging situations. When this activity was completed, each student had the opportunity to learn how others viewed their strengths. Students were also given the opportunity to consider their progress on the Brick Walls and Bring Something to the Table tasks through written reflections in response to reflection questions aimed at having students consider the two most recent tasks and the overall career planning process.

The questions students responded to were as follows:

What has been the most difficult or challenging part of the career planning process so far? Why do you think this is the case?

What part of the career planning process have you enjoyed the most so far? Why do you think this part has been so enjoyable?

In *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch talks about choosing how to live your life to enable your dreams to come true. Discuss at least one thing about yourself and the choices you are making (or have/want to make) that you have gained awareness of so far in this process that you think will help you to work toward some of the goals you have laid or might lay out for your future.

Lesson 6: Who are Your Supporters?

Naturally, the task of taking on new challenges can appear rather daunting. This activity encouraged students not only to increase their awareness of the characteristics they possessed that might help them achieve their dreams, but it also helped them to identify the individuals willing to support them and the kind of support they would receive. Students in English 10-2 and 10-4 were given a sample letter to customize along with questions about the task to aid in the completion of this activity. English 10AP and English 10-1 students prepared letters or emails to accompany the following questions that they sent out to personally selected individuals to gain a clearer understanding of their social support network:

What do you think are my major interest areas?

What are my strengths?

What do you see as my limitations?

What changes have you noticed over time?

What changes would you anticipate in the future?

What suggestions do you have for my career direction?

In what ways might my career decisions affect you?

This level of feedback for students was intended to aid students in attaining a broader perspective of themselves and their potential to achieve their goals.

Lesson 7: Bedroom Wall

As part of the support and encouragement that Pausch described receiving as a child, he told a story about how his parents permitted him to decorate and paint his walls however he wanted. For this activity, students created a small poster of their imaginary bedroom walls, assuming they were allowed

to decorate it as they saw fit. The teacher explained that the purpose of the activity was to elucidate students' individuality, hopes, dreams and values. The teacher advised students to strongly consider their career interests and future career goals. Upon completing the poster, students prepared a written explanation of the various images on their wall.

Lesson 8: Working Hard ...

Students used an excerpt from the Alberta Government's (2012) document *This is Your Life: A Career and Education Planning Guide* to investigate potential career options based on their interests and personalities. The guide contained a reference to a career website and several self-assessment tools that aided them in using self-knowledge regarding personal aptitude and suitability in relation to possible occupations. The guide also served to further reinforce the idea of finding a career that suited their individuality. Students explored the prescribed website (<http://alis.alberta.ca/careerinsite>), where they identified three specific careers they might be interested in that would also be amenable to their individuality.

Lesson 9: ... Or Hardly Working?

Up to this point in the unit, students had spent a great deal of effort focused on their past and present selves and what they had learned from their experiences which would help them achieve a fulfilling and meaningful future career. At this stage of the unit, "Hardly working" was defined as a career that might not feel like one that involves tedious and draining work but rather one that was personally meaningful and enjoyable. For this activity, students reflected and wrote about what they would like to be remembered for—not only at the end of their careers but even after death. This reflective exercise was likened to writing one's own epitaph, as it required students to think about potential accomplishments in relation to their "future" career and to consider the life that they would want to lead and be remembered for. Students were advised to provide specific examples of their career accomplishments and achieved life goals.

Lesson 10: Experience is What You Get

To concretize the series of self-exploration activities into a personally meaningful conclusion, students

prepared their own versions of *The Last Lecture*. English 10-2 and 10-4 students named the benefits and challenges in the career planning process and composed a paragraph about their experience with the unit, while English 10-1 and English 10AP students prepared a presentation where they used the information and insights they gained throughout the semester-long intervention to offer advice to those who might follow in their footsteps in the career planning process. In this final activity, students provided further evidence of their learning from the unit through their presentations. Throughout the unit, students were encouraged to consider several different factors that influenced their approach to their personal and professional lives, and these factors were included in their presentations: (a) developments in their views since the beginning of the course; (b) shaping or refining of their views because of the course; and (c) narrative detail about the progression of their thinking by the end of the course.

Results

Formative Assessment

Throughout the unit, students wrote and reflected on their participation in each activity in a personal journal that was included in their career planning portfolio, along with their assigned class work. Throughout the course of the unit, teachers conducted formative assessment of the portfolios regularly to check for comprehension and completion. Formative assessment through close observation was also employed to modify the unit as needed.

Summative Assessment

Part 1: Participation and completion

Students completed an evaluation form (Appendix B) of the intervention process. Instructions to complete the form included information about the assistance that evaluation responses would be used for to ensure that the unit was as operative, germane and accessible as possible for all students that might experience this intervention in the future. Due to absences on the day it was administered, the survey was completed by 88 out of 91 students. Of these 88, 78 per cent, on average, reported having completed all the activities listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Completion of Activities

Activity	I didn't do it	I did it
Elephant in the Room (Adult Report Card)	14 (16%)	74 (84%)
Last Lecture Viewing (Guide Questions)	7 (8%)	81 (92%)
Childhood Dreams (Past/Future Visual Representation /Reflection)	8 (9%)	80 (91%)
Brick Walls (Identifying Obstacles)	6 (7%)	82 (93%)
Bring Something to the Table (Pride Story/Table /Reflection)	9 (10%)	79 (90%)
Who are Your Supporters (Feedback Letters)	17 (19%)	71 (81%)
Bedroom Walls (Present Visual Representation and Tour write-up)	19 (22%)	69 (78%)
Working Hard (Career Research)	7 (8%)	81 (92%)
Or Hardly Working (Future-cast Reflection)	9 (10%)	79 (90%)
Experience is What You Get (Career Planning/Life Advice)	17 (19%)	71 (81%)

Part 2: Perceived Helpfulness of Activities

Survey results indicated a generally positive and receptive response to the career planning unit, with 87 per cent of the students responding favourably to the helpfulness of the activities toward the process of career planning as noted in Table 2. Activities that students found most helpful, which were rated as either “Good” or “Great,” included responding to the viewing of Randy Pausch’s *The Last Lecture* (94 per cent), exploring lifelong goals through the Childhood Dreams activity (93 per cent) and the identification and motivation to overcome obstacles to personal fulfilment and success in the

Brick Walls activity (92 per cent). Students who rated the activities as “Not good at all” in terms of helpfulness stated that more time for the unit, or an adjustment to the pacing of activities during the unit, would have been beneficial. Combined with the larger group of students that demonstrated difficulty with activity completion, addressing matters of pacing (speed at which tasks are assigned) and timing (amount of time provided for completion of individual tasks) appeared to be the principal factor that required the most consideration toward refining the implementation of the intervention unit.

Table 2: Perceived Helpfulness of Activities

Activity	Not good at all	Good	Great
Elephant in the Room (Adult Report Card)	17 (19%)	59 (67%)	12 (14%)
Last Lecture Viewing (Guide Questions)	5 (6%)	60 (68%)	23 (26%)
Childhood Dreams (Past/Future Visual Representation /Reflection)	6 (7%)	39 (44%)	42 (49%)
Brick Walls (Identifying Obstacles)	7 (8%)	39 (44%)	42 (48%)
Bring Something to the Table (Pride Story/Table/Reflection)	11 (13%)	50 (57%)	27 (30%)
Who are Your Supporters (Feedback Letters)	20 (23%)	30 (34%)	37 (43%)
Bedroom Walls (Present Visual Representation and Tour write-up)	10 (12%)	40 (47%)	36 (41%)
Working Hard (Career Research)	16 (18%)	35 (40%)	37 (42%)
Or Hardly Working (Future-cast Reflection)	11 (13%)	49 (56%)	28 (31%)
Experience is What You Get (Career Planning/Life Advice)	10 (11%)	50 (57%)	28 (32%)

Part 3: Meeting Learning Outcomes

According to the survey results, 57 per cent of responses indicated that students agreed that the unit outcomes had been met (Table 3). Concerning the discovery of individual strengths and attributes, 67 per cent agreed that they had achieved this outcome, and 65 per cent indicated that they had explored career options that promoted their individuality and strengths. Students indicated the most uncertainty regarding the development of their personal ideology of self-fulfillment and success as foundations for their career plans (52 per cent). However, it is possible that the wording of the question and the option to indicate uncertainty was difficult for students to understand.

Table 3: Learning Outcomes Fulfilled as Determined by the Student

	I Don't Agree	I'm Not Sure	I Agree
1. This unit helped me identify factors that influence my personal beliefs and values on self-fulfillment and success	6 (7%)	31 (35%)	51 (58%)
2. This unit helped me discover individual strengths and attributes	9 (10%)	20 (23%)	59 (67%)
3. This unit helped me explore meaningful career options that promote my individuality and strengths	6 (7%)	25 (28%)	57 (65%)
4. This unit helped me develop a personal ideology (ideas that reflect your social needs and aspirations) on self-fulfillment and success as a foundation for career plans	10 (11%)	46 (52%)	32 (37%)
5. This unit helped me evaluate career options according to personal ideology (ideas that reflect your social needs and aspirations and meaning)	10 (11%)	28 (32%)	50 (57%)

Discussion

Perceived Effectiveness of the Unit Plan

The implementation of this career planning unit was intended to help students better understand themselves and their potential toward future career prospects. The generally positive response to the unit's activities speaks to the amenability of Career Education and ELA activities involving (a) writing and visual representation toward the production of texts; (b) the metacognitive task of considering these created texts in conjunction with Randy Pausch's *The Last Lecture*; and (c) responding to them in the self-reflective process that was a dominant feature in this unit. Successful connection between career and ELA activities provided a dual benefit for students. Students who provided negative feedback did not generally elucidate as to why their response to the course was negative, but those that did respond reported that the unit's activities were too time-consuming and warranted more completion time than what was provided. Nearly all these comments provided positive evaluations of the unit's activities (as evidenced by the largely positive response to the helpfulness of each activity) but suggested that learning outcomes would have been more fulfilled if more time was allowed for completion and to fully grasp the content of each activity. For future implementations, the unit should focus on a smaller set of activities with a greater amount of time allotted.

Teachers observed that most of the students were initially reluctant to engage in the unit, as many of them believed that career topics belonged in the Career and Life Management (CALM) class. However, over time, students were noticeably more engaged as they learned more about themselves. For example, several students were reluctant to engage in telling a pride story, as they defined pride in terms of conceitedness, arrogance and moral deviance. However, upon completing the pride story and group sharing exercise, many of these same students expressed that they did not realize that pride had an alternative definition; it could also be defined in terms of self-esteem, purposefulness and dignity.

Teachers noted that students in the 10AP class and, to a lesser extent, those in the 10-1 class expressed both verbally and through written feedback that

they were accustomed to doing schoolwork to obtain a high grade. These grade-oriented students stated that it was the first time that a school subject made them want to engage in the lesson material because gaining self-knowledge became more valuable and rewarding than receiving a high grade. Students who were not as grade-focused (ie, 10-2 students and some of the 10-1 students) were especially opposed to the career unit, as they expected the unit to be a rehashed and “boring” iteration of CALM content. These same students,

Nearly every student across all grade levels generally found the self-reflective process to be difficult, but over time, students stated that this process ultimately became the most rewarding and the most personally impacting.

however, expressed that the career unit’s content was superior to CALM content because the unit provided them with “practical strategies,” namely, the self-explorative activities. They further noted that the CALM unit provided them with tools (ie, resume building, job searching, etc) whereas the career unit provided them with a purpose for using these tools. Nearly every student across all grade levels generally found the self-reflective process to be difficult, but over time, students stated that this process ultimately became the most rewarding and the most personally impacting.

Several students in the 10-2 class sought career coaching outside of class time, where they disclosed to the teacher that they generally believed that the school’s teaching staff held them in less esteem because they were less academically inclined. They pointed to the fact that teachers of higher seniority tended to teach AP classes, whereas new teachers and student teachers were placed in 10-2 classes. This hierarchical perception led students to believe that teachers perceived 10-2 students to be less desirable to teach, and therefore less desirable people overall. These students who sought coaching outside of class time expressed their appreciation for the teacher’s implementation of

the unit because they felt the unit placed value on their unique individualities, rather than on their grades.

Challenges and Strategies

Challenges with the implementation of the unit came with the diversity and size of the group undertaking the activities in the unit as continuous modification of the unit plan was needed to meet the diverse and unique needs of the various students. These modifications usually involved ensuring that the activities were effectively explained and supported toward completion as much as possible for students with diverse exceptionalities, ranging from developing English language skills, to moderate learning disabilities, and even to the more pronounced needs of the English 10-4 students enrolled in the English 10-2 class. Strategies to contend with this challenge included reworking the layout and format of the assignments to suit the needs of English 10-2 students and encouraging them to consider the questions for each activity in a way that the format of responses to those questions were laid out concretely. Where necessary, questions were adjusted to align with the English 10-2 level, which helped to ensure that students could remain focused on the primary intent and goals of the activities. For the 10-4 students, further modifications were made by reducing the size or eliminating the quantity of responses required where necessary and appropriate. For these students in particular, the career planning unit presented an excellent set of opportunities for communicating topics concerning personal learning, goal setting and exploring challenges. Many were able to acknowledge limitations regarding their learning and capabilities in an English setting while considering matters of personal growth and realistic career possibilities as part of the unit in a way that they had reportedly never done before.

Several students had also expressed that more time could have been allocated to exploring careers. Although the unit focused heavily on building self-awareness, only two lessons were wholly dedicated to career exploration (Lessons 8 and 9). For future implementation, more unit lessons should be committed to greater career exploration. It is our opinion that several of the students did

not believe the unit had achieved its objectives because, despite its emphasis on self-knowledge, not enough emphasis was given to linking self-knowledge to actual career paths.


Alternatives

Other considerations for the unit would be to address the unit's pacing or timing, namely, whether the unit was to be taught on a day-to-day basis or as a periodic, semester-long intervention. It is inherent in English instruction that the amount of work in and out of class ebbs and flows as the focus of each activity transitions between exploring and responding to texts. With the unit implemented as a semester-long intervention, the matter of having to interrupt "regular" English instruction for a career planning lesson came into debate. A potential solution to this might be to add more source texts to provide more variety in points of access to the ideas presented largely through *The Last Lecture* and to provide a sense of progress throughout the semester rather than a sense of return to the initial text around which the unit was to be meaningfully based.

Conclusion

The intention of this career planning intervention was to support students in making meaningful connections between their present and future selves, particularly concerning the subject of career planning and, to an equally valuable extent, connections to themselves as individuals whose responsibility it is to ensure they flourish in society. Moreover, the purpose of connecting the career planning intervention with a semester of English enabled students to connect to themselves and others. A connection of this nature not only augmented student awareness of what they could learn from stories told by others, but it also highlighted the significance that their own story could influence others who hear it.

One could argue that career planning intervention is most beneficial when started in the primary grades; however, there is no age where a message of this nature grows obsolete or unnecessary. The answer to the question of what really matters in relation to this career planning intervention is the offering of a point of impetus for adolescent students to engage in their own stories through

the work they do in career planning activities. This career planning intervention does not demand a definitive answer to questions surrounding absolute certainty toward specific career paths. What it seeks is student engagement in a process of exploration that will aid them not only in determining what sort of work they would like to undertake in their future careers but also to elucidate upon what they find valuable and important to them in all aspects of their lives. 

References

- Alberta Education. 2015. *English Language Arts (10-12)*. Government of Alberta. <https://education.alberta.ca/english-language-arts-10-12/>.
- Carnegie Mellon University. 2007. *The Last Lecture: Classroom Edition* [Video], December 20. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MqicxSo.
- Code, M, K Bernes, T Gunn and A Bardick. 2006. "Adolescents' Perceptions of Career Concern: Student Discouragement in Career Development." *Canadian Journal of Counselling* 40, no 3: 160–174. https://www.uleth.ca/dspace/bitstream/handle/10133/1170/Adolescents%E2%80%99%20Perceptions%20of%20Career%20Concern_NATCON.pdf?sequence=1.
- Say Anything*. 1989. Directed by C Crowe. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
- Government of Alberta. 2018. *High School Completion Rate of Students Within 3 Years and Within 5 Years of Entering Grade 10*, Alberta. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/80968b69-c17e-4f26-92c5-eae3b7793ce0/resource/321401a9-85f1-4892-a596-7673157feeb8/download/highschoolcompletionrateonep-age-03-28-2018.pdf>.
- Government of Alberta. 2023. *High School Completion Rate by Post-secondary Service Region*. <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/high-school-completion-rate-by-post-secondary-service-region>.
- Magnusson, K C, and K B Bernes. 2002. "Comprehensive Career Needs Survey: An Overview." *Alberta Counsellor* 27: 12–15.
- Meeder, H, and B Pawlowski. 2020. *Preparing Our Students for the Real World: The Education Shift Our Children and Future Demand*. National Center for College and Career Transitions, Columbia. <https://cica.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Preparing-Our-Students-for-the-Real-World-021720.pdf>.
- Pausch, R, and J Zaslow. 2008. *The Last Lecture*. New York: Hyperion.
- Perry, J C, and E W Wallace. 2012. "What Schools Are

- Doing Around Career Development: Implications for Policy and Practice.” *New Directions for Youth Development* 2012, no 134: 33–44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20013>.
- Porfeli, E, and B Lee. 2012. “Career Development During Childhood and Adolescence.” *New Directions for Youth Development* 2012, no 134: 11–22.
- Slomp, M W, T M Gunn and K B Bernes. 2014. “Training Pre-service Teachers in Career Education: Developing Foundational Perceptions, Knowledge, and Skills.” *The Canadian Journal of Career Development/Revue canadienne de developement de carrier* 13, no 2: 18–34. <http://ceric.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Training-Pre-Service-Teachers-in-Career-Education.pdf>.
- The Government of Alberta. 2012. *This is Your Life: A Career Education and Planning Guide*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/33ab00ee-b364-4cac-84fc-a544b78e8c48/resource/88e07ced-28a9-472a-840d-4853e37e91c9/download/tiyl-students-web-version-optimized-final.pdf>.
- Witko, K D, K B Bernes, K C Magnusson and A D Bardick. 2006. “Senior High Students’ Career Plans for the Future: Outcomes of the Comprehensive Career Needs Survey in Southern Alberta, Canada.” *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 6, no 2: 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-006-9103-3>.
- a. experiment with language, image, and structure to create different effects in particular situations and for particular purposes and audiences [for example, present the same information to two different audiences, and make appropriate changes to the content to suit the audiences]
- b. experiment with a variety of strategies, activities, and resources to explore ideas, observations, opinions, experiences, and emotions [for example, stream-of-consciousness writing, free verse poetry, exploratory talk, and improvisation]
- 1.2.1 Consider new perspectives
- a. describe personal responses to new perspectives, appraise whether such responses contribute to or inhibit understanding, and identify influences that have contributed to such responses
- b. identify own ideas, perspectives and interpretations and evaluate them for depth of explanation, evidence or support; and consider the ideas, perspectives and interpretations of others to broaden own understandings when exploring and responding to texts
- 2.1.1 Discern and analyze context
- a. identify a variety of different kinds of texts, audiences and purposes for creating texts [for example, purposes could include to inform, persuade, entertain or inspire; the purpose of a print advertisement is to sell a product]
- d. identify the impact that personal context—experience, prior knowledge—has on constructing meaning from a text
- 2.3.1 Connect self, text, culture and milieu
- a. identify and consider personal moral and ethical perspectives, as well as cultural perspectives, when studying literature and other texts; and reflect on and monitor how perspectives change as a result of interpretation and discussion
- b. respond personally and analytically to ideas developed in literature and other texts
- c. compare choices and motives of characters and people portrayed in texts with choices and motives of self and others
- 3.1.1 Focus on purpose and presentation form
- a. reflect on and describe strategies to determine

Appendix A

English Language Arts Curriculum Outcomes

1.1.1 Form tentative understandings, interpretations, and positions

a. generate and experiment with strategies that contribute to forming tentative understandings, interpretations and positions [for example, posing questions, suspending prejudgement as appropriate, recognizing that initial interpretations and positions may be inaccurate and incomplete, and recognizing that texts may be inaccurate, misleading or ambiguous]

b. form tentative understandings, interpretations, and positions on ideas and issues communicated in literature and other texts by expressing own explorations and considering others’ explorations

1.1.2 Experiment with language, image and structure

the depth and breadth of inquiry or research and to identify the purpose, audience and potential forms of presentation [for example, define parameters of inquiry or research, analyze available resources, create a timeline to guide inquiry or research, and understand purpose and audience]

b. describe the purpose of inquiry or research and the scope of the inquiry or research topic; identify the target audience; and identify the potential form for the presentation of inquiry or research findings, when applicable [such as a narrative, report, diary entry or biography]

c. refine the purpose of inquiry or research by limiting or expanding the topic as appropriate

3.1.2 Plan inquiry or research, and identify information needs and sources

a. reflect on and describe strategies for developing an inquiry or research plan that will foster understanding, select and monitor appropriate strategies, and modify strategies as needed to plan inquiry or research effectively [for example, use a research journal to keep and record reflections on the research process, clarify thinking, revisit initial perceptions and ask questions that lead to new research]

b. develop an appropriate inquiry or research plan that will address the topic and satisfy contextual requirements—purpose, audience and situation—and requirements of presentation form

c. determine the breadth and depth of prior knowledge, and formulate questions to determine information needs and to guide the collection of required information

d. identify information sources intended to fill gaps between prior knowledge and required information

e. identify and select potential strategies and technologies for gathering, generating and recording information [for example, outlining, webbing, taking notes in point form, recording sources accurately during information gathering, writing direct quotations correctly and bookmarking Internet sites]

4.2.1 Enhance thought and understanding and support and detail (writing)

a. review the controlling idea or desired unifying effect of a text in progress for clarity and focus [for

example, in a rehearsal, mock-up or draft], and modify the controlling idea or desired unifying effect as appropriate to meet the intended purpose

b. review the accuracy, specificity and precision of details, events, images, facts or other data intended to support a controlling idea or to develop a unifying effect; and add to details, events, images, facts or other data as needed to provide sufficient support or development

c. detect and correct logical fallacies

d. review own critical/analytical response to literature for plausibility, appropriateness of interpretations, and precision, completeness, and relevance of evidence; and revise interpretations and evidence, as necessary

5.1.3 Recognize accomplishments and events

a. use language and image to honour own and others' accomplishments [for example, celebrate together when classmates have accomplished a particular task or produced, published, or presented a particular text; or celebrate the completion of a portfolio with family and friends by holding a "portfolio launch"]

b. identify formal and informal ways in which language and image are used appropriately to honour people and to celebrate events [for example, eulogy, toast, and public service announcements]

5.2.1 Cooperate with others, and contribute to group processes

a. set appropriate personal goals for participation in a group; respect, be open to, and be supportive of the thoughts, opinions, and contributions of others in a group; and share personal knowledge, expertise and perspectives with others, as appropriate.

The wide variety of outcomes listed above supported semester-long career planning implementation and integration.

Throughout the semester, English instruction was connected to career planning as much and as meaningfully as possible to take advantage of every opportunity to enhance the career planning experience.

Appendix B

Unit Evaluation Form

Thank you for participating in this unit plan! I would like to know if it was helpful and how it could be made better.

Part 1: Please let me know if you did the activities.

Activity	Not good at all	Good	Great
Elephant in the Room (Adult Report Card Activity)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Lecture Viewing (Guide Questions)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Childhood Dreams (Past/Future Visual Representation and Reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brick Walls (Identifying Obstacles)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bring Something to the Table (Sharing Pride Story and Filling Out Table Template and Reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Who are Your Supporters? (Feedback Letters)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bedroom Walls (Present Visual Representation and Tour writeup)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working Hard (Career Research)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Or Hardly Working (Futurecast Reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experience is What you Get (Career Planning/Life Advice from Experience)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 2: Please let me know if you thought the activity was helpful by circling whether you thought it was “not good at all,” “good” or “great.”

Activity	Not good at all	Good	Great
Elephant in the Room (Adult Report Card Activity)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Lecture Viewing (Guide Questions)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Childhood Dreams (Past/Future Visual Representation and Reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brick Walls (Identifying Obstacles)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bring Something to the Table (Sharing Pride Story and Filling Out Table Template and Reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Who are Your Supporters? (Feedback Letters)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Bedroom Walls (Present Visual Representation and Tour writeup)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working Hard (Career Research)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Or Hardly Working (Futurecast Reflection)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experience is What you Get (Career Planning/Life Advice from Experience)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What did you like about this unit plan?

How could this unit plan be made better?

Part 3: Please tell me how much you agree with the following statements by putting a checkmark in the box that best tells me how you feel:

Activity	I Don't Agree	I'm Not Sure	I Agree
This unit helped me identify factors that influence my personal beliefs and values on self-fulfillment and success	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This unit helped me discover individual strengths and attributes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This unit helped me explore meaningful career options that promote my individuality and strengths	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This unit helped me develop a personal ideology on self-fulfillment and success as a foundation for career plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This unit helped me evaluate career options according to personal ideology and meaning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you very much for your help!

AUTHOR BIOS:

Kerry Bernes, PhD, is a full professor of educational and counselling psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. He graduated from the University of Calgary with a bachelor of education, master of science and doctor of philosophy.

Karissa Horne is a PhD student in clinical and counselling psychology at the University of Toronto. She also holds a master of education in counselling psychology from the University of Lethbridge and a bachelor of education from Memorial University of Newfoundland.