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Abstract

Undergraduate students increasingly cite vocational preparation and enhancement as their main reasons for pursuing a post-secondary education. Yet, when they require career advice and support, instead of visiting the career centres on their campuses, students turn to the career influencers in their existing networks: individuals who informally provide career-related advice, guidance, and/or counselling.

This qualitative study explores the conceptions of post-secondary education (PSE) professionals working outside of career centres and asks, “How do post-secondary education (PSE) professionals conceive their influence in student career development?” First, 104 students completed a poll identifying the types of PSE professionals they turn to for career help. Then, PSE professionals serving in these identified roles were recruited for the study. Fifteen professionals participated in an in-depth interview discussing a) their professional background, b) their conceptions of the term career, c) how they saw themselves contributing to student career development, and d) resources and competencies that would further their impact to student career success.

The study reveals that professionals’ conceptions of career, informed by their experiences and beliefs, influence the career advice they provide to students. Professionals also believe they contribute to student career development through performing their professional roles and exhibiting personal attributes that promote meaningful student interactions and relationships. To enhance their career influence they desire professional development on career-related topics and would like to see institutional commitment in recognizing student career success as an institutional priority. The findings yield recommendations for further research on career influencers in other institutional contexts. Implications are identified for practice that would enhance career services delivery, and employee and student career success.

Keywords: career influencers; career development; career services; student success; post-secondary education professionals; professional practice
Dedication

To Logan and Grandma May, my newest and longest-serving Career Influencers.
Acknowledgements

The fictional superhero, Spiderman, once received an extraordinary piece of wisdom from his uncle, Ben Parker: “With great power comes great responsibility.” I would like to adapt this to say: “With great empowerment comes great responsibility.”

Listing the individuals whom I wish to acknowledge would likely be longer than the dissertation itself. I have been so fortunate to have many Career Influencers in my life to date and would like to particularly recognize several groups of people. I am here composing this very acknowledge because of the folks in the former SFU Student Development and Programming Centre who gave me an opportunity to serve in a paraprofessional capacity, and believed in my potential and ability to succeed. Then, it was the SFU Surrey campus family who taught me what a tight-knitted community can accomplish when we work together, regardless of our roles and offices. SFU Surrey was also where I had the privilege to mentor talented paraprofessionals; the participant pseudonyms used in this study were named after these wonderful “work kids”. Finally, I am grateful to my KPU colleagues for inspiring the very idea of Career Influencers through their doing, thinking, and being. A very special thank you to those who participated in this study – I am looking forward to working with you to further our influence and impact together.

There are two individuals I want to acknowledge by name as I have grown immensely as a result of their guidance and mentorship. Since meeting them both on separate occasions in 2010, I gleaned incredible inspiration from their qualities and character, which I endeavour to emulate. I won the academic lottery when they agreed to serve as my Senior Supervisor and Co-Supervisor five years later. Thank you, Drs. Kris Magnusson and Cindy Xin for everything. You inspire me to do good, do more, and do more good.

Finally, my family, starting with my parents as my first Career Influencers: Dad for passing on his insatiable work ethic and curiosity, and Mom for her emotional intelligence. My brothers provided ongoing humour at critical times. Last but certainly not least, the two most important gentlemen in my life, John and Logan, for embracing the “birth” of this academic child.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Background

Consistently, students articulate career preparation and career success as their primary motivation to attain university and college credentials, perceiving post-secondary education as a viable avenue to gainful employment. In fact, the Canadian University Survey Consortium (PRA Inc., 2001, 2004, 2007; Prairie Research Associates, 2010, 2013, 2016; Walker, 1998) illustrates an increasing trend in the percentage of students who claim that getting a good job and preparing for a specific job or career are the two most important reasons for pursuing university education. Likewise, students who attend colleges also have job training as a key priority and aspire to increase their income level upon graduation (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2018; Finnie, Afshar, Bozkurt, Miyairi, & Pavlic, 2016).

In response to this trend, many post-secondary institutions strive to enhance their career and employment services (Shea, 2010), yet face challenges in resource availability; the expectation to operate with “no change in resources but an increase in services” (PSE Information Systems, 2017a, p. 33) has become a reality for many campus career centres. With Canadian post-secondary student enrolment reaching two million and rising (Statistics Canada, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017), and given the general lack of historic growth in career-based resourcing, it may be unrealistic for campus career centres to assume the full responsibility of providing career guidance and programming for the entire student population at their institution.

When it comes to seeking career help, students are already more likely to consult their post-secondary instructors and educational staff (e.g., academic advisors, volunteer managers) before turning to career specialists and counsellors who work in campus career centres (Brainstorm Strategy Group, 2017; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Environics Research Group, 2011). These post-secondary education (PSE) professionals often serve as trusted liaisons between students and their institutions, and thereby contribute tremendously to both student and institutional success. The influence professionals have
in students’ educational experience has been well-documented in student development literature (Astin, 1993; Downing, 2011; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2010, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Due to this study’s interest in exploring professionals’ influence in student career development, these professionals are referred to as career influencers.

For the purpose of this study, career influencers are defined as individuals who informally provide career-related advice, guidance, and/or counselling. In this study, particular attention was paid to the role of career influencers in post-secondary education institutions and their contribution to the career development of students and/or alumni. The definition of career influencers, in this study, is informed by prominent Canadian scholars in the fields of career development and strategic enrolment management in post-secondary education. Hiebert and Borgen’s (2002) distinction between three service levels helps outline the types of activity career influencers might conduct. When advising students, professionals impart generic career information to students that would not change regardless of who was getting the advice; for example, an orientation and transition professional, while leading a campus tour, may provide consistent information about career services and programs available to students. When providing guidance, professionals obtain personal information on each student to generate tailored advice; an example would be a prospective student advisor asking an applicant to share their background and interests and using the information to produce program and major recommendations. Finally, in counselling, professionals actively engage students to consider their unique experience in order to inform their career decision and planning.

Advising, guiding, and counselling services may be provided throughout a student’s experience in and with post-secondary education. The student engagement cycle outlined by Bontrager (2004) and Fee and Forsyth (2010) propose four stages, or touch points, where career influencers might conduct these activities: access (from the moment a student applies for admission to before their first day of school), transition (during their first year), persistence (between their second year and their last semester), and graduation (beyond their last semester).

To generate meaningful career advice for students, career influencers often draw from their own experiences, considering personal stories and lessons that would be relevant to help students with their scenarios. An educational advisor working in a
Faculty, for example, might share her graduate school experience with a student interested in pursuing a master’s degree by providing advice on the application process, conducting research, and seeking academic supervisors. Yet, due to the organic, informal nature of these helping interactions and relationships, little is known about career influencers. To what extent are they aware of their influence on student career development? How do they see themselves contribute to student career success, both as professionals and as individuals? What resources do they think might help them enhance their career influencer role?

With campus career centres expected to maintain or exceed service delivery levels with dwindling resources (PSE Information Systems, 2017a), leveraging existing, natural helping relationships between career influencers and students may provide a creative solution to alleviate ongoing resourcing issues. Consequently, the phenomenon of career influencers in post-secondary education is worthy of attention and investigation. Developing a greater understanding of career influencers and their inclination to provide career support to students may allow institutions to mobilize their talent and capitalize on their rapport with students, and in turn fulfill students’ prime objectives of attaining career success.

1.2. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how professionals in post-secondary institutions conceive their influence on the career development of students. Professionals who took part in the study shared their conception of the term “career”; identified their perceived contributions – within and outside of their professional roles – to student career development; and finally, discussed resources and support they felt would enhance their career influence. The central research question was “How do post-secondary education (PSE) professionals conceive their influence in student career development?” Four sub-questions were also posed, as follows:

- How do PSE professionals conceptualize the term “career”?
- How do PSE professionals see their role as having an impact on student career development?
• How do PSE professionals see themselves as individuals as having an impact on student career development?

• What resources and/or competencies do PSE professionals believe are important in furthering their impact on student career development?

1.3. Situating the Research Problem

The research study took place at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), a teaching-intensive institution located in the Canadian province of British Columbia. A detailed description of KPU and the rationale on its selection as the research site is described in Chapter Three.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed that students elect to pursue post-secondary education for career-related reasons. At KPU, approximately two-thirds of the students cite career preparation and advancement as their primary reason to pursue post-secondary studies (KPU Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning, 2014, 2015). Yet, KPU’s Career Services, the central unit with primary responsibility for career advising and programming, operates with minimal resources while striving to uphold its mandate of helping students prepare for their careers. Since its inception in the early 1990s, it has been operating with just one full-time and one part-time staff member for over 20,000 students and 50,000 alumni. The unit’s lack of resources may explain students’ major dissatisfaction with campus employment services, which was ranked 15th out of the 17 student support services listed in the KPU student satisfaction survey (KPU Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning, 2014). This has been a longstanding issue, and is consistent with the results of a previous survey, which showed that 13.4% of the student participants were unaware of student employment services, and 44.4% knew but chose not to use those services (KPU Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning, 2009).

Rather than using career services, students may be turning to other professionals within the institution for career assistance; this would be congruent with the findings from two national studies that have observed students’ tendency to seek career advice from instructors and educational staff rather than from career professionals (Brainstorm Strategy Group, 2017; Environics Research Group, 2011). As
a teaching-intensive institution, KPU maintains a maximum class size of 35 students and whenever possible, encourages faculty members to incorporate their professional experiences into their teaching. Its mandate to ensure high quality teaching may therefore be cultivating close relationships and career conversations between students and faculty, resulting in the emergence of career influencers. Hence, it would be critical for KPU to recognize and harness the role they play in enhancing student career development, and in turn contributing to student and institutional success.

1.4. Research Design Overview

Chapter Three provides a thorough account of the study’s methodology and approach; an overview of the research design is briefly outlined in this section.

1.4.1. Research Approach

Since the study aimed to understand professionals’ conceptions of their influence, a qualitative approach was employed as it placed an “emphasis on exploration, discovery, and description” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 27). Furthermore, the grounded theory tradition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was chosen so that (a) a theory can be generated about career influencers, a relatively unexplored topic in post-secondary education research; (b) the theory generated is grounded in the data (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012; Boudah, 2011, Creswell, 2014); and (c) multiple sources of data, such as interviews, research memos, and relevant literature can be considered as data (Goulding, 2005).

1.4.2. Data Collection

The study took place at KPU in two phases. First, a student poll was conducted to identify the professionals whom students see as career influencers, in turn generating the list of professionals recruited for the study. Invitations were sent to potential participants working in these professions, and a total of 15 participants took part in the study. Data was gathered through two one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, each between 60 to 120 minutes long. Participants were identified by pseudonyms, and all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Three types of memos were gathered throughout the study: field notes, method notes, and general reflections.
1.4.3. Data Analysis

Adhering to the grounded theory tradition, data analysis began as soon as data collection commenced, with interview transcripts and memos coded throughout the research process. Data was first coded into major categories to inform categorical definitions; theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006) was exercised to determine the need to gather additional data to elaborate and differentiate categories. Then, a major category, *Helper Self-Efficacy*, was identified as the ‘core phenomenon’ that connected other categories.

1.5. Introducing the Researcher

As a post-secondary professional, I have over 13 years of experience working within both student and academic affairs in numerous roles along the stages of the student engagement cycle (Fee & Forsyth, 2010) of access, transition, persistence, and graduation; my professional experience is elaborated in Chapter Three when I discuss my positionality and potential biases as a researcher. The common thread connecting these roles is that all of them involve direct student interactions, such as teaching courses, supervising student volunteers and staff, and implementing student transition programs. Combined with a Career Development Practitioner certification, these roles have enabled me to serve as a career influencer to students, and to also be curious about other professionals who informally provide career assistance but work outside of career services departments. This curiosity inspired this study, and led to my central research question, “How do post-secondary education (PSE) professionals conceive their influence in student career development?”

While my professional background inspired this study, my educational and research experiences afforded me the concrete skills to execute the study. As part of my Master of Education (MEd) program, I carried out a capstone research project that required devising research questions, conducting literature reviews, interviewing participants, and disseminating findings and implications. Beyond the MEd program, I have continued to refine my research and project management skills by collaborating in research teams and conducting my own research projects in student experience and program development.
1.6. Rationale and Significance

The genesis of the study came from my informal observation that students often have a “go to” person at their post-secondary institution for career advice, whether it be a student recruitment coordinator whom they saw when considering post-secondary education; a campus event manager who supervised their volunteer role; or an instructor who regularly encouraged them to make connections at campus events. Even though these professionals have neither a background nor expertise in career development, through performing their roles and drawing on their own experiences, they were able to help students with their career concerns while garnering trust and establishing connections. These informal helping relationships are worthy of attention because they might be the institution’s key to help students achieve career success – their primary reason for pursuing post-secondary education.

Post-secondary institutions have an onus to meet the needs of their students. Given that students see post-secondary education as a vehicle to enhance job prospects, institutions and their career centres ought to examine the programs and services available to support student career development, and to consider the professionals who can provide such support.

1.7. Chapter Summary and Dissertation Overview

Increasingly, students see the attainment of post-secondary education credentials as a means to job preparation and career success. While campus career centres hold mandates to provide career support and resources, their challenge resides in their limited capacity to serve the growing student population. At the same time, post-secondary institutions are observing a trend where students seek career advice from professionals working outside of career centres, such as academic advisors and instructors. However, due to the informality of their role, little is known about their conceptions towards assisting students with their career development and what actions they actually take, giving rise to the study at hand.

This chapter described the purpose of the study, situated the research problem within the research site, presented an overview of the study, and introduced the researcher. Chapter Two of this dissertation provides a review of the literature relevant
to post-secondary professionals and career development. Chapter Three describes the methodological approach and processes used in the study; this is followed by a presentation of findings in Chapter Four. Finally, in Chapter Five, implications of the findings and recommendations for research and practice are discussed.
Chapter 2.

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

For many students, post-secondary education is seen as a path to career success and preparation. Studies from the Canadian University Survey Consortium (PRA Inc., 2001, 2004, 2007; Prairie Research Associates, 2010, 2013, 2016; Walker, 1998) and Colleges and Institutes Canada (2018) found that students saw enhancing job prospects and job preparedness as primary goals to pursue a university or college education. It is thus important to consider how institutions are supporting students to achieve their goals. Chapter One provided the context to the research problem, namely that students tend to seek career help from professionals working outside of campus career centres, if at all, prior to visiting the career centres.

This chapter explores two key components in greater detail: campus career centres and the non-career centre professionals who are helping students from a career development standpoint. Specifically, for the former, this chapter examines how these centres are established, their general mandates, how aligned their operations are to those mandates, and how effective they are overall at serving student career needs.

This study refers to the non-career centre professionals as career influencers, who are defined as individuals who informally provide career-related advice, guidance, and/or counselling. The makeup of career influencers is examined, including their functional roles and how they support student career development. Notably, “career” serves as an umbrella term for each person’s unique “sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime. Careers are…”[also] dynamic…and include[s] how persons balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles” (Canadian Council for Career Development, 2012, p. 2). As such, professionals’ own conceptions of the influence they have upon students is considered, ultimately leading to this study’s central question, “How do post-secondary education professionals conceive their influence in student career development?” The final section of this chapter then provides rationale for the use of career development theories to inform the study’s conceptual framework, including brief overviews of select theories.
2.2. Post-Secondary Career Centres: A Context

Originally, career centres were created on Canadian university and college campuses in the 1940s to help World War II veterans secure employment upon their return from their military service (Bezanson, Hopkins, & Neault, 2016; Brown & Russell, 2014; Van Norman, Shepard, & Mani, 2014; Shea, 2010). Career centre practices have greatly expanded today, as evidenced by a study conducted by PSE Information Systems (2017a) that provided a comprehensive overview of Canadian post-secondary career service models. Out of the 180 institutions consisting of both colleges and universities, 67 institutions participated in the study, resulting in a response rate of 37.2%. The study revealed that post-secondary career centres, in general, provide services that support all students (and now in most cases, alumni) in their career exploration, career planning and decision making, and job search process. These services are facilitated on a one-on-one basis and/or in group workshop settings.

PSE Information Systems (2017a) also asked, “What two or three current issues have the greatest impact/are the biggest challenge for the delivery of your services?” (p. 46). The 167 comments shared reflected two primary challenges: expanding services with the same or less resources (59 comments, 35.3%), and meeting student needs and promoting the importance of career education (34 comments, 20.1%). Although 70% of the participants reported no increases or decreases in their budget from 2012 to 2017, 65% reported their centre increased their services offered (PSE Information Systems, 2017a). Forecasting into the next five years, participants anticipated this trend of service expansion with the same or less resources to continue. In terms of human resources, PSE Information Systems (2017a) showed that the number of full-time career centre professional staff members ranged from zero to 50, with a mean of 8.5. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2017), the median ratio of professional career centre staff to students is 1:1,765. From these two statistics, it may be deduced that a career centre operating with 8.5 staff members are expected to serve approximately 15,000 students, which is comparable to a medium-sized institution. The danger in using a generic ratio, though, is that the professional staff to student ratio might not be realistic for institutions to realize. For instance, applying the ratio would mean that Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s 1.5 staff members can only serve approximately 2,600 students, which is merely 13% of its student population; as such,
effectively 87% of the remaining student population would need to seek career support through other means.

Even if career centres increase resourcing to service a higher percentage of students, numerous barriers exist towards centralizing career guidance within a single institutional centre. PSE Information Systems (2017a) raised challenges with meeting student needs, notably citing issues in student engagement and perception of career education. Furthermore, the increasingly diverse student population necessitates tailored approaches to better serve the career needs of specific segments such as international students, students with disabilities, LGBTQ2 (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, and two-spirited) students, mature students, and many other student groups (Brown & Russell, 2014; Shea, 2010). Career centres also expressed challenges with low student attendance for events and programs, with one of the reasons being scheduling conflicts with classes. It was also speculated that students might see achieving academic success as their sole priority while in school, and as a result do not fully understand the value and benefits of career education as complementary to their academic studies (McGrath, 2002).

2.3. A Call for Collaboration

In consideration of the two primary challenges cited above, PSE Information Systems (2017a) asked participants what they thought their centre would look like in the next five years. Working closer with Faculties and student service departments may prove to be a solution to address the two primary challenges as over one-quarter of the comments predicted an increase in collaboration within their institution. In fact, forging partnerships with campus stakeholders was deemed a best practice demonstrated by career centres with "impressive service models" (p. 1). Professionals working in areas across an institution may hold strong student relationships through their regular interactions; they may be in positions to provide insight on student career needs, and how career centres can better promote career education and cater their services to students. Moreover, if career centres can leverage these professionals as career influencers to informally provide career assistance, their resourcing issue may be addressed as these professionals can be considered as an extension of their centre. In fact, numerous empirical studies describe the ways these professionals contribute to student career development by virtue of serving in their roles. Three examples of
professionals who embody this notion – faculty members, academic advisors, and librarians – and the techniques each may employ, are illustrated here. It should also be noted that in the present study, students also saw other professional roles as career influencers in addition to these examples.

2.3.1. Faculty Members

Consistently, students identify faculty members as professionals they consult with on career-related issues and topics; they are more likely to be regarded by students as career influencers who can advise and guide them in their career planning process – even beyond the course. Schwartz, Gregg, and McKee (2018) asserted that through their teaching and advising, faculty can “help students plan and explore their future careers [and] passions…begin to recognize the different alternatives related to a career plan [and] learn how to take action to best prepare for a particular pathway” (p. 51). In their roles, faculty members contribute to student career development through teaching discipline-specific and career preparation courses; their facilitation and delivery of course content also help students develop transferable skills they can demonstrate in future professional roles. The nature of their interactions often requires students to take stock of their own values, skills, and experience through activities and assignments thereby enabling faculty members to get to know individual students on a personal level (Case, Miller, Hensley, & Jackson, 2014; Ciarocco, 2018). Furthermore, faculty members’ interactions and relationships with students outside the classroom also enhance student career success.

Teaching Discipline-specific Courses

Since students perceive post-secondary education as a viable way to prepare them for work and to enhance job prospects, by teaching courses and sharing knowledge related to students’ desired professional field or industry, faculty members play an integral part in preparing students for their future professional aspirations (Ciarocco, 2018; Eagan, Stolzenberg, Bates, Aragon, Suchard, & Rios-Aguilar, 2015; Strapp, Drapela, Henderson, Nasciemento, & Roscoe, 2018). In addition, the ways faculty members facilitate their courses and course components also help students practice desirable workplace behaviours and skills (Schwartz et al., 2018). For example, a faculty member can employ case study exercises where students work in teams to
discuss and analyze a real organizational challenge, use course concepts to inform solutions to address the challenge, and present their analysis and recommendations to the whole class. Through applying their class learning to analyze each case and generate recommendations, students also practice analytical, teamwork, and public speaking skills, which they can transfer to future graduate school or workplace settings.

Many post-secondary institutions offer capstone courses or senior seminars for graduating students, affording them the opportunity to integrate academic learning from all previous courses within their discipline, and to consider their transition from their undergraduate education to either the workplace or further education. In the seminal study reviewing capstone courses featured in proceedings from national conferences on students in transition, Cuseo (1998) posited that capstone courses facilitate career development by their objectives to:

- Promote meaningful connections between the academic major and work (career) experiences;
- Enhance awareness of and support for the key personal adjustments encountered by senior [students] during their transition from college to post college life; and
- Improve senior [students’] career preparation and pre-professional development, that is, facilitate their transition from the academic to the professional world. (p. 22)

Subsequently, these objectives were further explored by researchers who investigated capstone courses and educators who taught them. Henscheid (2000) conducted a follow-up study reviewing presentations and articles on capstone courses available through the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and found that improving career preparation continues to be the second most frequently cited primary goal of capstone courses by professors; this reinforces that through teaching their disciplines, faculty members have a role – and see themselves playing a role – in assisting students to prepare for future job prospects.

In creating their senior accounting capstone course, Jervis and Hartley (2005) emphasized the focus from having students learn accounting methods and procedures – as they do in previous courses – to having them practice resourcefulness and apply their learning, so that they can “learn concepts and develop analytical abilities to find and use
resources for solving new, complex problems in a dynamic, global environment” (p. 313). In their course, students identify an organization and create a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis informed by their research on the company. Drawing from their previous accounting courses, students articulate organizational issues, propose solutions to address these issues, and present their findings to the class. Students’ participation in hands-on exercises like these reinforces Schwartz et al.’s (2018) earlier notion that faculty members’ facilitation of learning activities also supports students’ development and practice of workplace skills in the classroom.

**Teaching Career Preparation Courses**

Faculty members may teach career preparation courses that are either open to all students in general, or are embedded within and catered to their academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, accounting, biology, etc.). These courses aim to expose students to day-to-day activities involved in occupations related to their disciplines in order to enhance their job search preparation (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012; Stark-Wroblewski, Wiggins, & Ryan, 2006), while providing them with opportunities to consider how they might apply their educational experience to a work or graduate school environment (Case et al., 2014; Norcross, Hailstorks, Aiken, Pfund, Stamm, & Christidis, 2016; Roscoe & Strapp, 2009). For example, a course activity may involve students conducting research on industries and graduate or professional programs they are interested in by reaching out to alumni who have pursued similar paths. The resultant assignment might be a reflection paper capturing their learning and how the activity informs their vocational choices and career decisions.

Career preparation courses typically cover the following topics (Case et al., 2014; Ciarocco, 2018; Lloyd, 2002; Macera & Cohen, 2006; Thomas & McDaniel, 2004):

- Self-knowledge and self-assessment (e.g., Strong Interest Inventory, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)
- Career exploration and job search
- Application writing (e.g., cover letters, letters of intent, resumes, and curriculum vitae, etc.)
- Interview techniques and strategies
- Workplace communication and professionalism
• Graduate and professional school selection and applications
• Transition and future planning

The design of career preparation courses and assignments can help students gather and generate insights about occupations and graduate schools. In this regard, there is much variation in the format and structure of career preparation courses. They range from being credit-bearing to non-credit (Case et al., 2014; Lammers, 2001; Macera & Cohen, 2006; Roscoe & Strapp, 2009), as standalone courses or modular components embedded within other courses (Ciarocco, 2018; Ciarocco, Dinella, Hatchard, & Valosin, 2016; Norcross et al., 2016), and being taught by one faculty member to multiple faculty leading specific topics (Schwartz et al., 2018).

Students who took career preparation courses reported a better understanding of occupations related to their disciplines, the professional and educational requirements of their professional aspirations, and how and where to access career resources (Green, McCord, & Westbrooks, 2005; Roscoe & McMahan, 2014; Thomas & McDaniel, 2004). Compared to their counterparts who did not take such courses, they also expressed a higher level of confidence in making career decisions (Folsom & Reardon, 2003; Thomas & McDaniel, 2004), and in articulating and transferring their knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs) to their future workplace or graduate program (Ciarocco, 2018; Norcross et al., 2016).

**Interacting with Students outside of Class**

Beyond their formal teaching responsibilities, faculty members contribute to student career development through their informal interactions with students outside of their classes. Teaching Professor (2015) described the faculty-student relationship as “an integral part of the [students’] learning experience” (p. 6), stating that the impact of these informal conversations and relationships on student academic and career success are often underestimated. Cox (2011) emphasized that “even simple, incidental contacts mean something to the students…such interactions help humanize the faculty, narrowing the gap often implicit in the hierarchy associated with [the traditional notion that] students learn from a professor in the classroom” (p. 62). Faculty-student interactions beyond the classroom have been shown to have many benefits, such as enhancing students’ social and academic integration to their institutions (Kim & Sax, 2011; Komaraju, Musuklin & Bhattacharya, 2010; Lillis, 2012; Pattison, Hale & Gowens,
increasing student persistence in post-secondary (Astin, 1996; Tinto, 1998, 2000) and promoting academic and career success (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Peele, 2010).

A study conducted by Grantham, Robinson, and Chapman (2015) provided insights into the aspects that students value in their interactions with faculty members. In reviewing public thank you notes students composed about their instructors, the authors discovered that students appreciate high-quality interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom, which include discussions about their vocational interests and options, such as how their course and major choices can lead to their aspired profession and graduate programs. One student, who attributed his personal and academic success to a faculty member, wrote in his note: “From recommendations and job opportunities to class and life lessons, I always knew I could count on [my instructor] to give me good advice” (p. 130). With this finding, the authors were able to confirm that the aspects students value about their relationship with faculty, such as discussing their vocational goals, align with the activities deemed by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) as important and purposeful to student learning.

**Gaining Career Knowledge and Partnering with Career Centres**

Even though faculty members can contribute to student career development formally and informally through teaching courses and connecting with students outside of class, they may lack the career development training and knowledge that may enable them to provide career advice and guidance to students in a comprehensive manner. Gordon (2006) noted very few faculty members are exposed to formal education about career development theories, career information, and career counselling in their graduate education, since these topics tend to be in elective courses. This notion is supported by Halonen and Dunn (2018), who observed that while faculty members are subject matter experts in their fields, they often receive little to no training in career development and advising. The lack of training and experience in career topics may affect the quality of career education and the credibility of career information they share with students, especially if faculty members are uncomfortable developing and teaching career-related courses (Ciarocco, 2018; Hughey, Burton Nelson, Damminger, & McCalla-Wriggens, 2009; Vespia, Arrowood, & Freis, 2018).
Appleby (2018) pointed out that faculty members can draw from their own academic experience when providing guidance to students interested in pursuing graduate studies. However, as faculty members typically progress directly to academic and teaching positions after their terminal degrees, they may not have non-academic work experience to use as a frame of reference when guiding students who wish to work in non-academic roles after completing their studies. To enhance their career support for students and overall practice, collaboration and coordination with campus career centres is recommended (Ayoubi, 2017; Roscoe & Strapp, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2018). With help from career services professionals, faculty members can stay current with relevant career information related to their disciplines in order to inform their curriculum, course activities, and advice to students. They may also consider inviting career professionals to their classes to facilitate career topics ranging from career exploration, job and graduate program research, to application writing and interview strategies. Through their interactions with career centres, faculty members can gain knowledge and familiarity with services offered by the office, helping them make appropriate referrals to students.

### 2.3.2. Academic Advisors

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), an international professional association for post-secondary professionals in academic advising, describes the general role of academic advisors as individuals who

- provide advice on academic requirements and course selection, from evaluating transfer credits to performing degree and graduation audits;  
- regularly monitor student academic progress; detect academic difficulties and work with students to devise solutions;  
- liaise with colleagues within the institution to remain current with programs and services available to students, and to make appropriate referrals when necessary;  
- participate in the development and implementation of student orientation and retention programs; and  
- communicate and stay current with information on policies and procedures, both within and outside of their institutions (McMahan, 2008).
Out of these primary responsibilities, the first three – providing advice, monitoring progress, and liaising with colleagues – are functions that position academic advisors as natural career influencers who assist students with their career development. The three responsibilities are now discussed.

**Providing Academic Advice**

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS, 2015) described the work of academic advisors as providing information and advice to help students make “informed…choices and decisions about academic work and about educational, career, and life goals” (p. 7). Given that most students pursue a post-secondary education to enhance their career prospects, by providing advice on course and program selection, academic advisors help students ensure their academic plans align with their professional aspirations, recognizing that students begin making educational choices as early as during the application process (Gordon, 2006; Schwartz, Gregg, & McKee, 2018).

O’Banion (2012) outlined five steps in the academic advising process: “1) explore life goals, 2) explore vocational goals, 3) choose a program, 4) choose a course, and 5) schedule courses” (p. 44). O’Banion also asserted that often, academic advisors have the tendency to focus primarily on steps three, four, and five, as these steps can address students’ immediate concerns in academic program and course selection. Yet, it is the emphasis on the first two steps – the exploration of life and vocational goals – that can help students understand how their education journey can enable them to fulfill their life and professional aspirations.

Echoing O’Banion’s perspective is Gordon (2006), who introduced the 3-I Process academic advisors can use when assisting students with their career development throughout their post-secondary education. In the first phase, *Inquire*, academic advisors assist students in the identification of academic and career concerns. Since the issues students raise at this phase are typically “information deficits, general indecision concerns, and personal concerns related to career decision making” (p. x), academic advisors need to question, listen, and paraphrase, so that students can gain insights into their own career concerns. Once their concerns are clarified and articulated, in phase two, *Inform*, academic advisors assist students in gathering and evaluating relevant information pertaining to academic programs and occupations; whenever
appropriate, they also make referrals to departments and individuals such as campus career centres and faculty members teaching topics of interest to students they advise. In the final phase, *Integrate*, academic advisors help students make sense of the information gathered, and to consider and incorporate personal factors that may also influence their decisions (e.g., family responsibilities). As a result, a comprehensive picture of their career context is generated in this phase, enabling students to make informed academic and career decisions.

**Monitoring Student Progress**

Drake (2011) noted that an academic advisor’s role permeates throughout a student’s post-secondary experience and may be “perhaps the only opportunity for all students to develop a personal, consistent relationship with someone in the institution who cares about them” (p. 10). Therefore, academic advisors have the potential and opportunity to help students make sense of their educational experience by encouraging them to consider the major learning from individual courses, and how these realizations might inform further academic planning as well as their life and career goals (CAS, 2015; Lowenstein, 2005, 2006). For instance, an academic advisor might review a first-year student’s transcript, highlight their strong academic performance in particular courses and majors, and then recommend the student to explore upper level courses and occupations within those subject areas. During the conversation, they might ask the student to describe their interests and “aha moments” in the courses and listen for keywords or phrases that would inform their advice for the student to consider taking courses and participating in co-curricular activities (e.g., co-operative education and volunteering opportunities) that would allow them to explore their interests further. On the other hand, when students face academic hardships, such as being on academic probation, an academic advisor can also help the student learn from their failure, starting with identifying the factors and decisions they have made that contributed to the outcome. Following that, they can work together to devise learning and self-management strategies for the student to employ, not only to overcome their academic difficulty at hand, but also to deploy again in the future if they experience similar circumstances. In this sense, academic advisors prepare students to be their own “lifelong self-advisors” (Melander, 2005, p. 90) who can effectively manage and guide their own lives.
Liaising with Colleagues

Finally, CAS (2009) described academic advising as “one of the very few institutional functions that connect all students to the institution” (p. 36), making academic advisors natural liaisons with professionals working in other departments and Faculties in order to gather information and updates to generate well-informed advice to students. Recognizing that some students do not use formal campus career services, through their one-on-one interaction with students, academic advisors can be catalysts and effective promoters of career services and resources from career counselling, on-campus recruiting, to career preparation and planning workshops, and online career management systems (Kranzow, Foote, & Hinkle, 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that by emphasizing the importance of career exploration and development during their undergraduate studies, academic advisors can help students develop career direction from their first year (Ayoubi, 2017) to their final year of study (Imbimbo, Nina, & Stein, 2005).

2.3.3. Librarians

From application writing to interview preparation, librarians can assist students with their career development using their expertise in research and seeking information. Traditionally, librarians in post-secondary institutions have supported student career needs through the primary provision of print-based career resources; this is seen as a passive, outdated approach that call for collaboration with campus career centres to jointly promote student career success (Allen, 2015; DeHart, 1996; Hook, 2005; Pun & Kubo, 2017; Song, 2007; Walter & Eodice, 2007). As management and economics librarians at Purdue University, Dugan, Bergstrom, and Doan (2009) described their initiation of partnership with campus career centres in creating Career Wiki, a centralized online site that houses career resources in a single location; while enhancing the services offered by the career centres, Career Wiki has also increased the use of library resources.

Facilitating Career Workshops

Another way librarians collaborate with career services staff is through co-facilitating workshops with career centres. As Pun and Kubo (2017) pointed out, librarians working in post-secondary institutions often specialize in disciplines and can
provide resources tailored to specific academic areas. In these workshops, librarians often teach information search, which can include guiding students to find organization and industry-related data and to generate insights on potential companies they would like to work in. Joranson and Wider (2009) stated:

We taught students to go beyond reading the company Web site, developing a more comprehensive view of the company and industry...showed them how to find a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) for the company, as it provides a brief analysis of the company’s relationship to the business environment. Additionally, we reviewed how to find quarterly financial data in library databases. (p. 404-5)

These workshops also expose librarians to students who might not typically perceive libraries as a resource for their non-academic needs (Hollister, 2005). Joranson and Wider (2009) supported this sentiment and add that these workshops provide the “real world connection...[as] these skills [of research and information literacy] seem immediately relevant to students” (p. 404).

**Providing Training on Career Information Research**

Librarians’ role in student career development extends beyond information search; they can also provide support in composing job applications and preparing for interviews. By incorporating the in-depth information they have learned to gather, students can compose resumes and cover letters catered to the companies and roles to which they are applying (Pun & Kubo, 2017). Similarly, during interviews, students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the company and industry by formulating tailored, thoughtful questions posed typically at the end of an interview (Joranson & Wider, 2009).

By teaching information literacy and research skills, librarians help students increase their confidence in the job search process (Song, 2006). Howard (2017) stated: “The impact of our activities can be seen in our students’ confidence as they approach recruiters at job fairs, go into each interview more prepared than their peers, and make informed decisions about which job offer to accept” (p. 65). Furthermore, developing research skills can enhance students’ employability as it is considered a lifelong skill (DeHart, 1996; Joranson & Wider, 2009; Pun & Kubo, 2017); the ability to find and
interpret information, along with having the ongoing motivation to seek new knowledge, are becoming increasingly important in the digital era and in the workplace.

**Sharing Personal Career Experience**

Librarians can draw from their own experience to facilitate student career development. Since a graduate degree is a typical educational entrance requirement to become a librarian, Pun and Kubo (2017) maintain that librarians can share their graduate school experience with students interested in pursuing further education. In addition, they can support students in writing their curriculum vitae (CV) as they are expected to create and maintain a CV for their own professional needs.

**2.3.4. Summary of Sample Career Influencer Roles**

Professionals such as faculty members, academic advisors, and librarians have the propensity to be career influencers. Faculty members teach courses to help students gain discipline-specific knowledge, including career information related to their field. Their facilitation of course activities provide opportunities for students to develop and hone employability skills. By having informal career conversations with students outside of their classes, faculty members can enhance student academic and career success. Academic advisors provide academic advice and referrals that enable students to make informed decisions on their educational, and in turn, professional and personal goals. In their student appointments, they help students consider how their academic studies, combined with personal values and motivations, might influence their professional aspirations, and vice versa. Librarians leverage their research expertise to help students practice finding information by conducting industry search using databases and news media. Students also learn to gather and incorporate company information in job applications and interviews, in turn showing a high level of preparedness in the job search process. Essentially, by performing the responsibilities already embedded in their roles, these professionals make valuable contributions to student career development. By the same token, because professionals see themselves as merely performing duties within their roles, at times, they do not necessarily see their own potential in influencing students’ careers, resulting in a discrepancy between “doing” and “thinking of doing”.

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2.4. Professionals’ Awareness and Conceptions of Career Influence

While there is an abundance of literature describing the student career development activities that post-secondary professionals conduct, there is a scarcity of research investigating their perspective and experience with facilitating these activities. By performing their professional roles, do they necessarily see themselves as career influencers contributing to student career development? Vespia, Arrowood, and Freis (2018) emphasized the need to include professionals as research participants in studies concerning their helping approaches: “We can surmise what professors would say when asked about their expertise in career advising, but we should have evidence” (p. 30). Hence, the present study responded to this need through gaining an understanding of professionals’ conceptions of their influence in student career development.

How a professional conceives their influence in student career development matters; their conceptions can have an impact on their helping approach and relationships with students, and in turn student persistence and engagement. As Grantham, Robinson, and Chapman (2015) assert, when students perceived faculty members care about them as individuals, they expressed higher satisfaction and commitment to their course. Numerous scholars in student development also emphasized the role of high quality professional-student relationships in enhancing students’ academic and lifelong success (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013; Schwartz, Gregg, & McKee, 2018, p. 50; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Peele, 2010).

When professionals identify that their roles, as well as the approach to their roles, have the potential to enhance student career success, they can activate their helping behaviours to help fulfill students’ primary objective for pursuing post-secondary education: preparing for and enhancing job prospects. For professionals to hold this belief, they ought to embrace the notion that every interaction with students can contribute to their career development, and therefore, they need to be intentional with their encounters and conversations – both formal and informal – rather than leaving these moments to serendipity. For instance, when marking final term papers for her psychology course, a faculty member may notice a student’s passion towards mental health in his paper submission, and in her assignment feedback she may encourage him
to take relevant courses or pursue job or volunteer opportunities to explore his interest in mental health. If professionals can recognize their role as career influencers, then their contribution to student career success can be amplified as they act with intentionality.

With this in mind, the present study explored post-secondary education professionals’ conceptions of their influence in student career development by posing the central research question: “How do post-secondary education (PSE) professionals conceive their influence in student career development?” The four sub-questions were designed to explore study participants’ conceptions, as follows:

- How do PSE professionals conceptualize the term “career”?
- How do PSE professionals see their role as having an impact on student career development?
- How do PSE professionals see themselves as individuals as having an impact on student career development?
- What resources and/or competencies do PSE professionals believe are important in furthering their impact on student career development?

With the first sub-question concerning professionals’ conceptualizations of career, how professionals consider the terms “career” and “career development” may provide insights to their approach to their roles, in particular with assisting students with career-related questions and concerns. The second and third sub-questions are complementary to one another; the former solicited professionals’ perspective on the specific tasks and duties within their roles that contribute to students’ careers, while the latter asked professionals what they believe are their personal contributions to students’ careers, in terms of skills, attributes, and knowledge. The final sub-question considered that most professionals who work outside of career centres do not necessarily have training and education on career development and advising (Halonen & Dunn, 2018; Gordon, 2006); consequently, professionals were canvassed for professional development ideas that can support them as career influencers.

Career development theories have been selected to provide a lens to situate the research problem and study in context. In the *Handbook of Vocational Psychology*:
Theory, Research, and Practice, Gati (2013) defined career development as “a continuous lifelong process of development experiences that focuses on seeking, obtaining, and processing information about self, occupational and educational alternatives, life styles, and role options” (p. 206). Based on this definition, career development theories offer explanations to the ways individuals continually make sense of their experiences and use their understanding to guide their thoughts and behaviours. Likewise, the study at hand aimed to understand how post-secondary professionals draw from their professional and personal experiences – their career context – to inform the approach to their roles and the conceptions of their influence in student career development. This next section outlines the career development theories in three themes, as well as their implications for the current study.

2.5. Career Development Theories

This section begins with two caveats about career development theories. Firstly, career development theories are not stand alone, rather they are deeply rooted in a wide variety of disciplines such as psychology (specifically behaviourism, cognition, development, and learning, to name a few), sociology, and organizational studies, etc. For this reason, these theories go beyond their primary purpose of explaining career development and decision making; they also provide a lens to help interpret participants’ account of their experiences, uncovering individual assumptions and beliefs that drive their actions. Whenever appropriate, theories are also applied to inform the research question and sub-questions designed to uncover professionals’ conceptions of their influence on student career development. Secondly, no single theory can fully describe the complexity of career development; in fact, tremendous overlap exists between theories. Consequently, this section adopts an eclectic approach (Murdock, 2009) to present common underpinning theoretical themes of applicable theories as they relate to the study, which describe career development as: personal-environment interactions, a lifelong learning process, and integrative life design.
2.5.1. Career Development as Person-Environment Interactions

*If a man loves his work and can do it well, he has laid the foundation for a useful and happy life. But if his best abilities and enthusiasms do not find scope in his daily work, if his occupation is merely a means of making a living, and the work he loves to do is side-tracked into the evening hours or pushed out of his life altogether, he will be only a fraction of the man he ought to be.*

*(Frank Parsons)*

Often revered as the father of vocational guidance, Parsons (1909) developed the trait and factor theory of occupational choice which outlined three key factors: (a) understanding of oneself in terms of one’s background, preferences, skills, and interests; (b) understanding of the various industries and occupations available, including their “requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects” (p. 5); and (c) the match between (a) and (b). A successful vocational choice results from a strong match between what one can offer and labour market demands. In his view, the ultimate goal of vocational guidance is to assist individuals in finding an occupation suited to their skills and interests that will also promote “the development of full efficiency” (p. 3) in society. Parsons’ work led to what Weinrach (1979) termed “the structural approach” to career development, where specific linkages are made between person and environment. Parsons also conceived his theories and practices during a time period when spiritual leaders are regarded as authority for career guidance, signifying a relational aspect to the helping process where counsellors focused on understanding their clients’ contexts prior to helping them address their vocational issues.

Holland conceptualized the vocational choice theory (1959, 1996, 1997) which furthered the person-environment matching concept by designating individuals and environments into six types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC). The hexagonal model in Figure 1 depicts the relationships between the six types. Through hereditary and environmental influences, people can be represented by a three-letter personal code based on their dominant types (e.g. SAE, CRE, etc.). The code is compared against various environments using the same coding system. The closer the letters are within the hexagon model, the more related and predictable a person or an environment should be. This is known as *consistency*. People who work in environments that are compatible, or *congruent* to their code tend to be
satisfied and productive. If the scores for one or more types are distinguishably higher or lower compared to others, the person’s profile has high differentiation. Overall, identity considers how clear a person or an environment are of their goals and tasks, and how stable this clarity is over time.

**Figure 1.** Holland’s Hexagon Model. Adapted from "Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (3rd ed.)," by J. L. Holland, 1997, p. 6. Copyright 1997 by Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.

Parsons and Holland’s theories have made significant contributions to the career development field and their relevance continue to enhance policy and practice. The trait and factor theory inspired the creation of government tools such as the Standard Occupational Classification System in the United States and the National Occupational Classification (NOC) System in Canada (Neault, 2014). Arguably, O’Banion’s (2012) five steps in the academic advising process (explore life goals, explore vocational goals, choose a program, choose a course, and schedule courses) also drew from the trait and factor theory. The RIASEC model is still in use by the United States (US) Department of Labour’s online database – the Occupational Information Network’s (O*NET) interest profile (Rounds, Armstrong, Liao, Lewis, & Rivkin, 2008). That being said, these theories
also come with drawbacks. Parsons’ theory has been criticized for being ahistorical – often a critique made on structuralism as a methodology – neglecting contextual and social factors (Sharf, 2013), the role of emotions in career decision making (Kidd, 2008; Patton & McMahon, 2014), and individual changes in interests, values, and aptitudes (Zunker, 2011). As well, Lent and Brown (2013) stated that Parsons and Holland’s theories are insufficient in helping people make sense of the issues and challenges they face in the 21st century. Rapid advances in technology, the rise of a knowledge economy, and globalization drastically affected the nature of work, and call for more contemporary theories to help people negotiate a constantly changing environment.

**Implications for Current Study**

In addition to their use in national job search and career education tools such as NOC, the application of Parsons and Holland’s theories are also pervasive in the British Columbia provincial government’s rationale to justify funding to post-secondary institutions. Based on their interests and aptitudes, students select their major which becomes their credential upon graduation, and ideally they find an occupation and work environment that matches their education and training. As such, the provision of funding to institutions is contingent upon their ability to administer “job-ready” programs producing students and graduates who can quickly transition to work and contribute to economic growth upon graduation (Province of British Columbia, 2011). Post-secondary education professionals, therefore, are faced with pressures to help their institutions fulfill funding criteria. For example, when advising prospective students, a student recruiter might rely heavily on the NOC to generate advice on program selection and career outcomes associated with the programs that are recommended to students, and this advice may be influenced by provincial occupational priorities or targets.

A downfall of structural theories, however, is that they do not account for clients’ ongoing changes in interests, values, and aptitudes, since the assessment of the client is only conducted in the beginning during the initial intake process, rather than on multiple occasions (Zunker, 2011). Similarly, the government arguably only takes a single snapshot of the students: When they graduate with their completed credential, their assessment has been completed and they are ready to participate in the work force. The dangerous assumption is that post-secondary education is not one of many, but the career intervention that results in job placements, and that graduates who secure
employment no longer require career development and support. In addition, programs, and in turn professionals, are being measured by success benchmarks such as the number of student placements in highly employable programs and graduate employment percentages and outcomes. Redekopp, Bezanson, and Dugas (2013) pointed out the flaws in these quantitative measures: “Immediate employment is not necessarily sustainable or quality employment; admission to training and education programs is a very poor predictor of successful completion” (p. 1). Therefore, the current measures of success do not allow professionals to convey the full scope of their influence and extent of their work with students. This is where professionals who regularly interact with students have the potential and vantage point to contribute to qualitative assessment that reflects a more accurate portrayal of students’ evolving professional aspirations.

Furthermore, irony lies in that post-secondary professionals may also be the very products that reinforce the government’s agenda, since most of them attained at minimum a post-secondary degree to secure their current roles. As such, professionals are likely to be accepting of the trait-and-factor and vocational choice theories and the role they play in informing current structures and practices, without questioning the constraints these theories also bring, or considering other alternative theories. If this is the case, then this study might assist professionals in challenging their underlying assumptions about career development – starting with soliciting their conceptions of the term “career” as one of the sub-questions – and to consider how their own context might differ from those students they serve.

2.5.2. Career Development as a Lifelong, Learning Process

Expanding on the trait and factor theory to conceptualize career development evolving over the course of one’s life, rather than a single point-in-time, is the life-span, life-space approach (Super, 1980, 1990; Super, Savickas & Super, 1996). Super’s (1957, 1980) developmental model is graphically represented by the Life-Career Rainbow in Figure 2, which outlines the dimensions of time (life-span) and space (life-space) within a person’s life and development over time. The notion of life-span forms the longitudinal dimension of the rainbow and proposes five life stages related to career development: growth (childhood ages 0-15), exploration (adolescence ages 15-25), establishment (adulthood ages 25-45), maintenance (middlescence ages 45-65), and disengagement (senescence ages 65 and beyond). At each stage, individuals have a set
of required tasks to accomplish. Providing that they are successful in completing the tasks, they are said to be “on-schedule or mature” (Harris-Bowlsbey, Suddarth, Reile, 2008, p. 4-14) and are more likely to succeed in consequent stages; if they are not, they are considered “off-schedule or immature” (p. 4-14) and may have difficulty proceeding with the latter stages. Super (1980, 1990) later acknowledged the linearity of the stage model, which was introduced at a time when career decisions were made early in one’s life and transitions between jobs were minimal. He modified the stages to emphasize flexibility for people to “reexplor[e], reestablish…and recycle…a mini-cycle, through one or more of the life-stage maxi-cycles” (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 134-5).

![Figure 2. Super’s Life-Career Rainbow](image)


Life-space forms the latitudinal dimension of the rainbow and denotes “the constellation of social positions occupied and roles enacted by an individual” (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 128). This notion was considered revolutionary at the time of its conception:

Too many career theories ignore the fact that while making a living people live a life. The work role, albeit a critical role in contemporary society, is only one among many roles that an individual occupies. A person’s multiple roles interact to reciprocally shape each other. Thus, individuals make decisions about work-role behavior, such as occupational choice and organizational commitment, within the circumstances imposed by the constellation of social positions that give meaning and focus to their lives. (p. 128)
The concepts of life-space and life-roles stress the importance of taking a holistic approach when examining clients and their circumstances, instead of simply addressing their concerns within the vocational domain. A final key component that contributes to both life-span and life-space is an individual’s self-concept. A product of both nature and nurture, self-concept refers to how one sees themselves in terms of their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses, which informs their occupational choices and their perceived ability to manage various life roles.

The happenstance learning theory also highlights the significance of development and learning in one’s career (Krumboltz, 2009, 2011; Krumboltz & Levin, 2004; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Originally coined the social learning theory of career decision making (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996), it draws from social learning, behaviourism, and cognitive information processing to emphasize the role of learning in reinforcing (both positively and negatively) behaviours that facilitate career exploration and decision making. Of interest, the reinforcement theory is also apparent in Super’s theory, where positive and negative reinforcements contribute to the formation of one’s self-concept. In his most recent publications, however, Krumboltz shifts his focus towards exploring the role of chance in career development, having recognized that previous theories do not fully address career uncertainties (Mitchell, Levin, Krumboltz, 1999, p. 115). As a result, the happenstance learning theory posits that

human behavior is the product of countless numbers of learning experiences made available by both planned and unplanned situations in which individuals find themselves...Every situation can be seen as presenting potential opportunities if individuals can recognize them and then take action to capitalize on them. The interaction of planned and unplanned actions in response to self-initiated and circumstantial situations is so complex that the consequences are virtually unpredictable and can best be labeled as happenstance. (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 135-6) Happenstance refers to having an attitude to plan, while remaining open to possibilities that may change one’s plans. Krumboltz (2009) believes indecision is acceptable and ought to be reframed as open-mindedness. To recognize career opportunities in planned and unplanned situations, Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz (1999) recommend developing five qualities: Curiosity to explore new learning opportunities; persistence to endure hardships and persevere; flexibility to remain open minded; optimism to perceive new opportunities as achievable; and risk taking to act despite uncertain outcomes (Mitchell,
Levin, Krumboltz, 1999). Those who possess these qualities should remain adaptable and resilient in times of change and uncertainty.

Super’s and Krumboltz’s theories add sophistication to their career theorist predecessors. The life-span, life-space approach contributes “a longitudinal view of careers to supplement the cross-sectional view of occupations” (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 122). Patton and McMahon (2014) believed the happenstance learning theory contributed to the advancement of career development theories and promoted the integration of theory and practice, such as designing interventions appropriate for client needs and implementing assessments that truly measure client success. At the same time, Super’s theory was said to be too rigid (despite his later efforts to enhance its flexibility) and lacks cultural sensitivity (Leung, 2008). Both theories are considered “segmental” (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 126), meaning they are formed by fusing multiple theories in a rather loose manner. Therefore, as Krumboltz (2009) advised, further research is required to cohere the theoretical components in a more unified manner.

**Implications for Current Study**

Both life-span, life space and planned happenstance theories are applicable to the study at hand. Super’s (1980, 1990) and Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) life-role concept was explored through one of the sub-questions: “How do professionals see themselves as individuals as having an impact on student career development?” In addition to their professional roles, participants were asked to consider other life-roles they play outside of work and ponder how these roles might inform their approach to help students with their career development. The consideration of this would corroborate Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) notion that an individual’s life-roles “interact to reciprocally shape each other” (p. 128). Furthermore, how professionals perceive their own strengths and capabilities – their self-concept – affects their beliefs in their ability to conduct their roles, and in turn provide career assistance as part of their professional capacity. This study extensively explored professionals’ conceptions of their roles – both professional and personal – and each role’s contribution to student career development. It was anticipated that participants’ conceptions would inform their practice.

Incorporating the idea of planned happenstance could help research participants recognize the role that chance encounters and events play in shaping their own careers.
The very act of participants pursuing a profession in post-secondary education exemplified happenstance; this is because post-secondary institutions are primarily seen as a place of education, rather than a place of employment. Furthermore, post-secondary roles are not regarded as typical occupations as compared to traditional roles such as doctors and teachers. In fact, it is unlikely for individuals to realize the possibility of working in colleges and universities until their undergraduate studies, when they interact with professionals who work in these settings (Tull, Hirt, & Saunders, 2009). Krumboltz’s happenstance concept can offer a lens to explore participants’ perspectives on their planned and unplanned actions – as well as the interaction of these actions – in relation to their work and approach. Through professionals’ intentional, planned actions, such as carrying out their regular responsibilities, they may encounter unplanned, chance opportunities to offer career assistance to students. While meeting with a student to discuss graduation requirements (a planned event), an academic advisor, for instance, might be asked to contribute her thoughts on the student’s job prospects (an unplanned opportunity) and in response shares her perspective based on her experience working with previous students in similar circumstances. When professionals recognize every interaction with students has the potential to become a career conversation, they become intentional with their career influence and in turn amplify their impact on student career and institutional success.

2.5.3. Career Development as Integrative Life Design

The career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2011, 2013) brings together “the best concepts and research from the 20th century career models for use in 21st century” (Savickas, 2005, p. 2) by extracting from differentialism, developmentalism, constructionism, and contextualist perspectives. Savickas believed the traditional theories can be amended to maintain their relevance in the present. Notable examples include repurposing the RIASEC model as an initial assessment tool to explore occupations, instead of being used primarily to predict person-environment fit. Another example is interpreting the five life-span stages to explain the life cycle of a single job, as opposed to career progression over one’s lifetime. These examples illustrate the theory’s assumptions that:

- individuals can attribute different meanings from the same experience or context due to their past experiences, relationships, and worldviews;
• similarly, individuals also impose meanings on their behaviour in life and career, which allows them to develop a sense of purpose in their work;
• a pattern known as “a life theme” (Savickas, 2005, p. 2) may emerge, providing possible explanations to people’s rationale for their behaviours and actions; and
• in turn, life themes guide how people express themselves at work on a day-to-day basis, and managing their self-expressions is known as career adaptation.

The theory holds three central perspectives on the self: self as actor, self as agent, and self as author. The actor role begins when infants learn to develop their identities and roles based on social and familial constructs. As they progress to school age, they adapt to their peers and situations and assume an agent role, striving for independence and regulating their own behaviour. In adulthood, they integrate their action and agency to author a coherent, biographical story that draws from life themes. An individual’s life story, as well as the “micronarratives” (Savickas, 2011, p. 180) they elect to tell, and the manner they reconstruct these narratives, illuminates individual career choices and the meaning and rationale that guide these choices.

Likewise, coherent career practice (Magnusson, 2008, 2014; Magnusson & Redekopp, 2011; Redekopp, 2014) integrates key components including career development, counselling, educational, and positive psychology theories; it heeds Krumboltz’s (2009) call mentioned earlier to integrate the use of relevant theories in a methodical fashion. The framework tackles career issues that cohere, or “stick together,” (p. 176) as problems do not occur in isolation, but rather, likely in conjunction with other issues. Magnusson and Redekopp (2011) identified three fundamental tasks for career practice in the 21st century: (a) to pinpoint precisely the career issues clients need to resolve; (b) to propose and implement interventions addressing these issues; and (c) to promote clients’ “career resourcefulness, capacity, and self-sufficiency” (p. 176). The mastery of these fundamental tasks depends on four core elements:

• Career literacy refers to the attainment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to seek and make sense of information related to career development and management; this notion extends Parsons’ (1909) view of
conducting in-depth labour market research as it implies the development of metacognition and self-regulation skills.

- **Career gumption** describes “the energy, momentum, motivation or desire to engage in career development” (p. 177); this mirrors Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz’s (1999) emphasis of developing persistence, optimism, and risk taking to recognize career opportunities in planned and unplanned circumstances.

- **Career context** delineates the relationship between one’s perception of their immediate environment and of the larger world within which they operate; this relates to Holland’s (1959, 1996, 1997) theory aiming to match people to environments.

- **Career integrity** is achieved when one incorporates multiple factors (personal, social, societal) into making life and career decisions so that they can act in congruence to their identity and roles; life roles, of course, is a key concept in Super’s (1980, 1990; Super, Savickas & Super, 1996) approach.

These core elements, interdependent of each other, must “cohere, or hang together” (Magnusson & Redekopp, 2011, p. 178) within the dynamic system; a metaprocess known as career integration. Everyday experiences bring change and when one element changes, all other elements are impacted as a result. Therefore, by identifying a client’s core issue and the element from which it originates, interventions can be used to address the very issue. Similar to the career construction theory, the role of story and micronarratives are pivotal in uncovering issues within the core elements and how helpers can assist clients in living a coherent, integrated life.

Evidently, both theories and their components are well-grounded in literature; but they are also different from their predecessors as their goal was to reveal an individual’s uniqueness rather than their similarity to others (Savickas, 2005). Stories are used as a tool to draw out life themes, patterns, and issues, empowering clients to engage in self-reflection to “shape a coherent narrative identity and discern work’s personal meaning...[and] in doing so, a life-career becomes self-directed, self-managed, and self-constructed” (Hartung, 2013, p. 44-5). However, a criticism on stories, and constructionism for that matter, could be that they rely on the storyteller’s subjective interpretation of the truth, which may be far from reality (Crotty, 1998). In addition, as Magnusson and Redekopp (2011) identified, coherent career practice evolves as they
attribute existing theories and interventions to each core element. The individual elements warrant their own research, while the interdependency and interaction between the elements also requires further investigation in order to clarify how the theory pinpoints clients’ real issues and how it promotes self-efficiency. It too can be considered a “segmental” (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 126) theory through the infusion of multiple theories.

**Implications for Current Study**

Career construction theory and coherent career practice emphasize the importance of listening to a client’s story, as well as how they narrate their own story in order to understand the personal meanings that the client assigned to their experiences. Giving clients venue and voice to tell their story is key to understanding the meaning and purpose they attribute to their role and profession:

The essential meaning of a career, and the dynamics of its construction, are revealed in self-defining stories about the vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas that an individual has faced. In chronicling the recursive interplay between self and society, career stories explain why individuals make the choices that they do and the private meaning that guides these choices. (Savickas, 2005, p. 3)

In this study, the ways participants told their stories, from describing their entry to work in post-secondary education to identifying their own career influencers, provided insight into their beliefs, assumptions, and values; these elements, in turn, form the context that guides their day-to-day approach with students and elucidates why these professionals are regarded as career influencers by students.

As mentioned, numerous studies indicated that students are more likely to seek career advice from post-secondary professionals who work outside of campus career centres (AlMa’wali, 2017; Amrein, 2013; Brainstorm Strategy Group, 2017; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Environics Research Group, 2011; Imbimbo, Nina, Stein, 2005; Kranzow, Foote, & Hinkle, 2015; Noel-Levitiz, Inc., 2011; Rafuse & Lanning, 2016; Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010). Supporting this also are Magnusson (2008) and Redekopp (2014), who have found that many people will never meet with a career professional. Therefore, empowering professionals, such as faculty members, academic advisors, and librarians with a comprehensive career framework to inform their helping approach – and in turn promoting their own career literacy and enabling them to become
more intentional about helping students with their career development – might be more effective and powerful in student outreach due to these professionals’ regular interactions with students. Coherent career practice, for instance, might help professionals evoke personal narratives (e.g., a time when they demonstrated career gumption) they can use as examples when helping students with their career development.

2.5.4. Summary of Career Development Theories

Career development theories provide explanations to the ways people conceive their career and life experiences; these conceptions influence their thinking and actions. The theories in this section described career development in three themes: as person-environment interactions, as a lifelong, learning process, and as integrative life design. Parsons’ (1909) trait and factor theory and Holland’s (1959, 1996, 1997) vocational choice theory are rooted in the belief that for an individual to experience career success, there should be a match between their skills, interests, and preferences with the qualities their occupation and work environment can provide. The life-span, life-space approach originated by Super (1980, 1990; Super, Savickas & Super, 1996) proposes that an individual’s career develops over their lifetime and through various life-roles. His theory is complemented by Krumboltz’s (2009, 2011; Krumboltz & Levin, 2004; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996; Mitchell, Levin, Krumboltz, 1999) notion of planned happenstance, where planned and unplanned events occur throughout one’s life, presenting opportunities for the individual to make the most out of them. Lastly, drawing from various career theories and models, Savickas’ (2005, 2011, 2013) career construction theory and Magnusson and Redekopp’s (2011; Magnusson, 2008, 2014; Redekopp, 2014) coherent career practice provide frameworks to assist individuals in composing and telling their life stories and micronarratives, and in turn promoting personal agency and self-reliance. For the purpose of this study, career development theories provided a valuable lens to explain how post-secondary professionals make sense of their career and life experiences, and how their understanding of these experiences informs their approach in helping students with their careers.
2.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter began with an examination of career centres on post-secondary campuses: their emergence, evolving mandate and consequent activities, and overall effectiveness in meeting student needs. Through this examination, a service delivery gap was realized, since students tend to seek career advice first from professionals working outside of career centres. The attention then shifted to these professionals, in terms of their professional roles, and the career activities they conduct within these roles. The conceptions they hold about their work and influence on student career development was identified as the focus of this research study, which informed the central research question: “How do post-secondary education professionals conceive their influence in student career development?” Career development theories informed the theoretical lens chosen to address the central question by providing explanations to how individuals come to understand and make meaning out of their experiences. The theories selected depicted career development as interactions between a person and their environment; as a lifelong, learning process; and as integrative life design.

The next chapter on methodology outlines the research methods employed in this study. Following a justification on employing a qualitative research design with grounded theory components, the research site and participants are described. Then, the data collection and analysis processes are discussed, and the chapter ends with considering trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitations in the study.
Chapter 3.

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how post-secondary professionals conceptualize their influence in student career development. Understanding their conceptions to informally serve as career influencers would not only help professionals enhance their engagement to their roles; it would also enable institutions to mobilize the talent of these professionals to promote student career success. To this end, the study addressed the research question and its four sub-questions: How do post-secondary education (PSE) professionals conceive their influence in student career development?

- How do PSE professionals conceptualize the term “career”?
- How do PSE professionals see their role as having an impact on student career development?
- How do PSE professionals see themselves as individuals as having an impact on student career development?
- What resources and/or competencies do PSE professionals believe are important in furthering their impact on student career development?

This chapter details the study’s methodological approach. It begins by providing rationale for selecting a qualitative design, in particular, the grounded theory tradition. The research site and sample are then featured, followed by a researcher positionality statement. Next, data collection, the consideration for ethical treatment of participants, and data analysis are described in thorough detail. Finally, the chapter concludes with identifying issues of trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitations to the study.

3.2. Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

There are numerous reasons why a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study. In general, scholars in research methodology (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Boudah,
2011; Brewerton & Millward, 2001; Cassell & Symon, 1994; Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) describe qualitative research as inquiry that

- focuses on context: Qualitative researchers gather data within natural settings where the phenomena take place, and by talking to and observing participants.

- recognizes the researcher as the key instrument: Unlike quantitative research where instruments and statistical analysis are used, in qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument in gathering data. Of importance is that the researcher reflects participants’ perspectives rather than that of their own (Mitchell, 1977). Therefore, the researcher needs to consider their role and discuss how their background and experiences might shape the process and outcome of the study.

- adopts an emergent design: Qualitative research plans remain flexible to account for possible shifts and changes, which may involve revising initial research questions to better elicit participants’ detailed accounts of the research problem.

- employs inductive and deductive logic: In the data analysis process, patterns emerge in an inductively bottom-up manner, generating categories and themes. Then, the themes are reviewed in a deductive, top-down fashion to determine if further data needs to be gathered to support each theme. It is also possible that both inductive and deductive processes take place concurrently.

- provides a holistic account: The researcher uses data to present a comprehensive picture of the phenomena – one that reflects participants’ multiple perspectives, highlights key factors at play, and proposes possible relationships and connections.

The study’s epistemological approach is grounded in constructivism, suggesting that it exhibits these qualitative research features. Constructivism asserts that reality is constructed and that individuals generate multiple realities based on their worldviews and meanings they assign objects, people, and experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012;
Blumer, 1969; Cassell & Symon, 1994; Crotty, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Young & Collin, 2004). This assertion conveys the pivotal role of context in the meaning making process, emphasizing the need for researchers to study in the participants’ natural settings. In this study, the natural setting is the institution that employs these professionals. A description of the research site is outlined later in the chapter.

Being the researcher – the key research instrument – and also an employee of the same institution, I recognize the need to practice researcher reflexivity to be mindful of my context, potential biases, and assumptions that might influence the study. As such, two measures were taken. First, my professional background and researcher assumptions are discussed later in this chapter in the section titled, “Researcher Positionality”. Secondly, memos were composed throughout the research process to capture my impressions and thoughts, so that biases can be identified and kept in check. By the same token, these very assumptions and biases also contributed to my unique perspective as the researcher; this, I believe, resulted in a deeper, nuanced understanding of the data, as memo entries regularly discussed how my context and point of view influenced my interpretation of participants’ perspectives.

Finally, to provide a holistic account that is reflective of the participants’ experiences, the research questions and data must drive the research design, and not the other way around (Creswell, 2014). This means that as data is collected and analyzed, the design must remain flexible to incorporate adjustments proposed by the patterns, categories, and themes emerging from the data. For this reason, the grounded theory tradition was the chosen methodology for this study.

3.3. Rationale for Grounded Theory Methodology

In this section, a background on the grounded theory methodology is provided prior to justifying its suitability for this study. The sections on data collection and analysis also discuss how grounded theory features are applied to these processes.

3.3.1. History and Overview

Grounded theory was developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) while conducting field research on dying patients in hospitals. To understand patients’
perception of their pending death, they collected data through interviews with patients, caregivers, and staff members (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), generating a theory of the awareness of dying. The theory was firmly grounded in the research data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which led to the realization of the methodology.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) documented the grounded theory approach in their seminal piece, *The discovery of grounded theory*. The book was written at a time when the scientific method – grounded within positivist (or objectivist) epistemology – was deemed the approach to assume (Charmaz, 2006; Chell, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2012) and quantitative approaches, firmly based on the same set of beliefs, were favoured within the field of sociology: “quantitative methodologists reigned over departments, journal editorial boards, and funding agencies…[and the] discipline marched toward defining research in quantitative terms” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). With grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) challenged the underlying positivistic assumptions of quantitative research, while proposing a qualitative methodology comprised of systematic strategies. Grounded theory is distinct in that:

- data collection and analysis processes take place simultaneously;
- categories and themes should emerge only from the data and no other sources;
- a method involving making comparisons during each stage of the analysis – known as constant comparative analysis – (a) confirms the accuracy of evidence, (b) establishes empirical generalizations to “delimit a grounded theory’s boundaries of applicability” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 24), (c) specifies the study’s unit of analysis, (d) verifies and (e) generates theory;
- the theory generated undergoes ongoing development throughout the process; and
- the practice of memo writing is key to help define categories and their properties, and to elaborate on relationship categories, while identifying gaps.

These features together form a strong case in establishing the credibility and legitimacy of qualitative research, and as Charmaz (2006) suggests, debunk the notions that
qualitative research is unsystematic, less rigorous compared to quantitative research, and unable to generate theory.

A central tenant of grounded theory is that Glaser and Strauss (1967) recognize the unlikelihood of separating researcher experience and prior knowledge from the research process:

The core categories can emerge in the sociologist’s mind from his reading, life experiences, research and scholarship…no sociologist can possibly erase from his mind all the theory he knows before he begins his research…the trick is to line up what one takes as theoretically possible or probable with what one is finding in the field. (p. 253)

Data, in this sense, can incorporate a researcher’s existing understanding of theories and literature related to the phenomenon. A strength of grounded theory is that it accommodates multiple data sources such as interviews, observations, and memos, etc., as long as the researcher can justify the source in generating a theory to address the research questions (Goulding, 2005).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) recognize grounded theory as “work-in-process” (p. 9). The methodology has continued to evolve as the theorists diverged in their conceptual ways. Glaser contends with the earlier interpretations emphasizing grounded theory as “a method of discovery, treated categories as emergent from the data, relied on direct and…narrow empiricism” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 8), while Strauss (1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) focuses on developing the data and theory verification processes, which have been well-received as they provide a “clear, philosophical base for theory development” (McCallin, 2009, para. 5). As a result, Strauss and Corbin’s version is seen to be more commonly adopted in the literature and instructional materials on research methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Boudah, 2011; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013, 2014; Crotty, 2013); their version is also adopted for this study.

3.3.2. The Theory Generation Process

As mentioned, grounded theory’s main goal is to generate or discover a theory on a phenomenon in question based on the experiences of the research participants. The purpose of theory development within a specific context might be to explain practice, modify or extend current theory, or inform further research. This process
consists of “a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24), and involves three stages of coding:

Researchers typically begin with open coding—that is, coding data for major categories of information. From this type of coding, axial coding emerges—that is, identification of one open coding category as the ‘core phenomenon.’ This process gives way to causal conditions (factors that cause the ‘core phenomenon’), strategies (actions taken in response to the ‘core phenomenon’), contextual and intervening conditions (situational factors that influence the strategies), and consequences (outcomes as a result of the strategies). The final step in the process is selective coding; that is, the researcher develops propositions or hypothesis that interrelate the categories or assembles a story line that describes the interrelationships among categories…the theory developed by the researcher is articulated toward the end of the study. (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 33)

The coding process begins as soon as the data collection commences. The researcher engages in constant comparative analysis, continuously evaluating the code classification and relevance of categories, assessing the need to gather additional data to elaborate and differentiate categories – a process known as theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical saturation is achieved when “no new or relevant data seems to emerge regarding a category; the category development is dense, insofar as all of the paradigm elements are accounted for and the relationships between categories are well established and validated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 188). Finally, most grounded theory research can be graphically represented in a schematic diagram to succinctly communicate the relationships between key concepts (Boudah, 2011). The theory generation process as applied to the study are discussed in detail later in the chapter as part of the data analysis process.

Grounded theory has renewed interest and confidence within the research community to use qualitative methodologies due to its high level of rigour (Charmaz, 2006). Its systematic approach, complete with explicit guidelines and processes challenges the assumptions that qualitative research cannot be logical and theory-generative (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 2012). It allows researchers to communicate their process and rationale in an evidence-based approach. Researchers are held accountable to continuously reflect and document categorical decisions to promote transparency in both process and outcome.
3.3.3. Applications

Due to its origin in a hospital setting, grounded theory has garnered adoption in the medical, health, nursing and psychiatric fields (Barker, Jackson, & Stevenson, 1999; Beal, 1999; Scharer, 2000; Wiener & Wysmans, 1990). More recently, grounded theory has been applied to library studies (Faggiolani, 2011; Mellon, 2015; Nguyen, 2015), learning strategies and assessments (Alonso-Diaz, Yuste-Tosina, 2015), and professional practice and identity development in a variety of fields including performing arts (Fletcher-Watson, 2013; Parker, 2014), education (Derbyshire, Machin, & Crozier, 2015; Lane, 2015), and counselling (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014; Parker, Chang, Corthell, Walsh, Brack, & Grubbs, 2014).

While there is a growing body of research on post-secondary professionals that favours the use of qualitative methodologies such as case studies (Beer, Rodriguez, Taylor, Martinez-Jones, Griffin, Smith, Lamar, & Anaya, 2015; Cooper & Stevens, 2006), phenomenology (Harrison, 2014), narrative (Culter, 2003), and grounded theory (Haley, Jaeger, Hawes, & Johnson, 2015), research topics are mostly concerned with how professionals can improve the practice of their formal roles. Since professionals who serve as career influencers do so informally, their background, perspectives, and motivations need to be illuminated prior to helping them enhance their informal role as career influencers. Grounded theory, known for its effectiveness in examining areas with little or no previous research and theories (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Hutchinson, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), is the appropriate methodology to use in this study as the concept of career influencers in post-secondary is remains a largely undiscovered phenomenon.

3.4. The Research Site

The study took place at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), a regional teaching-intensive university in British Columbia, Canada. KPU was selected as the research site because (a) its mission to help students “achieve success…necessary for good citizenship and rewarding careers” (KPU, 2013, p. 4) demonstrated the institution’s desire to promote student career development and success; (b) its evolution from its college roots to a teaching university facilitated an intriguing research backdrop that participants may allude to when discussing their experience and relating to the
institutional context, which was the case; and (c) it is the primary institution where the researcher works. With four campuses distributed in the province’s Lower Mainland region, KPU has over 20,000 students annually and employs over 1,400 faculty and staff members (KPU, 2018a). Participants in this study consisted of professionals working at KPU who served as career influencers, defined earlier as individuals who informally provide career-related advice, guidance, and/or counselling. Appendix A features a list of potential participants whose professional roles fit this definition.

3.5. Research Positionality (Theoretical Sensitivity)

Patton (2015) advocates for qualitative researchers to demonstrate reflexivity throughout the research process: “The credibility of qualitative inquiry is so closely connected to the credibility of the person…that reflexivity…is a window into the thinking processes that are the bedrock of qualitative analysis” (p. 700). In grounded theory, reflexivity is referred to as theoretical sensitivity, which refers to “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). Theoretical sensitivity describes the researcher’s awareness and knowledge about their area of research, which ties back to their credibility.

My professional work in post-secondary education began 13 years ago when I assumed a role overseeing the new student orientation and transition programs in my alma mater, ensuring student volunteers were equipped with the skills and knowledge to excel in their roles. Training involved educational aspects (e.g., how to conduct a campus tour) and I made sure volunteers remained committed throughout their term. My key strategy involved connecting their roles to their personal goals, which were often tied to their professional aspirations. I observed that doing so enhanced their performance and satisfaction with their volunteer experience, which in turn gave them confidence and hope that they can achieve their aspirations. As a result of this experience, I discovered the possibility of working in post-secondary education and remained in the institution serving in other capacities: campus and residence life, student success and engagement, academic and career advising, and university advancement. Regardless of where I worked and the role I served, I maintained my strategy to help students connect their present circumstance to their future aspirations. This approach continues in my
current role as an educational studies instructor, specializing in university transition courses at KPU, the site for this study.

The professional narrative above portrays my philosophy and approach as a career influencer, highlighting my preconceived notions about effective helping relationships. Inherently, I may assume that establishing personal connections is key to successful helper-student relationships, and that helpers should derive an intrinsic sense of satisfaction from helping students. These assumptions do not necessarily hold true and in fact can be problematic. In the former, though building connections is crucial, a helper such as a counsellor may need to set clear boundaries to be effective in their roles (Martin, 1983; Murdock, 2009; Young, 2009). The latter is idealistic, as not all helpers are likely to find satisfaction and meaning from their roles. As Super’s (1980, 1990) theory posits, individuals may engage in other activities providing them with satisfaction they do not gain from their occupation.

Being aware of these assumptions and their influence on me as a researcher, as well as documenting them as reflective memos throughout the research process, has helped keep my biases in check when interviewing participants. In one particular scenario, when I realized a participant held an opposing worldview from mine, I was able to recognize the difference and not react emotionally on the spot (e.g., asked them leading questions or expressed my disagreement with their viewpoint). Instead I remained curious, continued with the interview protocol, and reflected on the experience in my journal afterwards. In my reflection, I considered our difference in perspectives and what I needed to do as a researcher to honour the participant’s viewpoint, in addition to the strategies I already employed, such as composing interview summaries and sharing interview transcripts. Taking these measures preserved both my relationship with the participant and the integrity of the data.

3.6. Data Collection

The data collection process was divided into two stages. The first stage consisted of implementing a student poll to identify career influencers at the institution; the second stage was conducting interviews with professionals serving in these roles whom students saw as career influencers.
3.6.1. Stage One: “Who Influences your Career?” A Student Poll

Prior to understanding the experiences of career influencers, it was important to ask, “Who do students talk with about their careers in at the institution?” As well, since the definition of career influencers alludes to the informality of the role, a mechanism was needed to initially identify candidates for the study – that is, professionals who may informally influence students’ careers. A poll, informed by Redekopp and Austen’s (2015) community helper recruitment approach, was designed to serve as this mechanism and is available in Appendix B.

The poll was administered in January 2017 to 104 students taking a course on job search techniques and professional readiness. Since the course was offered at three of KPU’s four campuses and attracted students in various years of study and disciplines (Arts, Business, and Science), it was inferred that the professional roles identified by these students would be reasonably representative of the KPU student population. Students were invited to voluntarily complete this poll during class; those who chose to participate provided their oral consent. The data was anonymous and was only used to identify potential interviewees.

In addition to soliciting student demographic information, such as their major and year of study, the poll posed two main questions. The first question asked students to consider, in theory, the professionals they would turn to for career help, while the second question asked from whom they have actually sought career help. Students chose from a list of professional roles informed by Fee and Forsyth’s (2010) student engagement cycle stages and could contribute additional roles in the “Other” option. To qualify for the study, a professional role must be “checked off” in both questions; that is, students not only indicated they would meet with this professional role for career help, but they had actually taken action to do so. Compiling the poll entries generated the professional roles (checked boxes and bolded) in Table 1 who were invited to participate in the study.
Table 1. Results from Student Poll on Career Influencers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I were to seek career help from someone at KPU tomorrow, I would meet with a/an…</th>
<th>During my time as a KPU applicant and/or student, I have already sought career help from a/an…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Aboriginal services coordinator</td>
<td>☐ Aboriginal services coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ academic advisor</td>
<td>☑ academic advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ admissions advisor/coordinator</td>
<td>☐ admissions advisor/coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ alumni services officer</td>
<td>☐ alumni services officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ assessment and testing coordinator</td>
<td>☐ assessment and testing coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ career services coordinator/advisor</td>
<td>☑ career services coordinator/advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ counsellor (personal or career)</td>
<td>☑ counsellor (personal or career)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ disability advisor</td>
<td>☐ disability advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ financial aid and awards coordinator</td>
<td>☐ financial aid and awards coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ instructor/professor</td>
<td>☑ instructor/professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ interfaith centre staff member</td>
<td>☐ interfaith centre staff member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ learning strategist/facilitator</td>
<td>☑ learning strategist/facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ librarian</td>
<td>☑ librarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ orientation leader</td>
<td>☑ orientation leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ recreation coordinator</td>
<td>☑ recreation coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ registrar’s office staff member</td>
<td>☑ registrar’s office staff member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ student club executive</td>
<td>☐ student club executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ student life coordinator</td>
<td>☑ student life coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ student recruiter</td>
<td>☑ student recruiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ student society staff member</td>
<td>☐ student society staff member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ university administrator (e.g., dean, department chair)</td>
<td>☑ university administrator (e.g., dean, department chair)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ volunteer services coordinator</td>
<td>☑ volunteer services coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑ Other Peers, Internet, HR Managers</td>
<td>Other Peers, Internet, Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.2. Research Participants

Of those invited to participate in the study, a total of 16 individuals originally took part in the study; however, data from one participant was omitted since the person did not complete the full interview process despite multiple attempts to contact them. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants under their pseudonyms, indicating their gender, employee type, and role within Fee and Forsyth’s (2010) student engagement
cycle stages of access, transition, persistence, and graduation. Due to the study’s qualitative nature, the resultant sample size of 15 participants was deemed sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as themes and categories were fully developed. The theory development process is described later in the data analysis section.

Table 2. Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Employee Type</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacques</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shayan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6.3. Sampling Strategies

Purposive sampling strategy, deemed appropriate for qualitative research (Boudah, 2011; Patton, 2015), was employed where a list of individuals who work in these identified professional roles and their contact information was generated from reviewing public KPU webpages. These individuals received an invitational email, through university-wide and departmental mail lists, describing the purpose of the study and soliciting their involvement (Appendix C). Snowball sampling was also used by asking participants to tap into their network and recommend colleagues they consider as career influencers to participate in this study.
3.6.4. Stage Two: Interviews with Career Influencers

The interview is the primary data collection method for this study. As expressed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), an interview is an "attempt to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject's experiences, [and] to uncover their lived world" (p. 1). It is designed to draw out participants' perspective, allowing them to describe their experience in their own words. Therefore, it is an instrument well-suited for grounded theory studies since the methodology maintains that the data should be derived directly from the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Interviews should also be seen as conversations, a two-way exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Patton, 2015). In the case of this study, the interview method allowed participants to seek clarification about the study, and for me as the researcher to pose probing questions to deepen my understanding of their point of view.

**Interview Questions and Pilot Interviews**

The research questions and sub-questions provided a framework to devise interview questions; each sub-question served as a heading for each cluster of interview questions. Two pilot interviews were conducted with KPU colleagues who were pursuing graduate degrees and had experience conducting qualitative research interviews. These interviews yielded two recommendations to: (a) solicit participants' career and role information prior to introducing the definition of career influencer and their self-perception as a career influencer, and (b) emphasize the difference between question clusters two (how participants see their role contribute to student career development) and three (how they see themselves impact student career development). Both recommendations were implemented for the actual interviews. The final list of interview questions is available in Appendix D.

**Location**

The interviews were held in the participant’s office, as it is important for the location to be within the participants’ natural setting to “allow for complex social phenomena to be viewed holistically” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 36). As such, observational memos were composed to capture my impression of their physical space. If participants did not have an office, my office was used as a backup location.
Interview Process

Data was gathered from participants through two one-on-one interviews between February and May 2017. Prior to the first interview, participants were given the research questions and sub-questions in advance, providing them with time and space to fully contemplate their experience and perspective, in order to promote data accuracy. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for this study; I used the pre-determined questions to open the dialogue and added follow up questions and comments throughout the conversation to explore topics and themes further. Interview probes included and were not limited to: having participants illustrate their responses with examples from their lives; asking them to discuss the significance of an idea they shared in their personal, departmental, and/or institutional contexts; and inviting them to make connections between responses to different questions.

The first interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Participants were asked to describe their background and role, and if they considered whether or not they regard themselves as career influencers within their context. They then answered questions pertaining to each research sub-question: their definition of the term “career”, how they believe their role and themselves as individuals contributes to student career development, and resources they require to be successful as career influencers. At the conclusion of the interview, they were asked if their participation in the interview helped them generate insights related to their career, role, and approach. After the interview, summaries were composed within one week to capture participants’ main points, along with follow up questions that surfaced from the interview. Appendix E features a sample interview summary.

The second interview took place six to eight weeks after the first interview and lasted between 20 to 60 minutes. Interview summaries were sent to the participants prior to the interview, thus allowing them to review their summary ahead of time. The interview began with soliciting participants’ feedback on the summary and making revisions when necessary. Participants were then asked if they had experienced any shifts in thinking and/or practice since their first interview, and whether or not their participation in this study had changed their perspective on their career, role, and approach. Schön (1987) describes the shifting process as reflection-on-action, where professionals consider how their practice can be improved after the fact: “We reflect on
action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome” (p. 26). In this sense, the first interview held a secondary purpose of helping professionals think and talk about the conceptions of their role in student career development. In doing so, they might have generated ideas to enhance their practice, and even implemented these ideas prior to the second interview. Therefore, it was important to also note these shifts in thought and action if they had taken place as a result of the first interview, which would have implications for professional practice and is discussed in the Discussion Chapter. Similar to the first interview, they were also asked to consider if the second interview helped them come to any revelation about themselves. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and presented with a gift card of their choice.

**Memos**

The practice of memo writing is critical in grounded theory to formulate categories, their definitions, and their relationships to one another. As such, three types of memos were gathered throughout the research process. Field memos consisted of detailed information pertaining to the data collection process, such as “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 121) describing an interview’s “physical environment…social environment, verbal and nonverbal interactions, activities, etc.” (Boudah, 2011, p. 134). Neglecting to reflect on the interview “is to seriously undermine the rigor of qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 473). Method memos documented and defended the use of grounded theory as a methodology and changes that took place during the study, such as the redefinition of a category when new data was introduced; the use of this memo type is discussed further in the next section on data analysis. Reflective memos were composed to assess how the research was progressing, successes and challenges, and anything else that contributed to my development as a researcher.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ensuring participant safety and confidentiality is paramount to any research project. By studying my own organization, I recognized I was also engaging in what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describe as “backyard research”. The dual role of researcher-employee can be ambiguous at times for the participants as well as the
researcher (Creswell, 2014). Participants may not be as forthcoming sharing their thoughts with a colleague who is conducting research as they may fear that their views may be judged or disclosed. There may also be power imbalances between researcher and participants.

To address this, consent was obtained at the first interview and confirmed again at the second interview. Prior to the first interview, participants were asked to review and sign a letter of informed consent (Appendix F). The letter explained that the study was deemed by both Simon Fraser University (SFU) and KPU’s Research Ethics Boards as a minimal risk study, meaning that there might be risks involved for participating in this study, yet the risks were not greater than those the participants may encounter in their everyday life. It also stated that while participants were asked to share their personal experiences and information, they were not required to respond to any question they felt would cause them discomfort. Efforts were made to ensure participants understood their right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study anytime; it was reinforced to them that their refusal or withdrawal would not result in any negative consequences to our professional relationship and/or their employment at KPU. At the end of each interview, I checked in with them to ensure they felt okay with the interview process and the way they were treated as participants. As a precaution, I included counselling information and resources in case a referral is required. My contact information was also shared in the consent form for participants to contact me with questions and/or concerns.

3.7.1. Participant Confidentiality and Data Security

All interviews were audio recorded; participants were informed of this at the beginning of the first interview and were reminded again at the second interview. They were also given an option to participate without recording their interviews. Recordings were transcribed by Transcription Ninjas, a professional academic transcription service, which included a signed confidentiality agreement (Appendix G), while participant names were also removed from the data provided.

The letter of informed consent also detailed my plan to keep data and participant information private. To protect participant identities, identifiers such as names and email addresses were removed from all data documents (e.g., audio recordings, transcripts,
and field notes) and assigned a pseudonym. Data was stored (password-protected), analyzed, and reported by the participant's pseudonym. Paper data, such as handwritten interview notes, were transcribed within 24 hours after the composition of the document and saved electronically; then the physical paper copy was destroyed.

A password-protected master file containing identifying information (e.g., names and contact information) linking to pseudonyms was created and stored separately from the data. The data was kept in a locked office at KPU and password-protected on a computer hard drive. Only my supervisors and I had access to the materials. Data such as audio recordings and transcripts were scheduled for deletion six months after the approval of this thesis dissertation. Participant quotes featured in this dissertation or in future journal articles and conference presentations were displayed under the participant's pseudonym.

3.8. Data Analysis

3.8.1. Data Management

The research data was organized in two ways to facilitate the analysis process and for the ease of returning to particular passages and ideas. Data was first arranged by participant pseudonym, so I could generate a holistic view of each interviewee's perspective and monitor any shifts in their thinking between the first and second interviews. Secondly, data was also organized by sub-question to facilitate a cross-individual analysis to address each sub-question.

As mentioned in the previous section, data was maintained primarily in electronic format. Physical notes taken during interviews were typed, and paper copies destroyed thereafter. A backup copy of all electronic files was saved weekly into a password-protected hard drive only accessible by me and my supervisors. A site map and a log of document updates was maintained to ensure files were organized and easily searchable for the data analysis process.
3.8.2. Coding Process

In grounded theory, the coding process begins as soon as the data collection commences. Each interview was transcribed shortly after its completion word for word, in order to capture the participant’s experience in their words; keywords and phrases were also used as in vivo codes, which are discussed later. Prior to coding, as recommended by Clarke (2005), I read the transcript in its entirety to form an initial impression of the interview, recording keywords, themes, and general thoughts that surfaced during the reading.

Open Coding

Also known as initial coding, open coding is the first stage of analysis where data is “broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). I followed Charmaz’s (2008) and Saldaña’s (2013) advice to examine the transcript line-by-line to become familiar with the nuances in the data, while coding words, phrases, and sentences that help address the research question and sub-questions. On occasion, in vivo codes were used to preserve participants’ description of their perspective, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. For example, a participant described himself as a “guilty peddler of the designation” within his profession. The phrase was used as an in vivo code to highlight the tension professionals often face in imposing their own belief and experience to help students achieve career success, leading to the realization and another in vivo code of “what worked for me then might not work for students now”.

Microsoft Word’s “Insert Comment” option was used to facilitate the coding process; passages were highlighted and assigned codes which were entered as comments. The approach displayed the codes side by side with their corresponding passages, creating an audit trail for readers to follow my thinking and coding decisions.

The goal of this coding stage is to “remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). While coding, I made additions and revisions to my original recording of keywords, themes, and thoughts. The final recording helped with writing post-interview memos, which captured my overall reflections on the interview and facilitated constant comparative analysis as I
identified similarities and/or differences between the interview at hand with previous interviews I have transcribed and coded.

**Axial Coding**

Birks and Mills (2015) asserts that “initial [or open] coding is often said to fracture the data, whereas intermediate [or axial] coding reconnects the data” (p. 12). Boeije (2010) describes the purpose of axial coding as “determin[ing] which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones... [and also to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (p. 109). Identifying patterns and relationships between categories is critical at this stage, as doing so raises the level of conceptual analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The identification process also establishes the core category and prepares the data for the final analysis stage of selective coding.

In preparation for the sorting process, codes were transposed onto individual pieces of paper, ensuring categories and themes emerged only from the data, remaining true to grounded theory’s approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Codes were sorted according to interview questions and spread across a large surface to be examined altogether. Similar codes were grouped into clusters; if a particular code was deemed appropriate for multiple clusters, it was duplicated to be placed in those clusters.

From the clusters, major categories emerged along with their properties and dimensions. Properties describe a category’s attributes and characteristics, while dimensions capture the range of properties. For instance, within the major category of “Professional helping attributes”, the category “Approachable” ranged from passive actions, such as “having an open-door policy”, to active actions, such as “initiating meeting with student”.

On a continual basis, memos tracked my decisions and rationales on the formation of categories. They also explicate the relationships between categories through the exploration of four additive elements of process described in Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) organizing scheme:
- **the causal conditions:** What personal factors cause professionals to believe they can help students with their career development?

- **the strategies:** What actions do professionals take as a result of their belief?

- **the contextual conditions:** What situational or environmental factors influence the strategies professionals employ to enhance student career development?

- **the consequences:** What outcomes occur as a result of professionals taking action to help students with their career development?

Reflective memos considered the categories that inform responses to the four questions raised above, and as a result, a couple of categories and their definitions were revised to better reflect their relationships with other categories, ultimately helping to identify the core category. These revisions and their justifications were captured as method memos.

**Selective Coding**

The advanced stage of selective coding is where "data ultimately becomes theory" (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 112) by identifying a core category and relating it to other major categories, refining categories that require further development, and finally generating and articulating a theory on the phenomenon. Developing a core category is central to grounded theory analysis (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); it “encapsulates the process apparent in the categories and sub-categories constructed” (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 97). A core category “has grab; it is often a high impact dependent variable of great importance; it is hard to resist” (Glaser, 2007, p. 14).

Memos once again served a vital role at this stage. Reflective memos discussed possible candidates for the core category and how other categories might relate to them as well as with one another. After considerable experimentation, the core phenomenon, *Helper Self-Efficacy*, was conceived. Inspired by a participant’s comment, “I believe I can help, so I did”, it emphasized the importance of a professional’s belief in their own ability to help students with their career development, which in turn prompts them to take action.
**Theoretical Sampling and Saturation**

In grounded theory, the processes of data collection and analysis take place simultaneously. The concurrence, along with constant comparative analysis, allows the researcher to engage in theoretical sampling, continually assessing the need to gather data from areas that may strengthen category and theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Analyzing early interview data revealed the necessity to also survey professionals working with graduating students and alumni, even though alumni professionals were not originally identified in the student poll. In their interviews, participants alluded to students requiring different career needs depending on their stage in the student engagement cycle; several speculated that senior students and recent alumni are likely to express a stronger desire for career conversations and support, and therefore professionals who regularly interact with these two groups of students would provide a valuable perspective to the study. Hence, additional efforts were made to recruit these professionals. The ability for the study’s research plan to remain emergent and flexible, as illustrated by this additional participant recruitment strategy, further reinforced the rationale to employ a qualitative, grounded theory methodology.

Data collection and analysis concludes when theoretical saturation is reached, meaning that “no new or relevant data seems to emerge regarding a category; the category development is dense, insofar as all of the paradigm elements are accounted for and the relationships between categories are well established and validated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 188). In this study, there was no novel information generated after the 13th participant, and therefore the data collection process stopped after interviewing two additional participants, resulting in a total of 15 participants.

**3.9. Trustworthiness**

In quantitative research, validity and reliability are used to evaluate quality. When a study is valid, it does what it intends to do; its results are due to the study and no other extraneous variables. For a study to be reliable, in its replication it must produce similar results. In qualitative research, since the researcher is the research instrument, the focus is on their ability to portray their participants’ realities, demonstrate transparency in their data collection and analysis, and provide a detailed account of their research
context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Boudah, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are used to evaluate trustworthiness of this study; measures to promote trustworthiness are also presented.

3.9.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which a researcher accurately represents the perspectives of the participants. While it parallels internal validity in quantitative research, it extends beyond internal validity because credibility assumes participants experience multiple realities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Measures to promote credibility include

- declaring researcher biases and monitoring them throughout the study;
- prolonging engagement in the field, in order to become meaningfully acquainted with the research site and participants;
- triangulating data by collecting multiple sources of information, and by employing different methods;
- presenting negative instances that challenge the researcher’s expectations and findings, reflecting the ‘messiness’ of data and real life;
- conducting member checks by sharing interview transcripts or summaries for participants to review; and
- engaging in peer debriefing, such as having a colleague asking questions to help examine assumptions and/or consider alternative explanations to the data and findings.

To ensure this study is credible, I was transparent with my researcher positionality earlier in this chapter, sharing my professional background and discussing how I kept my biases in check throughout the study. As a permanent employee of the research site, I had prolonged engagement in the field; data collection spanned over a five-month period, while analysis took over 11 months, keeping in mind that it overlapped with the collection process. Member checking was used when interview summaries were sent to
participants two weeks prior to the second interview, giving them plenty of time to review for accuracy and feedback; at their request, interview transcripts were also available at their disposal. Finally, constant comparative analysis could also be seen as a measure towards credibility, since it promotes the continual return to existing data for verification. This perspective was supported by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

3.9.2. Dependability

The criterion of dependability mirrors quantitative research’s internal reliability. However, instead of assessing the extent to which researchers could replicate the study and reach similar results, dependability focuses on whether or not researchers can follow the data collection and analysis processes.

To promote dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend providing an ‘audit trail’ detailing data collection and analysis, so that readers can envision the steps I took to conduct this study. This chapter and the appendices served as the backbone of this study’s audit trail; they documented how I collected data, and extracted themes and categories. Aside from making the research process explicit, I also habitually captured ideas, thoughts, and decisions related to the study – as well as their evolution – as memos in my researcher journal. Upon request, these memos can be made available.

3.9.3. Confirmability

Confirmability corresponds to objectivity in quantitative research: That findings are attributed to the research and not to the researcher’s biases and subjectivity. The audit trail used to demonstrate dependability can also be used to fulfill this criterion. In addition to transcripts and memos, my researcher journal is available upon request to demonstrate researcher reflexivity (Crotty, 2013; Patton, 2015). As well, two participants took up my offer to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts.

3.9.4. Transferability

This final criterion refers to “how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will…work in their own settings…by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113).
Though generalizability is not expected in qualitative research, the findings and implications derived in one setting might \textit{transfer} and be of use to others.

Aside from providing thorough details about how the data was collected and analyzed as previously mentioned, Denzin (2001) recommends also providing a ‘thick description’ of the research context, allowing readers to determine how the study might be replicated in their own circumstances. This study’s research context has been detailed in this chapter, from research site, research sample and sampling strategies, to data collection and analysis procedures. Since teaching-intensive post-secondary institutions may share common characteristics with KPU, and that career success is often students’ primary motivation for pursuing post-secondary education regardless of the institution, it is possible for this study’s findings to have implications on other similar institutions. In the next chapter, whenever appropriate, I connect study findings to the research context, which also enhances transferability.

\textbf{3.10. Limitations and Delimitations}

Despite best efforts made to promote trustworthiness, this study had several limitations, all pertaining to its design. Firstly, the interview was the main data collection method, and as such interview transcripts were the primary data source, with no other sources with which to triangulate. In hindsight, using an additional method, such as focus groups with either current or new participants who can provide feedback on initial themes generated from the first interviews, would have enhanced credibility. That being said, employing an initial poll to determine potential participants demonstrated my commitment to recruiting professionals whose perspective could help us better understand the experience of career influencers. Furthermore, the use of constant comparative analysis did facilitate corroboration between participant data sets.

Another limitation related to interviewing participants is that of participant reactivity (Maxwell, 2005). Since some of the participants and I had an existing professional relationship prior to the study, their responses might be influenced as interviews are “not neutral tools of data gathering [but are the] result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and the context in which they take place” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 121). For example, on one hand, they might have responded in ways they believe would be helpful to my research but weren’t necessarily
reflective of their own views; on the other hand, their responses might have been
cautious due to our relationship. In an attempt to address this, several measures were
taken. As mentioned earlier, I articulated in the consent form that their participation in the
study would not in any way impact our working relationships. Also, the use of interview
probes, such as having participants to describe their experience using personal
examples, grounded their response within their context, rather than the context of the
interview. Finally, participants could go ‘off the record’ at any point during their interview,
requesting that I pause the recording and leave their disclosure out of their transcript. A
few participants exercised this option to provide me with confidential information that
was important for me to have in order to understand their context; their comfort in
sharing private information with me demonstrated their trust and confidence in me to
portray their authentic experience.

The third limitation pertained to the study’s sample, in that not all professional
roles students identified as career influencers took part in the study. It was important to
note, however, that if participants’ former roles were taken into account, then the entire
list of roles were represented. The caveat then becomes: Do these past professional
experiences reflect the current realities of professionals in these roles? If not, then the
sample would need to be considered as incomplete.

Two delimitations were imposed to purposely limit the study’s scope. Since no
graduate programs exist currently at KPU, the study has been delimited to explore the
perspective of professionals who assist undergraduate students. Arguably, as graduate
students are typically paired with a faculty supervisor, career mentoring and influencing
relationships already exist through this academic structure. Finally, by employing Fee
and Forsyth’s (2011) student engagement cycle, a delimitation was placed on
professionals who work in the stages of access, transition, persistence, and graduation.

3.11. Chapter Summary

This chapter described the study’s research methodology. Grounded theory was
employed to explore how post-secondary professionals conceive their influence in
student career development. The participant sample consisted of 15 purposefully
selected individuals who were employed at a regional teaching-intensive university in
British Columbia, Canada. The individuals took part in two interviews, which were
transcribed; the transcripts were analyzed through three stages of coding, and in the final stage, a core category and a theory explaining the phenomenon were developed. Measures to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were taken throughout the study. Findings from the study, as well as the grounded theory, are presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 4.

Results

4.1. Introduction

This study explored how post-secondary professionals conceptualize their influence in student career development. The conceptions of their career influence on students provide insights to why they elect to offer career help and consequently serve as career influencers; understanding why they do so could help institutions leverage their talent in engaging students and promote student career success.

A qualitative research design, employing elements of grounded theory, was selected as the most appropriate methodology. The grounded theory approach is used to explore topics with little or no prior research and theories (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Hutchinson, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1990); for this particular study, it illuminated the concept of career influencers, which was considered an undiscovered phenomenon due to the career influencer role being an informal capacity.

Having analyzed data through interviews with 15 participants and analyzed interview transcripts, the study revealed four key findings related to the proposed research questions:

1. Professionals’ conceptions of the term “career” were informed by their own “work, learning and leisure activities” (Canadian Council for Career Development, 2012, p. 2).

2. Professionals believed their roles contribute to student career development through the performance of seven functions: advising, guiding, counselling, teaching, advocating, external liaising, and leading.

3. As individuals, professionals saw themselves contribute to student career development by sharing their life stories and demonstrating five helper attributes that enhance conversations and relationships with students: approachable, authentic, empathetic, a natural coach, and vulnerable.
4. To further their influence and impact, professionals would like to engage in professional development related to career development, and to see institutional support and investment in student career success.

This chapter begins with an overview of participants’ roles and experiences. Then, each key finding is presented in detail, and wherever appropriate, participants’ direct quotes are featured. The next chapter, Discussion, considers the implications of the findings and makes recommendations to research, policy, and practice.

4.2. Participants

Prior to presenting the findings to the study, a brief description of the participants is in order, for two important reasons. Firstly, doing so provides a context for the responses to the sub-questions, since participants related their responses to not only their current professional roles, but also to their experiences outside of these roles. Secondly, the richness and diversity of their combined past and present experiences generate insights as to why students have identified them as career influencers.

As mentioned in the last chapter, professionals whose roles were identified by students as career influencers were invited to participate in the study, as listed below. At the time of their interviews, participants held the roles in bold font:

- academic advisor
- career services coordinator/advisor
- counsellor (personal or career)
- financial aid and awards coordinator
- instructor/professor
- learning strategist/facilitator
- orientation leader
- registrar’s office staff member
• student life coordinator

• student recruiter

• university administrator (e.g., dean, department chair)

• volunteer services coordinator

The fact that participants who held five of the non-bold roles were not interviewed may seem to be a gap in representation, as professionals in these roles did not provide their perspectives to this study. However, when asked about their career in the post-secondary education field and to describe the roles they have held to date, several participants cited past work experience in the remaining five roles. Thus, although participants were not presently in all of the roles, all of the roles were represented in the collective experience of participants. Participants’ professional, educational, and personal experiences are discussed next.

4.3. Participants’ Professional Experiences

4.3.1. Professional Experiences in Post-secondary Education

Collectively, participants served or are serving in various positions distributed along Fee and Forsyth’s (2010) student engagement cycle (SEC) stages: access, transition, persistence, and graduation. Chapter Three described the use of SEC as a framework to identify professional roles that students might regard as career influencers at various touchpoints, or stages, during their undergraduate career. The four stages are also used to outline the career-related responsibilities professionals believe they fulfill in their present and past roles; these responsibilities are featured in Table 3. The career-related responsibilities, in turn, were categorized in groups that informed the seven functions professionals perform to promote student career development (research sub-question two). The seven functions are discussed in Section 4.6, “How Professionals Conceptualize ‘Career’.”
Table 3. Career-related Responsibilities Performed by Post-secondary Professionals Distributed along Student Engagement Cycle Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote the institution at student recruitment and public events</td>
<td>Organize new student orientation and transition programs</td>
<td>Teach second, third, and fourth year courses</td>
<td>Promote alumni benefits and services, university news and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate career exploration workshops in high schools</td>
<td>Teach introductory courses*</td>
<td>Facilitate academic and career success workshops*</td>
<td>Highlight career and volunteer opportunities to graduating students and alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide academic program information to prospective students and families</td>
<td>Provide academic advice to first year students*</td>
<td>Supervise and mentoring student staff and volunteers</td>
<td>Facilitate connections between employers, alumni and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize open houses, information sessions, and tours</td>
<td>Follow up with students who require additional support through the Early Alert Program*</td>
<td>Advise on course selection and program planning</td>
<td>Provide career advising and coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversee pre-university transition programs</td>
<td>Facilitate academic skills development and mentorship programs*</td>
<td>Provide career advising and coaching*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oversee co-curricular programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborate with local organizations to develop paid and unpaid student opportunities*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chair and or participate in university committees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate, revise, and develop policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A career-related responsibility that extends beyond the assigned SEC stage. For instance, a professional teaching introductory courses (transition) might also teach final year capstone courses (persistence).

Access

Seven participants held current and past roles in the access stage, with responsibilities ranging from promoting the institution at student recruitment and public events; facilitating career exploration workshops in high schools; providing academic program information to prospective students and families; organizing open houses,
information sessions, and campus tours; to overseeing pre-university transition programs.

**Transition**

Twelve participants were working or have worked in the transition stage, performing responsibilities such as organizing new student orientation and transition programs; teaching introductory courses; providing academic advice to first year students; following up with students who require additional support through the Early Alert Program; and facilitating academic skills development and mentorship programs. Note that many of these responsibilities extend beyond the transition stage, such as teaching, advising, and overseeing skills and mentorship programs.

**Persistence**

Thirteen participants had present and/or past experiences working in the persistence stage, where they engaged in teaching second, third, and fourth year courses; facilitating workshops on topics related to academic and career success; supervising and mentoring student staff and volunteers; advising on course selection and program planning; confirming students are on track to complete their program requirements, and if necessary, recommending course substitution and conducting prior learning assessment; offering personal and career counselling; providing career advising and coaching; overseeing co-curricular programs, such as co-operative education and academic case competitions; collaborating with local organizations to develop paid and unpaid student opportunities; chairing and or participating in university committees such as program advisory committees and Senate committees; and evaluating, revising, and developing policies.

**Graduation**

Ten participants held responsibilities in this stage. In their roles, they were promoting alumni benefits and services, university news and events; highlighting career and volunteer opportunities to graduating students and alumni that are both within and outside of the university; facilitating connections between employers, alumni (who can be both job seekers and employers) and students; and again, providing career advising and coaching.
Transfer of Learning between Roles

More than half of the participants discussed the notion of transferring knowledge and experience learned from previous roles in order to be effective in their current position. They believed having worked and developed expertise in one area (e.g., orientation and transition) enhanced their transition to another area (e.g., student recruitment, service learning), especially if they had remained in the same institution, because they were already familiar with the organization’s systems and processes and had developed a collegial network they could rely on. Sumra shared:

I think definitely because of my background [having worked in multiple areas] ...you get really familiar with who everybody else is and what they do...just being able to pick up the phone and ask a question, knowing the right person to call...if you really want to get anything done around here you have to have face-to-face time with people.

The significance of learning transfer is discussed and illustrated at a later section when participants share their contributions as individuals (research sub-question three) to student career development.

4.3.2. Other Professional Experiences

Participants also gave accounts of their work experiences outside of the post-secondary educational field. Jacques, Sumra, and Oshi participants had teaching experiences and taught locally, online, and overseas. Their international teaching experiences, they asserted, had helped them with their current role when working with international students.

Jenn shared her work experience in the government sector prior to being employed in post-secondary education. She believed her success in shifting from one occupation to another has enabled her to normalize transition as part of ordinary life, in addition to sharing her own experience: “I worked in the government...for ten years...before I was hired full time as a faculty member...the reason I bring that past period up is I do consider myself to be a successful career changer as an adult”.

Melissa, Michael, Cristel, Jacques, and Oshi reported work experience in professional industries prior to working in post-secondary education, such as marketing, design, real estate, and accounting. All spoke of circumstances in their industries that
led them to pivot into working in post-secondary education. Some participants were motivated by a desire to fulfill interests or passions they discovered in work or volunteer capacities, such as realizing their passion for teaching while serving in a training and supervisory capacity, or their enjoyment in informally mentoring university students and therefore wanting to find a formal opportunity to work with them:

I started teaching the face to face sessions for the [professional designation] and found I was into it, so, you know I like doing the teaching stuff...I had a few of my friends who also taught for the [school] who were saying “look, you gotta get into this teaching gig” and for whatever reason I pushed it off. It was a mistake, I should have come a lot earlier. (Jacques)

The role itself having the ability to connect with students and get them excited about post-secondary and have them start thinking about different things than maybe they didn’t think of previously, like “Oh I can make a career out of being a brew master?” or “I can make a career out of product design?”...I really saw the role and what attracted me to the role was the ability to share my excitement for post-secondary with other people, to get them excited. (Michael)

Others faced negative events that propelled them to exit their industry, like sensing a decline in their field as they observed companies were downsizing; feeling dissatisfied in their role and wanting to find something that fulfills their purpose and potential; and experiencing burnout in a highly competitive role and desiring to attain work-life balance for their own sake and the wellbeing of their family:

My industry was dying. So, I was living in Montreal and working in Toronto. And I’d go back and forth to teach each week because getting an academic job is quite a significantly difficult thing to do. So, I was working contract at the university and then I worked at my old job as a textile designer part time. And I just, eventually there was no more work. All the industries, the fashion industry is dying out there so I went, “alright it’s kicking me out. You’ve got to go.” (Melissa)

When you’re 24 and having your mid-life crisis, my parents were like “where is your most meaningful relationships, or where did you find that you were impactful?” And it was at university because I, just loved being a student. So that’s when I reached out to [a university mentor] and I applied here [at KPU] and then I became the student service[s] specialist at the front counter. (Cristel)

Experiencing these circumstances helped inform the way participants conceptualize “career” as a term, and these conceptions inform their practice and approach with students. This is discussed later on when participants’ definitions of “career” (research sub-question one) are examined and analyzed.
4.4. Participants’ Educational Experiences

While reflecting on the beginning of their professional journey in post-secondary education, participants believed it was their own post-secondary education that gave them exposure to post-secondary institutions as a potential workplace. In this section, participants’ educational experiences are considered in relation to how these experiences have informed their approach with students.

4.4.1. Degree-related Experiences

Participants spoke about their undergraduate education and how it contributed to their current professional role and consequently as a career influencer. Shayan, who pursued an undergraduate degree in child and youth care, felt he was well-suited for a post-secondary profession, and particularly in a helping capacity:

Once I got into [the] child and youth care [program], it became pretty evident that I’m really good at working with youth, children and youth, and then getting [into] the counselling [program]...[my education] helped me understand people and understanding where they’re at in their life. How can I help them get to where I need them to be? But [also] in terms of just working with them as an individual so I think that...my whole academic background totally helps me in terms of being a people manager.

Having majored in liberal arts, Sumra believed her degree helped her be resourceful and well-rounded, which are qualities she thought are useful not only in her role but are also ones that she role models for students:

One of the strengths of being an Arts student is that you get little nuggets from a lot of different things. It’s a usually fairly interdisciplinary and that kind of helps with all kinds of diverse experiences and ideas and all that sort of stuff so that helps [with] your people skills.

Two-thirds of the participants continued with their education and pursued graduate degrees that aligned with their helping profession, such as in education, counselling, and leadership. David, who completed a doctoral degree in science, was an exception since that credential was required to teach and conduct research in his field. It was interesting to note that these participants were already working in the post-secondary environment prior to obtaining graduate degrees. They saw graduate education as a vehicle for them to advance their professional aspiration and/or
specialization, and to deepen their professional practice. Shirin, who completed a Master of Education, attributed her student success framework to the learning she derived from the program:

Ironically when I think back on my first role advising 20 years ago and when I started my Master’s in Education in Administrative Leadership in Education, I wouldn’t have had these conversations with students...like the engagement, their experience, enrich their lives and support them through many touch points and focus the energy on just supporting student success.

4.4.2. Campus Involvement

During their undergraduate studies, some participants volunteered and/or worked on campus; these experiences helped them cultivate a sense of belonging to their alma mater, while introducing them to post-secondary institutions as a work environment. Michael, who pursued work outside of post-secondary education upon graduation, eventually decided to return to the post-secondary environment as an employee, due to the positive experience he had when working as a former student volunteer and staff:

So way back to my very first days at [university], attending orientation, the infectious enthusiasm that I saw from the volunteers and the people working in student life at the time really caught my attention that you can have work that’s that much fun and you get to basically get students excited to be at post-secondary. I thought it was unreal. So from the earliest moment I could I started volunteering, getting to know other fellow volunteers who were interested in the same thing, getting more connected with the student life office and exploring different opportunities throughout.

Through his role as a graduate teaching assistant, David discovered his interest in teaching and helping students learn; this discovery ultimately shifted his original goal of becoming a post-doctoral researcher to pursuing a post-secondary teaching role:

When you’re doing research you tend to be very narrowly focused. I mean you might have more than one project but each project itself would be quite narrowly focused. So when I started teaching then I kind of re-opened my mind again to a much broader range of physics topics that I...hadn’t thought about in a long time, so I suppose it reminded me of why in some ways why I liked physics so much because I got to think again about a much broader range of topics. I enjoyed interacting with students, maybe as a researcher you don’t get to interact as much with people as when you’re teaching.
Participants also commented on the valuable skills they gained from these student roles, such as interpersonal, organizational, and leadership skills. They have continued to apply these skills in their professional roles, and moreover share their own involvement experiences with students, empowering them to get involved in their university community as part of their career and personal development. The transfer of skills from one role to another, as well as the passing of knowledge to students illustrate Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) notion that individuals’ “multiple roles interact to reciprocally shape each other” (p. 128).

4.4.3. Work-integrated Learning

In addition to on-campus volunteer and work experiences, work-integrated learning was another form of co-curricular activity that participants thought was beneficial to have as career influencers. Those who participated in work-integrated learning programs, such as co-operative education and internships, spoke highly of the experience. For Jenn, this was completing a graduate internship devising an employability skills curriculum for students in trades and apprenticeships, which in turn cultivated her interest in career counselling:

We facilitated what was called exit skills and that involved me doing, facilitating large groups of students, sometimes 30 or more at a time in getting their interview skills under their belt. I would tape them and we would go through an interviewing process and we would, I would then teach them how to deliver feedback and we would watch portions of interview clips and in a respectful manner [and] give feedback. It worked quite well even back then and I was interested and I really saw in certain ways how career could really come alive by using different things in an interesting way.

Work-integrated learning programs allowed participants to explore potential occupations related to their studies and in turn helped confirm their specialization or consider alternative areas of study. Their firsthand experience as program participants, along with the job search and career management skills they gained, gave them the credibility to advocate for and to support students gaining work experience relevant to their degree.

4.4.4. Interactions with Professionals

Participants referenced the post-secondary professionals they encountered during their undergraduate experience, citing both positive and negative interactions that
contributed to shaping their own professional approach. Angelica attributed her professional success to an instructor who vouched for her potential when she was a recent graduate starting in the post-secondary field:

I think one of the big career influencers that I had was my instructor [who] was very good in sort of seeing that yeah okay, sales and that kind of stuff was just not really my jam. So I think he was a big influencer in sort of, for me to feel comfortable with that, me being different from the rest of my classmates in different ways. But he was also a huge career influencer in that he was a reference for me for this job. Had I maybe not had that reference from him I don’t know if I would be here.

Likewise, when he was a graduate student, David received encouragement from his department chair to develop instructional skills, which led him to discover his passion for teaching students:

...the chair of the physics department at [my university] at the time, she was very much promoting post-doctoral researchers [in] getting some teaching experience and getting involved in teaching...she encouraged us to teach and to help with teaching in the department and to do the things like the graduate certificate in teaching and learning. So all that had an influence [on me].

Both Jeremy and Michael reflected on their student volunteer experience and discussed their former supervisor who role modelled mentorship behaviour for them:

[She] dedicated a lot of time to myself and to a lot of my colleagues, too, to coach us and to mentor us and talk to us about all kinds of different things to do with careers and exploring our interests and our passions. So I think I’ve tried to emulate what I’ve received from [her] to some extent. (Jeremy)

I’ve been always able to count on [my former supervisor’s] non-biased advice and if ever there was biased advice [she]’d openly identify it and say “I’m biased for these reasons but...” [Laughs] But just always being a reliable sounding board where if I had a concern or wasn’t sure how to navigate a situation knowing that [she]’d always be there, you know, to support and give me the guidance that I need, even if that guidance is turning the question back at me and getting me to think deeper about it. (Michael)

On the contrary, Lynda described a dismissive interaction with her academic advisor whom she thought provided her with ill-informed advice; as a result, in her current advising practice, she is often reminded of that particular interaction as a counterexample and strives to always be of service to her students.


4.5. Participants’ Personal Experiences

Aside from their professional and educational experiences, participants cited other circumstances that might influence their approach as a career influencer.

4.5.1. Personal Life-roles

Participants believed the roles they play outside of work enhance their practice as career influencers, and vice versa, again reinforcing Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) notion that one’s life roles can influence one another. As a parent, Cristel transferred her learning from raising young children to her role advising prospective students and families:

I tend to get the parents sometimes or the difficult situations. And definitely, absolutely 100% my background...[as a parent] helps me with those conflict situations because I can almost walk a parent off the ledge because they’re so worried about their student, their own students’ career development and their outcome and their life.

An avid hockey player and passionate about music, Jacques emphasized with his students the value of pursuing hobbies outside their academic life, not only as outlets to attain work life balance, but also because they would have something unique to share about themselves when networking and interviewing with future employers. Sumra considered herself to be a “renaissance person who knows a bit about everything”; she saw this as a strength to build relationships with students, as she can always find shared interests with them, making her relatable and approachable: “If you can relate to somebody on some level or have some sort of a common shared experience with them then there’s something to work with.”

4.5.2. Experiences in Failure and Overcoming Challenges

Participants readily shared with students their past instances of failure, as well as the insights they gained from failing, so that students can learn vicariously and apply these lessons to their own life and career. Examples of failures could be professional or personal. Jan recalled his experience being terminated from a senior leadership position and continued to share his story with students and direct reports to illustrate politics in the workplace and the importance of remaining hopeful and resilient:
So I was out of [my former role] and this job, like the next day was in the paper and I applied and I did what I do in circumstances like this, I really rallied folks at [my former institution] to say...[if I] have an impact. I had some amazing statements from people that were known and now that I look back, some of the most difficult people I deal with [whom I won over]...I was the unanimous choice [for my current role] and here I am.

When engaging new students, Angelica referenced her own first year experience where she failed her first term but ultimately found her passion when she switched schools and programs. These personal narratives demonstrate that success is not always linear, and requires courage, flexibility, and hard work to overcome challenges. Furthermore, they also demonstrate career influencers’ vulnerability, a trait that enhances their relationships with students; career influencers’ helper attributes are outlined at a later discussion on their individual contributions to student career development.

**The Role of Mentorship**

Through their hardships, participants mentioned the importance of seeking timely advice from mentors such as family members and supervisors, who assisted them in resolving personal and professional dilemmas:

As a definite introvert [public speaking] is not a comfortable, or wasn’t a comfortable place for me to be but because I’ve done it for quite a while now...I think a lot of my peers and the people I’ve surrounded myself with have allowed me to get to this stage too. (Jeremy)

[I] met with the former Director [of Co-operative Education and Career Services] at Kwantlen...and just really respected her vision and her ideas and what Kwantlen stood for in terms of the educational side of career advising. I essentially came to KPU because of her. (Emily)

Participants also appreciated their mentors for identifying their unseen potential and possibilities, and challenging them when necessary:

I had a lot of people in my life that were my motivators or people that just believed in me. It was my math 11 teacher, like I barely passed math [and he told me], “I believe in you”, that was enough to keep me going...I’d never forget that. My grade 12 English teacher, English was such, it was always a struggle for me but she said “Try before you say you can’t.” Because I always say I can’t do that, I can’t do that, well have [I] tried? Uh nope. (Shayan)

Given participants’ own positive experience with receiving mentorship and guidance, it may have influenced their inclinations to give back by supporting students with their
personal and professional concerns, similar to how they have received help from their own career influencers.

4.5.3. Section Summary

This overview of participants’ experiences featured their past and current roles and responsibilities, educational background, and personal circumstances; all these components alluded to their inclination to assist students with their careers. Next, these experiences are further elaborated and examined within the context of the four research sub-questions, which again are:

- How do PSE professionals conceptualize the term “career”?
- How do PSE professionals see their role as having an impact on student career development?
- How do PSE professionals see themselves as individuals as having an impact on student career development?
- What resources and/or competencies do PSE professionals believe are important in furthering their impact on student career development?

4.6. How Professionals Conceptualize “Career”

After participants described their professional experiences within and outside of KPU, they were asked, “When you hear the term ‘career’, what comes to mind for you?” The question followed the account of their professional experience because their conceptions of career differed depending on their life and career experiences. Indeed, in this study, participants drew from their own experience to conceptualize the notion of career; from their responses, five conceptual categories emerged.

4.6.1. Career as an Instrumental Purpose

Several participants hesitated to overlap the notion of work with other non-professional roles and activities and felt strongly there should be a separation. Jacques saw career strictly as work and an activity that “pays the bills and that one consistently
conducts for exchange of money”; in this sense, he believed that career served an instrumental purpose of making a living. He attributed his conception to his firsthand experience of career burnout and how it negatively impacted the collective wellbeing of his family. Drawing from this incident, he advised students to strive for work-life balance, maintaining that a clear distinction between professional and personal lives would enhance their effectiveness as future professionals:

I struggle with the idea, I don’t want your work to be your life and that is certainly a concern that we have with a lot of these [students]...one of our co-op students here who was working 100 hours a week at one of the firms...I think that is a real problem so I would like there to be a much clearer break between those things.

4.6.2. Career as Professional Advancement

Some participants used the metaphor of a ladder to describe career: as one climbs their career ladder and advances in their profession, elements such as their scope of responsibilities and earnings should also increase as a result. The ladder metaphor also implied that one’s career takes place within a single field or industry. David, who had spent his entire professional life so far in post-secondary education, concurred with the conception, as he progressed from a post-doctoral fellow to an academic administrator. He recounted personal examples where he took advantage of opportunities to progress professionally:

I suppose I did [the] CUTL (Certificate in University Teaching and Learning) to advance my own career prospects and the chair of the department at the time was encouraging post-docs to take on more, get teaching experience and encouraging us to do programs like that.

...we’ve got a fairly small department, so it [the department chair role] generally has been a rotating position, so I was considered next in line, really. [laughs] And I, I mean I didn’t have to take it, but it was, I was considered next in line and I thought I’d give it a go.

That being said, he also realized his profession is situated within a field that “promoted linearity and advancement along the ranks”, and that his students’ career contexts would likely be very different and much more complicated. Being mindful of this variability, David revised his conception of career later in his interview, stating that one “ought to be open and flexible with transferring between fields to maximize their potential” – a lesson he strived to inspire students to incorporate in their careers.
4.6.3. Career as a Way of Learning

While the previous conception of career focused on one’s career advancement, participants who described career as a development and expression of one’s skills and knowledge considered how work enable individuals to realize and hone their strengths. In their definitions, they alluded to three themes:

- Individuals not only express skills and knowledge, but hone and develop new ones through the performance of their roles;
- since individuals express their skills, education, and knowledge through their careers, people who hold the same role can approach the role differently;
- as individuals’ interests and strengths evolve over time, ongoing development of skills and knowledge is critical to help them adapt to these evolutions.

Expressing and Developing Skills and Knowledge

Participants who held the conception that career allows them to express and develop themselves believed in a reciprocal relationship between their talents and role; while one contributes their skills and knowledge to the role they serve (expression), they also gain valuable experiences which in turn enhance their impact, future job prospects, and engagement (development):

...a career should be a professional expression of your skills wherever you can take those, and ideally advancing as you move forward, not necessarily advancing in terms of rank or title or salary...but that the work you do becomes more challenging and becomes more important and becomes more impactful as time goes on. I love my job but I don’t want to be doing it in 20 years. (Oshi)

...the progression of skills and interests is important for, well at least in my mind, to prevent boredom, right? I mean I don’t think anyone wants to stay stagnant in their skills and interests because the more you’re exploring, the more you’re learning, I think it kind of keeps you engaged and it’s that whole engagement piece there. (Angelica)

When determining one’s fit with a particular role or profession, one ponders, “Will this role or profession provide me with opportunities to express my current talents and develop new ones for future roles?” Their self-response would yield insights informing
their approach to the role, as they consider the assets they can readily offer, as well as
skills and knowledge they lack and how they might develop them.

**Approaching the Same Roles Differently**

As professionals’ expression and development of skills and knowledge diverge
based on their life experiences and goals, how they approach their roles also differ as a
result. Working alongside two other advisors, Oshi observed variations in their advising
style due to their individual background and experiences. He saw the difference in
approach as beneficial to both students and themselves:

> It’s if one of [my colleague]’s students wants to come see me I will help
> them to the best of my ability. If they want to only see [my colleague]
> that’s fine...they may have to wait a little bit longer but that’s their
> prerogative, so we allow for that level of personal comfort because for
> some people asking for help is not an easy thing and for some people
> they value the relationship that has built up.

The ability for students to connect with any advisor and determine a preference based
on their needs not only promotes student agency, but it also allows each advisor to
develop closer one-on-one relationships with students. Furthermore, Oshi expressed his
keenness to shadow his counterparts’ student appointments to learn and exchange
advising practices.

**Engaging in Ongoing Learning**

Participants placed high emphasis on continuous learning in their roles. For
them, the pursuit of professional development opportunities, both formal and informal,
was not only a way to stay current with leading practices, but it also enabled them to
remain engaged and positively challenged in their roles. Having worked in multiple
departments within post-secondary education, Shirin believed “the continual push out of
her comfort zone” helped her discover new interests and strengths, and the resultant
expansion of her comfort zone was critical to remaining professionally engaged and
satisfied.

**4.6.4. Career as a Way of Living**

This conception of career was perhaps best captured by a phrase prominently
displayed on a wall in Emily’s office: “Do what you love, love what you do”. Participants
who connected the term career with notions of purpose and meaning differentiated between work and career; the former provided extrinsic benefits such as money and prestige, while the latter ideally offered both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits like personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Cristel, who supported this distinction between work and career, described work as "working to live" and career as "living to work". For her, career should evoke a sense of accomplishment for professionals, so much that their dedication to their role and profession "keeps them up at night".

Participants’ definitions of career also alluded to the concept of flow, a positive psychology term coined by Csikzentmihaly (2008). An individual's full immersion into their work is important: “I need to be personally and completely invested in what I'm doing to be happy in my career. My full investment pays dividends in satisfaction and fulfillment” (Angelica). If an individual is able to derive meaning and fulfillment, then "work will not feel like work" (Angelica) and feel “almost like [one is pursuing] a hobby” (Cristel). The immense interest in their work is a precursor for experiencing flow, engagement, and productivity. When they continue to pursue roles that generate flow, their career becomes “a joyous lifework” as described by Jan:

...you know that you’re working in a strength area if you go into the zone and time stands still and I think that if you were truly in a career, that’s right for you, you’re in the zone the whole time...For me it’s not a couple of hours can go by...40 years has gone by and I’m thinking "Oh my god, working with students, working in institutions trying to help them improve, trying to make them be safe places, welcoming places and all the things that we’ve seen change over the years!”...So that’s the importance of career and having something that can become a joyous lifework.

Participants also thought flow should be apparent and infectious to others, such that when a person experiencing flow is generating productivity and results, they in turn also inspire others, such as students and other colleagues, to pursue roles and opportunities they are passionate about.

4.6.5. Career as a Means to Contribute to Society

In this last conception, participants believed one’s career must enable them to contribute their talents and skills for the benefit of society. As a faculty member, Melissa exemplified this as she incorporated community-service components in her courses, so
that students can practice the skills they learned in the classroom while generating and applying solutions to solve practical challenges in the local communities:

> We are often defining and solving problems that aren’t necessarily our own...a lot of times they’re larger problems. Some of our students worked with the City of Surrey on multi-family; the problems surrounding multi-family compost bins. So [students designed a bin] that was presented to the City of Surrey...and they’ve got an order for another four because they did a whole study and they actually put one in an apartment building and it worked out really well. So, they have an order and they have to build these things again.

Through this process, students also gain valuable hands-on experiences to also benefit their careers. It is appropriate to note also that Melissa saw her teaching career and role in educating and empowering students as her way of giving back.

Participants who adopted this conception of career believed that as one progresses in their profession, their impact and ability to instigate positive change should also increase at the same time: “One must strike a balance between pursuing their own ambition and serving the greater good” (Sumra). Acknowledging that the two may at times be at odds, the goal is to align one’s personal mission and values with what would be useful and beneficial to society. This is congruent with Erikson’s theory of Generativity by which individuals intrinsically engage in activities that will benefit others, and often for generations to come (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2016). For Angelica, her goal of professional progression aligned with the institution’s key objective to support students. The transition programs she facilitated contribute to student retention, helping students develop confidence as they begin post-secondary studies, so that upon graduation they can enhance their job prospects and contributions to their communities. As such, the successful performance of her role would “benefit the institution and society, and [her] career development”, strengthening her skills in preparation for future career opportunities.

### 4.6.6. Section Summary

When asked how they conceptualize the term “career”, participants’ responses formed five categories. Participants saw career as a way to “pay the bills” (Jacques); as a continual progression of jobs, responsibilities, and earning; as a medium to express and develop skills and knowledge; as a source of meaning and happiness; and as a
channel to give back to society. While distinct categories emerged, it was also clear that some participants belonged in multiple categories. As illustrated by participant examples, professionals’ conceptions of career were impacted through their own experience, background, and beliefs.

4.7. How They See Their Role Impacting Student Career Development

Two important commentaries preface this section. The first is the distinction between roles and functions. For the purpose of this study, roles refer to professionals’ position titles, such as instructor or dean; in the preliminary survey, students were asked to indicate roles they regard as career influencers. Functions, on the other hand, are tasks and responsibilities assumed by professionals in their roles. For example, teaching is a function performed by an individual in an instructor or peer educator role.

The second commentary is the reminder that the sub-question is concerned with participants’ perception of their roles and functions, rather than the roles and functions themselves. What responsibilities within their roles do they believe contribute to student career development, and how so? For instance, even though career development isn’t within Oshi’s purview, because he saw having student-centred conversations and addressing student concerns as central components to his role, when career topics come up in student interactions, he saw it as his responsibility to assist students with their concerns:

We spend so much time talking about students and talking about their personal goals is there’s no way to divorce yourself from that level of, from the concept of [career] influence, even by having the conversation you are influencing. And in this job I hold a somewhat tenuous position in terms of formal career advice because it’s not my purview and we do have a career centre. But it’ll always come up and then you have students saying “Oh, what can I do with Anthropology?” or “What can I do with an Arts degree?”

As mentioned in the last section, individuals approach the same role differently based on their experiences. Similarly, participants articulated a variety of responsibilities they performed that enhance student career development. These responsibilities, while providing confirmation and support for Hiebert and Borgen’s (2002) three levels of career
services of advising, guiding, and counselling, also presented four additional functions. The seven functions are as follows:

- **Advising**: The professional disseminates career information focused on a particular topic; the information is general and not tailored to the student.

- **Guiding**: The professional personalizes career information based on the goals of the student; this requires gaining an initial understanding of the student’s needs and concerns prior to generating information.

- **Counselling**: The professional works with the student to engage in a self-exploration process in order to determine the best course of action that aligns with the student’s values and goals (both personal and career-related).

- **Teaching**: The professional helps the student develop career skills and competencies (e.g., conducting an audit, professionalism) through the facilitation of curricular and co-curricular activities.

- **Advocating**: The professional makes recommendations to processes, policies, and structures (e.g., degree requirements) to resolve issues and/or make improvements to enhance student career success.

- **External Liaising**: The professional promotes the institution to the general public; cultivates relationships with external organizations and professionals to enhance student career success (e.g., career and internship opportunities).

- **Leading**: The professional, typically in a supervisory capacity, supports and empowers their direct reports to serve as career influencers to students.

It is worth noting that functions are audience-specific. The first four functions – advising, guiding, counselling, and teaching – are considered student-facing functions; advocating is an administration-facing function; external liaising is public-facing; and leading is employee-facing. The seven functions are now discussed in greater detail with specific examples illustrated by the participants.
4.7.1. Advising

Hiebert and Borgen (2002) define advising as “disseminating information on a certain topic or focus” (p. 136) regardless of the characteristics of the individual seeking the information. This is a primary function many professionals, such as those who work in recruitment and admission departments, conduct as they are often the first point of contact in helping prospective and current students and alumni. Cristel described her former student services specialist role as a “catch all” position: "You have to know everything in that position because that’s where the students go for problem solving. When they don’t know where to go, that’s where they start.” Being able to effectively perform in this function requires professionals to have information, in both breadth and depth, within their specific areas such as Faculty and program offerings; general knowledge about post-secondary admission requirements and processes; academic program requirements and policies, etc.

Participants who perform an advising function saw the importance of showing students the process of obtaining the information they shared, so that students can develop resourcefulness and self-reliance, and know that help is still available if required. Michael described his approach:

I’d be...giving them [students] access to tools or resources where they can be better informed on their decision or explore. That was a big other part of the role...if a student had questions about “I want a career in this area but I don’t know what”, knowing [and referring them to] the resources [where] they can go to get more information.

As well, based on the questions and issues students have, professionals may be able to anticipate other needs students might have in the future. For instance, when new students are attending a group session on course registration, they are also likely to seek advice on program career outcomes and “prefer one-on-one chats so we make that happen and host drop-in advising” (Shayan). When professionals can foresee these questions coming from students, they can be “one step ahead of the students” (Jeremy) and proactive in preparing resources and referrals accordingly.
4.7.2. Guiding

The advising function bridges into guidance (Hiebert & Borgen, 2002), or guiding (for consistency’s sake, all functions are cited as action verbs), which requires professionals to tailor their advice and information to students’ circumstances and contexts. Therefore, guiding also encompasses the advising function since professionals need to have a general breadth of knowledge in order to generate personalized advice.

The guiding function takes place both in single interactions and through ongoing relationships with students. As a ritual, Lynda began her student appointments with the question, “How can I help you today?” to give students the agency to set the meeting agenda, and to also get a sense of the information and resources she would require to best assist the student. Oshi believed the key to successfully guide students is to develop a positive relationship with them. When interacting with students, he demonstrated curiosity by posing clarifying and follow up questions to better understand their contexts and to “develop professional relationships [and] learn these cool things about people’s lives”. He believed doing so strengthens their relationships and in turn students are more likely to seek further guidance from him in the future. In her role, Shirin had a mandate from her Faculty to support students from their first day to beyond graduation. Naturally, this mandate enhanced her team’s engagement with students due to connecting at multiple touchpoints during their undergraduate studies:

[We’re exploring] that mentoring or academic coaching piece for...students so that we’re...helping them out with academic success throughout their program at different touch points not just at entry point, but throughout their program.

Becoming familiar with students’ needs at various touchpoints also allowed them to be proactive in disseminating just in time, tailored information specific to students’ stage in the student engagement cycle.

4.7.3. Counselling

Hiebert and Borgen (2002) describe counselling as “an interpersonal process that moves beyond providing client-relevant information to broader issues such as career development, work-adjustment, work-dysfunction, and integration of life roles” (p. 137). Participants who served this function also employ advising and guiding skills to
counsel students in their career development. As the functions progress from advising, guiding, to counselling, so does the intimacy of the relationship between the professional and student; the exchange of information shifts from the professional disseminating generic information and the student being passive, to the student actively contributing personal information and insights in counselling.

Professionally trained as a counsellor, Jenn used personality and career assessment such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Strong Interest Inventory to help students begin their self-discovery process. Being careful not to simply “test and tell”, she conducted in-depth debrief sessions with students on their assessment and grounds the results on their context:

With the Strong [Interest Inventory], we always had times of working one on one with the student, debriefing it, seeing how this fit for them and how that didn’t...I had learned the manuals of the MBTI and...how to make it more, really carefully aligned with students...so I think there is a really a respectful and open way to use some of these inventories.

When working with students to overcome career-related issues, such as feeling anxious about job prospects upon graduation, Jenn employed motivational interviewing to help them understand the origins of their anxiety; working together they would identify strategies to acknowledge and address factors that trigger their anxiousness. She believed establishing a “therapeutic alliance” is essential to the success of the therapy:

I bring together my skills as a counsellor to establish therapeutic alliance, develop a solid working relationship as we move ahead with their career questions and the goals that they have as they’re working ahead. How I help them meet their goals is through everything I myself have learned in career...I help them from where they’re at, and I’m careful to find out well, okay, what is your question that you’re coming to me with me to me here today, how can I be most useful for you? It’s an interplay of course I have many ideas on how I can be useful to them but I want to build that working alliance and have them fully involved too.

Combined with interventions specific to students’ needs, having a therapeutic alliance enables professionals to help students progress from inaction to action, passive to active, and feeling hopeless to regaining a sense of agency.
4.7.4. Teaching

Participants who taught saw teaching as a function that takes place inside and outside of the traditional classroom, through both curricular and co-curricular activities. By facilitating curriculum, professionals cited transferable skills they nurture in students. Three notable transferable skills mentioned were critical thinking, problem solving, and adaptability.

**Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking requires one to make judgments by considering and analyzing options. Jacques employed case studies as a teaching tool in his course, where students reviewed actual organizational issues and applied course concepts to formulate solutions to the issues. Given limited time frames to analyze each problem and devise recommendations, students presented their analysis and solutions as part of their course requirement. As an added benefit, Jacques invited industry employers to observe and evaluate these presentations, so that students received feedback from professionals “working in the field” on both the presentation content and delivery, and gained insights as to how these organizational challenges are tackled in the workplace. Bringing organizations into the classroom also helped students gain exposure and connections with potential future employers.

**Problem Solving**

Professionals also facilitated opportunities for students to practice problem solving skills. As she conceived career as a way to contribute to society, Melissa encouraged students to consider their own contribution by actively identifying problems in the community and how they can leverage their knowledge and talent to address these problems; the last section on professionals’ conceptions of career highlighted her students’ success in designing a composting bin for the City of Surrey. In her course, she sought local community partners interested in having students help with their organizational challenges, which may involve identifying and cultivating stakeholders, designing solution prototypes, and/or presenting recommendations to the organization’s board of directors. Working as “teams of junior consultants”, students also practiced teamwork, project management, and conflict resolution – all in a safe environment under Melissa’s guidance and mentorship. By having students engaged with community
organizations to help address tangible issues, they developed confidence and gained valuable experiences for their portfolios and future professional aspirations.

**Adaptability**

Professionals taught students to adapt to changing circumstances. In her role organizing campus events, Angelica role modelled adaptability for her student staff and volunteers when details did not proceed according to plan, and “quick thinking and troubleshooting are mirrored and required” to resolve logistical issues. Whenever possible, she involved her student team in forming and implementing solutions to major problems affecting her department. During events, when unexpected situations took place, Angelica empowered student staff and volunteers to be adaptable and resourceful and to consider how they might resolve the issues before escalating them to her attention. Ultimately, she hoped these co-curricular involvement opportunities teach students to “expect the unexpected”, and to transfer their adaptability to their academic and professional roles.

**4.7.5. Advocating**

In their day to day work, professionals pay attention to patterns and trends in student issues; recurring problems and requests from students indicate potential systemic issues that require advocacy. For instance, academic and program advisors, through their interactions with students, may discover common problems with course enrollment and degree requirements:

[A student] took a...special topics course and she took it a second time on a different topic because it’s a special topic, you should be able to take them more than once if you want to. Now [the department] had neglected to include language in the calendar allowing a student to take it more than once...It’s these little clerical pieces that fall through the cracks so easily and aren’t noticed until something goes wrong. (Oshi)

By raising their concerns and enlisting support from senior administrators, such as Deans and Associate Deans to champion their cause, they can resolve these issues systemically for all students experiencing the particular issue, rather than by one student at a time. Career influencers see themselves providing valuable student perspective by being “people on the ground” (Oshi) who make a consistent effort to relay student experience and recommendations for improvement to their leaders. Lynda explained:
Advocating for students is huge, is a big part of [my] role. When students have extenuating circumstances and they need some considerations we can speak on their behalf because we know the jargon. I think that’s a big thing. Universities have a jargon for sure and the student when presenting their case to somebody can use the wrong words and it sounds right...So advocating for a student, helping them understand how the system works, to solve short-term problems; very important.

Professionals also actively participate on university committees, either by virtue of their roles or running for positions. The act of running for a position is in itself a career development activity, since the candidate has to engage in self-promotion, which require an awareness of their strengths and potential contribution to the position; in addition, they must convince colleagues to support their candidacy, which involves influence and persuasion. This is comparable to a typical interview process where the applicant discusses their qualifications and persuades interviewers of their suitability for the role: “In both cases, you need to know yourself and know how to ‘sell’ yourself” (Shayan). Shayan regarded his committee work as an opportunity to further his impact on students and to serve the university community by contributing his strengths and perspective. Oshi was attracted to committee work as it enabled him to “take their expertise and make the job more interesting”, while expanding his campus network and presence at the same time. Both Shayan and Oshi thought their participation on committees helped them become better role models to students, as they demonstrated the importance of community service as part of their career development strategy.

4.7.6. External Liaising

Often, professionals represent the institution at outreach programs and events in the local community. In addition to promoting KPU’s program options, they may be asked to facilitate workshops educating audiences on the value of post-secondary education, especially in relation to how education may enhance job prospects. Jeremy saw the external liaising function as an opportunity to connect with the public and to get them excited about pursuing higher education, while leaving a positive impression about KPU as an institution that is “out there with the community”. Michael believed his role champions the institutional value of accessibility, as well as the notion that post-secondary education is available to anyone who wishes to participate and take advantage of the opportunity to improve themselves to fulfill their personal and professional goals:
…post-secondary can be a scary place…Part of what I saw in my role was breaking down the barriers of post-secondary as this big scary place that you need, I don’t know, to be of a certain kind of person to go to, no you don’t. Anyone can go [Laughs].

Professionals also connect with community organizations and agencies to develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial; doing so requires them to understand the goals of both the organization and themselves, and how the collaboration would result in meeting both sets of goals. When developing student volunteer and service learning opportunities, Sumra envisioned the purpose and outcomes of the opportunities, and then sought “organizations who share similar values and goals, so that the partnership is worthwhile” for both parties and increases the likelihood of future collaboration.

Gathering information and news is another incentive for professionals to liaise with external organizations on a continual basis. Cristel described herself as a “catalyst of information exchange” as she regularly interacted with local school districts to gather trends in secondary education, so that she could help high school students, families, and teachers prepare for their transition to post-secondary education. David chaired his program advisory committee, consisting of employers and professionals from the industry. He engaged committee members to provide feedback and perspective on his program’s curriculum and learning outcomes.

4.7.7. Leading

The final function, leading, is often performed by managers and administrators who oversee employees. Responsibilities under the leading function fell under three descriptions: empowering team members, leveraging connections, and leading change.

Unlike the previous functions, leading roles indirectly impact student career development by empowering their staff – the professionals whose work directly enhances student career success. Jan saw himself as a career influencer on “a meta level…[as] an influencer for career influencers”; he described leading as “clearing the way for those who come behind [me]”, removing barriers and obstacles so they can conduct their roles of serving students in an optimal environment. Shayan described his daily ritual of checking in with each team member in order to gauge their workload and wellbeing, in order to offer personalized support to “help them help students”.
Participants also discussed leveraging connections within and outside of the university to obtain current information for their team and themselves. Cristel saw herself as a conduit between her department, KPU colleagues, and partnering organizations, and a “sourcer of information” who readily shared her learning with her staff to ensure they operate with the most up-to-date information and discussed any changes the information has on their role and service to students:

[My role entails] sourcing information, it’s listening to people, it’s asking the questions and then it’s giving everybody else the information. I’m just a sourcer of information...I still directly see these prospective students and everything but not as much as I used to because my role is more working with the school districts, with the executives at KPU and overseeing a team and scheduling to make sure that they’re on target. But they [my direct reports] are definitely way more as the career influencers, so there’s been a shift [from my former roles].

As well, participants in supervisory capacities spoke of leading and supporting changes in policies, systems, processes, and organizational structures. To successfully perform her managerial role, Shirin believed having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of university policies was critical:

...not only do I have the [KPU] policy website on standby at work, I also encourage my team to do the same because these conversations about student conduct, academic integrity, attendance, appeal process, etc., etc., come up all the time when we meet with students. I also make a point to participate in the [KPU] policy development blog and comment on new and revising policies.

When Jan started his role, he was given the directive to bring stability to his Faculty portfolio but to also proceed with the developments the Faculty has already committed to fulfilling. This involved striking a fine balance between acknowledging the existing operations and processes that continue to be useful, while also building trust with his team and encouraging them to consider new ways to be adaptive and efficient:

I think because my personality is that people do trust me fairly easily. They saw that I had the language to support them and I had the passion to support a vision of treating students appropriately and be fair to faculty as well...so we certainly have a team and we made some adjustments. Now I think that everybody feels like we are working in the same direction to get some good work done and that’s an important piece.

In managing this balance, Jan sought advice and support from champions within his Faculty, and from there, engaged his entire team to offer recommendations to improve
their practice. This included devising “common exams, common goals…[and] common rubrics, no matter what level they’re teaching”. This in turn advanced his original directive, while also improving student services and employee engagement.

4.7.8. Combining the Functions

Professionals perform multiple functions simultaneously when they conduct their work. For instance, Jeremy described his experience facilitating workshops in local high schools:

We’ll go out to younger groups in grade 10 through Planning 10 classes and do more career and post-secondary exploration workshops…[describing] this is what post-secondary looks like and these are the types of careers you can go into and by doing that creating awareness about KPU.

Conducting such workshops on post-secondary education programs and related occupations at a local high school would employ a combination of teaching, advising, and external liaising functions.

The guiding and advocating functions may operate as a cycle; through regular student interactions, professionals detect recurring patterns on student issues. Oshi discussed how his role as an academic advisor enabled him to support a policy allowing students to pursue minors in his Faculty:

I’d like to think that [academic advising and policy development] inform each other; that if my experience in advising was one of the things that led me to realize that there was a population that wanted to take our programs that couldn’t and by, the sheer volume of Bachelor’s degree plans that I’ve put together has given me very solid structural knowledge of the way our degrees work… the advisors in this place have some of the best understanding of the full degree program.

Upon generating recommendations and lobbying for support to address students issues, professionals can then revise their guiding practice with updated solutions and continue to seek out new issues to be resolved.

4.7.9. Section Summary

Professionals saw their roles impacting student career development by performing seven key career functions. The first three functions of advising, guiding, and
counselling were considered typical career helping activities in any settings (Hiebert & Borgen, 2002), while the remaining functions of teaching, advocating, external liaising, and leading were introduced as additional functions based on the perspectives of this study’s participants. In their day-to-day work, professionals perform a combination of the functions in carrying out their responsibilities.

4.8. How They See *Themselves* Impacting Student Career Development

The previous research sub-question solicited participants’ perspectives on how their roles contribute to student career development. The next question asked how they, as individuals, help enhance student career success. In general, participants believed they do so by sharing their life stories and demonstrating personal attributes that promote meaningful interactions and relationships.

4.8.1. Sharing Life Stories

The beginning of this chapter featured participants’ professional, educational, and personal experiences that make up their life stories. When helping students with their career development, professionals draw from these experiences to inform their approach, as explained by Cristel, who felt she has the life and professional experience to inspire students in their careers despite the lack of training in the topic:

I’ll tell students like “I’m not trained in this”. That’ll be the first thing, like I’m not, because I know that it’s a very political thing between the career counseling, career advising, all those different things and a) I don’t want to step on anybody’s toes and b) I also want them to know like this is not [based on formal training], I just lived through this and I’ve asked a lot of questions and I know a lot of people and I’ve been at KPU and I’ve seen the programs evolve.

To this end, three vignettes – one each from a faculty member, a staff member, and an administrator – to demonstrate diversity of experiences, are presented.

**Jacques’ Story as a Faculty Member**

Prior to working at KPU as an instructor, Jacques worked in a professional firm as a manager and led a team of staff, where he gained insights into desirable employee attributes. Wanting to simulate the workplace environment in the classroom and help
students practice these attributes, Jacques assigned a professionalism mark in his courses:

I try to bring what my understanding...as an auditor for off and on for like 14 years. The things that I thought were the characteristics that led to promotion at my firm and the stuff that I look for [in] students, and so I try to promote those in the classroom, being punctuality, being prepared for meetings; that means I’ve really emphasized you should be prepared for our class, it is not a lecture, you should be involved. Participate, you are a participant so you’re involved in these discussions and you’re talking to other human beings so those elements all come into play in the professionalism mark that I give each week.

Jacques also leveraged his connections with former industry colleagues by inviting them to attend his class and campus networking events, to share their experience working in the field. Whenever appropriate, he proactively facilitated connections between his top students and employers. For example, as the lead case competition coach for his academic program, he engaged hiring managers to serve as guest judges during mock competitions. While the judges provided feedback to student presentations, they also observed firsthand each student’s capability in an informal setting, giving them an opportunity to scout out talents to join their companies. Earlier in the chapter it was also mentioned that Jacques, having experienced burnout and its impact on himself and his family life, advised students to maintain work-life balance.

Jacques discovered his passion for teaching when he first taught courses for his professional association, which he continued to do. To enhance his practice as an educator, he pursued a graduate degree in education. The learning experience helped refine his pedagogical approach and instilled the value of lifelong learning – a notion he passes onto students as he recommends them to pursue formal and informal learning opportunities such as completing a professional designation or participating in online courses. As an educator, he aspired to “expand [students’] curiosity” so that they would want to, instead of having to, engage in learning.

Outside of work, Jacques played on a sports team and also coached his kids’ teams. He enjoyed the competitive nature of these activities and believed it is also why it is fitting for him to serve as an academic case competition coach.
Angelica’s Story as a Staff Member

Even though her role and mandate were to facilitate a smooth post-secondary transition experience for new students and families, Angelica’s own integration to university life was initially precarious. She began her undergraduate studies in science at a large research university and recalled failing her first semester:

[I share with] the new students...that I am a failed transition...I failed, I flunked out of [university] my first semester. So and for all the reasons that we know cause a student to flunk out, it’s a miracle I have this job but I also understand that perspective...I guess tying that back to a student’s career development I’m hoping that they can...learn through my mistakes or being able to analyze what I did wrong. They can reflect and see what’s holding them back.

Deciding that her original university and major was a poor fit, Angelica transferred to a teaching university closer to home and switched to a business major, with a concentration in entrepreneurial leadership. Through the program, she found a mentor in one of the instructors who believed in her ability and vouched for her potential when applying for her current position, which was mentioned earlier in the chapter. She used the skills learned from the program in her day-to-day work, from engaging stakeholders, organizing events, to evaluating program success. In addition, she readily shared her university transition experience with new students and student leaders to illustrate the importance of learning from failure, engaging in self-reflection and exploration to discover her purpose and fit within the university community. As a result of her own academic experience, she incorporated opportunities to explore options and to connect with others into the transition programs:

...so things like normalizing changes in their majors...students often think that they come to university and they’ve made a choice to be an accountant and that’s it. But part of my job and part of the orientation leader’s job is to tell them that “no, university is for exploring”...I think for the new students as well there certainly can be career influencers through the events themselves so getting students access to the different resources, because I think the more the students explore those resources the more they can develop themselves as individuals and potentially professionals...as well as networking because they meet senior students, they meet other students, not necessarily in the same program so I think that their careers could potentially be influenced indirectly by those networking opportunities.
Shayan’s Story as an Administrator

As a high school student who lacked focus and concentration, Shayan never conceived of going to university and completing a graduate counselling degree:

For someone who barely passed high school, even though I tried my butt, I tried very hard and I never moved passed that C minus and then [when I finished the graduate program] it’s just, holy smokes, like people wrote me off and now I’m the most educated person in my family and then in my group of friends, academically, it doesn’t mean I’m the smartest but in terms of credentials, I got it.

He described the turning point in his academic “turmoil” was when a friend’s mother suggested he consider pursuing a degree in child and youth care at a local college, and once he started he “never looked back”. When graduation approached, a classmate informed him of a posting that “had his name written all over”: KPU was looking for a coordinator to encourage disengaged youth to pursue post-secondary education; this became his first role at the institution. Being able to relate to students in the program with his own circumstances, Shayan felt he was able to make a positive impact.

In his tenure at KPU, Shayan had served in multiple capacities in recruitment, transition, and advising, developing his expertise and building professional networks along the way. However, his professional journey was not always “smooth sailing” and he valued the opportunity to learn from failure. In one unsuccessful job competition, he recalled receiving advice from one of the interviewers to pursue a graduate degree to enhance his qualifications; he was subsequently successful when the same position became available again and he had completed additional studies. He attributed his success to date to the career influencers he had encountered; each of them provided him with advice and recommendations to move towards major milestones: “it was somebody else seeing something in me that got me these jobs and this career…[and] I didn’t have to second guess myself”. He applied learning from his counselling program on a daily basis when working with students and motivating direct reports, striving to balance between providing support and fostering self-reliance:

I bring…listening and understanding…[to] what is it that others want…not only what we think they want, what is it that they want. What do students want when they come see an advisor? What do students want when we’re talking about careers? What do they want? What do I want when I ask somebody? I want someone that knows what they’re talking about, I want someone to help give, instruct me somewhere,
[but] not give a full meal deal because if they did I’m not going to do it...the work [is] done for me [so] why would I do it?

4.8.2. Demonstrating Personal Attributes

As demonstrated by the Jacques, Angelica, and Shayan’s vignettes, professionals’ approach to serving students can be traced from their life experiences. Furthermore, the analysis of participants’ background and lessons resulted in five personal attributes they bring to foster meaningful conversations and relationships with students: approachable, authentic, empathetic, a natural coach, and vulnerable.

**Approachable**

Melissa believed her strong campus presence is why students feel comfortable connecting with her:

I talk to them [students] a lot outside of class as well because I’m just always here, which is very helpful for them so they just like grab me and ask me for things. Or I’ll see them on the Skytrain and we’ll chat on the way home...a lot of times we’ll be doing a project and I’ll be there in the lab with them, helping them out, even if it’s not class time, it doesn’t have to be class time. Sometimes I have to go somewhere else but that’s fine. I tell them what my limits are but I’ll be there and they can ask me questions.

Approachability requires a professional to be both available and willing to engage with students. In Melissa’s case, by being on campus frequently and making herself accessible, she helped students resolve their issues and concerns promptly, rather than delaying their resolutions until formal office hours. The convenience she provided students, in turn, enhanced their relationships.

**Authentic**

Being authentic requires the professional to be genuine and truthful; to provide information and advice grounded in facts; to be as transparent as possible when making evaluations and providing feedback. As an administrator, Jan showed both approachability and authenticity when he followed an open-door policy and facilitated a safe environment for students and colleagues to share their issues:

...you are a safe person so that on a personal level you are predictable, you are yourself. It doesn’t mean that you have to be completely even tempered or always in the best of moods but it does mean that
predictably, somebody could come to you and they would not be treated differently than they would [since] the last time...they would know that they would be listened to and that there would be help that could be given and honesty about what limitations.

When individuals (students or direct reports) feel safe to express their concerns, they tend to explain their circumstances in greater detail and give professionals a fuller picture of their circumstances. In turn they receive comprehensive advice to make the best possible decision for themselves and are more likely to seek help again because they found value in the interaction and advice.

**Empathetic**

Professionals demonstrate empathy by asking themselves, “How would they like to be treated if they were in the student’s shoes?” For instance, professionals with advising, guiding, and counselling functions in their roles typically host drop-in appointments, helping one student after another. At times, it can be exhausting to engage in back-to-back conversations. For Michael, exercising empathy is critical in combating “appointment fatigue”:

...in a lot of cases you are...one of their first interactions with the university... you’re setting the bar for their experience [at KPU]...they’ve made an effort to take time out of their day, to come to this location at these designated hours, waited for a while to speak with somebody [and therefore] I’m going to give them the time and attention that I think they deserve rather than push them out the door so I can get on the lineup and help the other people who are waiting. In most cases when we were busy and we were behind...I don’t remember people leaving my office angry or upset or mad about anything. I was always able to either calm them down if they were worked up about waiting or provide a level of service that compensated for the long wait without ever having to rush through.

Aiming to understanding students’ perspective reminded Michael to be in service of the students he meets, as the quality of their interactions could affect students’ impressions of the university. Furthermore, he continued to demonstrate empathy in appointments by actively listening and asking questions to confirm he understood their experience and concerns, which in turn allowed him to provide relevant advice tailored to students’ individual situations.
A Natural Coach

Being a natural coach involves highlighting students’ strengths and helping them remove barriers that hinder their potential. Lynda saw every student conversation as an opportunity to perform these coaching activities. Though her role is primarily concerned with students’ academic wellbeing, she often advised them on personal issues beyond their studies. She described a typical interaction where she helped students consider the rationale for their choice of major:

You [as an advisor] say [to a student] “You know, it looks like you’re pursuing Business but really your highest grades are in your non-Business courses”. And you leave it at that. And the student will often say “Well, my parents said that if I studied Business I can get a job that pays really well and so I’m listening to my parent. Actually, I really like History, but I don’t want to be a history teacher.” So you can start to explore what that would mean for the student and encourage them to talk to people. First talk to the people on campus that are easily accessible, look at career information that connects to History and then think about “Okay, how can we help you talk to your parents, how can we get your parents involved in that conversation?” [Sometimes] you can’t [help]. Not everybody can pick up and change and do whatever they want without their family’s support...[but] if we can help a student gather information and connect better then I see that as important. I just think it’s going to make a big difference.

Coaching is a “delicate process” (Lynda). Instead of having professionals “hand hold [them] and drive the process” (Shirin), students need to generate their own insights and conclusions, in turn develop agency to take action to resolve their issues. By doing so, students also enhance their self-awareness and cultivate valuable transferable skills, such as interpersonal skills, resourcefulness, and problem solving, as indicated by Lynda’s student example.

Vulnerable

Angelica’s vignette, described earlier, demonstrates this final attribute. Instead of feeling embarrassed about her initial defeat as a first-year student, she was open and keen to share her failure experience and the lessons she had learned, in hopes of inspiring others to explore various academic options to discover their fit. “Putting [herself] out there as someone who had been through the trenches and can understand what [students] are going through” made Angelica vulnerable and relatable, earning her respect from students.
4.8.3. Section Summary

As individuals, professionals extract from their unique life experiences to inform their actions and strategies to help students develop character, skills, and knowledge necessary for career success. The three vignettes featured in this section demonstrated the ways professionals used their professional, educational, and personal experiences to impart lessons to students in hopes of these lessons resonating with the students’ contexts. In addition, through this process of sharing their stories and experiences, professionals also exhibit attributes that promote student interaction, regardless of their roles. The attributes are: approachable, authentic, empathetic, a natural coach, and vulnerable.

4.9. Resources and Competencies to Further Their Impact

Finally, participants were asked to contribute ideas on resources and competencies they believe would help further their impact on student career development. Their responses fell into two main areas: (a) they would like to see professional development related to career topics and receive support to pursue these learning opportunities; and (b) they would like the institution to demonstrate their commitment to student career success through tangible actions.

4.9.1. Furthering Impact Requires Professional Development

Participants expressed a strong desire to engage in learning opportunities related to student career development. Angelica would like to develop basic knowledge and understanding of career development theories and how they apply to post-secondary students and to her role and practice:

...student development theory [is] fantastic for the new students and in some cases the orientation leaders. But I’d like to be able to support my orientation leaders a little bit more and know specifically how to, how to support them in a...strategic way that involves tried, tested [career development] methods and theories.

For professionals such as Emily, Jacques, and Sumra who oversee co-curricular programs, grounding their activities in a career-centred theoretical foundation allows them to communicate their educational value and impact – and ultimately their credibility
– to internal stakeholders such as senior administrators and faculty members, which could in turn contribute towards stronger rationale for requests such as securing resources to sustain these programs:

So often we’re reporting on statistics, number of [job] placements, geographic location of where students worked but not measuring the level of their learning or these transformational moments or how much they felt it. I know a lot of it is anecdotal but it’s like how can we capture that, just real measure of success, of them feeling like this co-op experience changed the way their educational experience at Kwantlen? I think career theories can help us explain these successes and...get that message to senior administration...get them to care...and ask the right questions. I feel like there is a gap there with, at the front level we see these transformations and these successes, but I don’t know how far those success stories get pushed up the ladder. (Emily)

In addition to learning about theories, participants would also like to enhance their practice of career activities immediately related to their roles and in turn, the functions they perform within their roles. Since career questions and concerns surface frequently in student appointments, when performing advising and guiding functions, Lynda and Oshi wished to be equipped with tools on facilitating career conversations:

“What are some things I can say, resources and tips I can provide, before I make a referral for them to go see someone in Careers?” (Oshi). For Jeremy who advised prospective students on academic programs and potential career outcomes, finding and interpreting labour market information is important; he would like to “organize [the information] in a way that [he] can refer to them and direct students to them in a useful manner”, which he believed would help them appreciate the everchanging labour market, and in the process also develop research skills and adaptability. Since their faculty role and teaching function involve coordinating student practicums, Melissa and David were keen to refine their relationship building skills with potential employers and organizations interested in hiring student talent:

...trying to develop those relationships with industry. How do I do that...how can I be more effective at it? Right now, it’s a little bit random in terms of how I’m going about it and so looking at that strategically I’ll probably go back and think “Okay, to develop these ones, who are the people I need to hit? How do I bring them into our fold in different ways?” And do that strategically so that...I don’t overlap with other people because everybody has their own contacts and...we don’t want to overwhelm one person with all of it. How do I strategically build that interdisciplinary network for all of the students? (Melissa)
They would also like to learn how to provide initial feedback on student applications as they saw students as “an extension of the program and university’s reputation to the community” (David).

**Formality of Activities**

Participants discerned between formal and informal professional development opportunities. Formal activities included completing courses and programs related to career development, such as the career development practitioner certification and graduate degrees in career counselling. Informally, participants saw the potential in forming a community of practice for career influencers to exchange ideas and learning. Some even expressed interest in job shadowing and mentoring one another, and possibly conducting a short-term practicum in their industry to ensure their teaching in the classroom continues to be relevant:

I’d almost like more “flies” on my wall...It’s not something that we get to do because everybody’s too bloody busy, but I do think it should be part of the practice that periodically we are observed by either other advisors or by Associate Deans or by faculty members or by someone who has some professional stake in the practice just as a form of review. (Oshi)

...I find professional development, the one month that we’re supposed to do professional development very difficult because I have the four departments I need to keep on top of. I can usually find something to do for each one, making sure that my knowledge is growing in that way, but how do I keep in touch with the industry through that time? I’ve been thinking about possibly approaching a company and talk about doing a one-month residency. So actually, going back into the industry for a month [laughs]. (Melissa)

It was noteworthy that the majority of participants (14 out of 15) acknowledged the value of taking part in this study, as it gave them an opportunity to reflect on their practice. In the following quotes, participants discussed how their participation in the study allowed them to clarify their practice and served as a good reminder to be intentional about their work and approach:

I really loved this whole interview process. I spent some time preparing and reviewing and getting what I thought were relevant materials together and it actually helped me to clarify my process. I feel a lot more clear about some things in the past, career theories and practices that more than a decade ago really inspired me and influenced me and it helped to conceptualize more clarity on my process: exactly how I start and what really are my deeply held beliefs about working with people.
So I am really glad actually that we had this time, I feel like in preparation, it helped me to become more clear about my own process. (Jenn)

I think [the interview process] was a good reminder of why, what I do, and why I like, what brought me into this career, this path, from the beginning. I think you forget sometimes in the hustle of everyday trying to get things done or things taken off your to-do list that it’s easy to forget why we’re here and what our role is in helping students, educating them. So it’s a good reminder of kind of going back to the original roots of why, or what my role is and what I find meaningful in my job or how can I give meaning to students. I think that it’ll maybe make me more of a compassionate instructor or, yeah I think it’s probably more compassion. (Emily)

To reflect back on why you do what you do is important after you’ve been doing it long enough that it becomes rote…I think asking these questions and being able to answer these questions is good for me. I enjoy…think[ing] about what I’m doing a little bit more and to make sure that I’m still doing, I’m still being intentional about what I do and I’m not just going through the motions of looking up information and passing on information…It’s easy to get bogged down in ‘I need to get into this course, I need to graduate, what’s a quantitative course? What if I don’t want to take English 1100? What if I don’t want a language?’ All those nitty-gritty things. It’s easy to get bogged down in that. But to remember to slow down and look at each student as an individual and yes you have to answer the question that a student comes in with but remember to end your conversation with ‘is there anything else I can help you with?’ (Lynda)

The testimonials above also suggested that self-reflection should also be regarded as an informal learning activity, and that setting aside time and space for contemplation is essential for professionals to connect their day-to-day work with their own purpose and values and to improve their practice.

**Support for Pursuing Professional Development**

As much as they discussed the value of professional development to enhance their impact, participants also emphasized the importance of receiving support and “having leadership actually valuing it and encouraging…[and] saying it is important to take the time to pursue and bringing learning back to their work and to their colleagues” (Sumra). Support such as funding and time off were seen as equally important for formal and informal activities. A few noted that if any professional can serve as a career influencer, then career-related professional development, whenever possible, should be accessible to all.
4.9.2. Furthering Impact Requires Institutional Commitment

For Jacques, institutional support meant “having the university recognize there is value in the work I’ve been doing off the side of my desk [and as a result they are] helping me make it more of my desk”. Professionals would also like to see KPU demonstrate commitment to student career success through action. Talking about the importance of career education and development isn’t enough; they yearned to see key planning documents cite career success as a key outcome, along with strategies on how it can be realized, so that they can see themselves as “contributors to the outcome and strategies through their day-to-day work” (Jan).

Providing that student career success becomes a key priority for the institution, participants would like KPU to “walk its talk” (Shayan) by further investing in career development and education programs that already align with this priority:

I think Career Services (CS), I think if there was a department, because some of the uncertainty comes from just not understanding the transferability of your education or understanding or getting a sampling of Co-op[erative Education] (Co-op), let’s say. I think Co-op is so important that you get to sample what you’re doing. I think experiential learning, Co-op Education, Career Services where they get to test and try things out and understand the importance of how transferable their education is, and I think KPU does a great job of it already, but I think definitely some resources in those areas like CS and Co-op would be super valuable. (Cristel)

By the same token, participants also felt it would be important – and timely, given that KPU is working on its next strategic plan, at the time of writing – to incentivize new initiatives and programs that promote career development. Examples included incorporating reflection activities in courses to help students consider the skills and knowledge they are learning in relation to their professional aspirations and embedding career success outcomes in the curriculum and also in co-curricular activities.

4.9.3. Section Summary

Nurturing professionals to serve as career influencers requires institutions to empower them with professional development opportunities and to place emphasis on student career success as a key institutional priority. In this study, professionals aspired to strengthen their helping approach with career development theories and practices by
participating in formal and informal learning activities. The pursuit of these activities would necessitate support from the institution in funding and time. Recognizing student career success as a key priority means for the institution to “walk its talk” by articulating concrete strategies in key planning documents and contributing resources into current and new initiatives that are aligned with the priority and strategies.

4.10. Chapter Summary

This chapter began by reiterating the professional roles that students saw as career influencers, followed by outlining participants’ collective professional, educational, and personal experiences, and how these experiences might have informed their helping approach. Then, the study’s findings were presented by addressing the four research sub-questions: how professionals conceptualize the term “career”; how they see their role impacting student career development; how they see themselves impacting student career development; and finally, the resources and/or competencies they believe are important to further their impact. The next and final chapter discusses the implications of these findings, contributions to theory and practice, and proposes recommendations for research and policy.
Chapter 5.

Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This study explored how post-secondary professionals conceive their influence in student career development; their conceptions generated insights as to why some professionals, referred to by this study as career influencers, are naturally inclined to offer career support to students. Since professionals who serve as career influencers do so in an informal capacity, the study employed grounded theory methodological elements to better understand this largely unknown phenomenon. Two-part interviews were conducted with 15 participants, with the data analysis process generating the following significant findings that address the central research question of “How do post-secondary education professionals conceive their influence in student career development?”:

1. Post-secondary professionals see their role impacting student career development by performing functions advising, guiding, counselling, teaching, advocating, external liaising, and leading functions.

2. Professionals see themselves impacting student career development by sharing their life story and by being approachable, authentic, empathetic, a natural coach, and vulnerable.

3. Professionals conceptualize the term “career” in a variety of ways. These conceptions inform their career context – the lens they employ to help students with their careers.

4. Professionals identified both formal and informal professional development opportunities that they believe would further their impact on student career development – in the form of both theoretical knowledge and practice.

The implications of these significant findings are next discussed in detail. The first three sub-questions are reviewed in-depth. Results from fourth sub-question contained significant overlap with the first three and informed the data and analysis for
those questions; consequently, the fourth sub-question analysis is incorporated into the first three. Then, this final chapter concludes with an examination of the study’s contribution to theory, its limitations, and recommendations for practice and further research.

5.2. Performing Functions that Enhance Student Career Development

The study’s participants described a variety of career-related activities they conduct within their professional role. Compiling and categorizing these career-related activities resulted in the emergence of four new functions not previously described in the literature:

- **Advising**: The professional disseminates career information focused on a particular topic; the information is general and not tailored to the student.

- **Guiding**: The professional personalizes career information based on the goals of the student; this requires gaining an initial understanding of the student’s needs and concerns prior to generating information.

- **Counselling**: The professional works with the student to engage in a self-exploration process in order to determine the best course of action that aligns with the student’s values and goals (both personal and career-related).

- **Teaching**: The professional helps the student develop career skills and competencies (e.g., conducting an audit, professionalism) through the facilitation of curricular and co-curricular activities.

- **Advocating**: The professional makes recommendations to processes, policies, and structures (e.g., degree requirements) to resolve issues and/or make improvements to enhance student career success.

- **External Liaising**: The professional promotes the institution to the general public; cultivates relationships with external organizations and professionals to enhance student career success (e.g., career and internship opportunities).
• **Leading**: The professional, typically in a supervisory capacity, supports and empowers their direct reports to serve as career influencers to students.

Each function caters to a specific audience type. Advising, guiding, counselling, and teaching are student-facing; advocating is administration-facing; external liaising is public-facing; and finally, leading is employee-facing.

### 5.2.1. Performing Functions in Breadth

In the previous chapter, it was posited that professionals may perform multiple functions simultaneously when conducting their work. Two examples were provided to illustrate how professionals combine functions: Jeremy presenting a workshop on post-secondary education options and career planning to high school students is performing the advising, teaching, and external liaising functions; Oshi, while meeting with students during advising appointments (guiding), notices a recurring course enrollment issue experienced by multiple students and raises this concern with his supervisor along with proposed solutions on policy development (advocating).

It can be speculated that “function overlaps” occur frequently as professionals carry out their role and activities. It can also be hypothesized that each function operates much like a rheostat, an adjustable dial that professionals calibrate on a frequent basis. Adjusting the dial may happen as a result of a number of factors, such as:

• **the professional’s role**: To what extent can the professional exercise the function within their role? For instance, do they have the authority to qualify student practicum experience so students can receive course credit?

• **the professional’s experience and training**: Does the professional have the qualifications to perform the function in varying degrees, such as having a registered clinical counsellor designation to perform the counselling function?

• **the type of activity or request**: What is the professional being asked to do? In relation to the previous factor, is the activity or request within their perceived jurisdiction and capability?
• the professional’s relationship with the student(s) or stakeholder(s):
  Has the professional worked with the student or stakeholder before in similar or other capacities (and is therefore familiar with conducting the activity or request), or are they meeting for the very first time (requiring them to first become acquainted)?

  Returning to one of the examples mentioned above, Oshi began with performing primarily the guiding function. As he observed multiple students facing the same course enrollment issue preventing them from graduation, he also activated the advocating function by alerting his supervisor who would have the authority to address the issue, ultimately leading to the development of a policy that afforded students the flexibility to pursue minor programs in his Faculty.

5.2.2. Performing Functions in Depth

  As mentioned, the seven functions were generated by compiling and categorizing career-related activities. Further expanding on the rheostat metaphor, hypothetically, each career-related activity can be placed along the track of the adjustable dial to indicate the degree of involvement required by the professional to successfully conduct the activity. An illustration of a rheostat based on David’s scenario, a department chair who serves an external liaising function, is depicted in Figure 3.
Functions as Rheostats and Role Thresholds: David’s Experience

When asked how he believed his role as a department chair contributed to student career development, David identified a series of career-related activities, of which, a few were related to the external liaising, public-facing function; these are presented as follows, with each increasing activity requiring more involvement from David than the last:

1. He represents the institution and his Faculty at local business events, such as networking events at the local board of trade chapter;

2. He speaks at student recruitment events to prospective students and families, introducing them to the institution and programs within his Faculty; and

3. He chairs his department’s program advisory committee, where employers, alumni, and faculty members provide perspective and recommendations on the program’s curriculum and future direction.
David’s level of involvement, effort expended, and preparation required for each of these activities increases sequentially and are represented accordingly in their clockwise positioning on the rheostat. For example, attending a board of trade event required minimal preparation on his part, while chairing a program advisory committee meeting involved much more planning and consideration in advance, such as setting the meeting agenda, identifying relevant background materials and resources, and engaging guest speakers.

Since he has been serving as department chair for some time, David mentioned being able to conduct these activities with ease and comfort. That being said, towards the end of his first interview, he identified an additional external liaising activity:

I suppose there’s one more thing that I do [to help students with their career development]. One of the members [of the program advisory committee] wants to come on campus to recruit students and asks if [my department] would help with this...another employer heard our side chat and wanted to learn the same...and then the idea of a career fair for our program was conceived. [I was] unsure how to go about...what the protocol is so I chatted to [name of a staff member] from Career Services and she helped me out there.

Other participants also made reference to referring students and other stakeholders to the career centre. Shirin mentioned often walking students to the Career Services office right after academic advising appointments, so that “students are able to connect the dots for themselves”. Melissa connected her industry colleagues to Career Services so they can promote their company’s job openings using the institution’s central job portal.

Based on these accounts of referrals to the campus career centre, it can be theorized that within each function, a professional has a “role threshold”, that when exceeded, will result in the professional making a referral. Returning to David’s example, the three activities of attending network events, speaking at recruitment events, and chairing his department advisory committee, are what he believed to be within his role threshold; and therefore, he proceeded with conducting these activities, since he saw them as part of his role as a department chair. With respect to the advisory committee member’s proposal to recruit students on campus, he saw it as beyond his role threshold due to his lack of experience in event organization, and hence he referred them to colleagues in Career Services. Figure 4 illustrates the role threshold in David’s external liaising rheostat.
5.2.3. Implications of the Seven Functions

By seeing career-related activities as part of their role, regardless of position, professionals within the post-secondary institution acknowledged that career development is not – and also should not be – a responsibility solely of those professionals working in campus career centres. The realization that students tend to solicit advice from non-career services professionals prior to visiting their campus career centres – that is, if they visit at all – is already supported by other research studies (AlMa’wali, 2017; Amrein, 2013; Brainstorm Strategy Group, 2017; Environics Research Group, 2011; Imbimbo, Nina, & Stein, 2005; Kranzow, Foote, & Hinkle, 2015; Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2011; Rafuse & Lanning, 2016; Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010). It is also now corroborated by this study’s preliminary student poll, which confirmed that students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) sought career advice from professionals working outside the career centre (see Table 2). Therefore, career centres ought to consider better leveraging career influencers at their institutions to help emphasize career education and development as an important part of students’ post-secondary educational experience.
Notably, career centres can encourage professionals to identify the extent to which they fulfill the seven functions in their current roles. When professionals see the potential in their daily responsibilities to enhance student career development – in other words, recognizing and capitalizing on Krumboltz’s (1999, 2009) notion of unplanned opportunities – they can execute these responsibilities with more intention and purpose to influence students’ careers, and as a result amplify their impact on student career success.

The role threshold concept has immense potential and deserves further attention and investigation. Applying the concept, institutions may encourage professionals to identify and classify the career-related activities they believe they can take on, versus the activities they see requiring referrals to career centres. Doing so can help career centres crystalize their key functions and services and consider the activities career influencers can assist with. Comparing the two classifications can also indicate where role thresholds might reside for individuals in the same professional types, such as department chairs, as illustrated by David’s example. If career centres are successful in helping professionals identify their respective thresholds, then they might better anticipate supports and resources career influencers require to effectively help students and other stakeholders they serve, and in turn proactively provide just-in-time resources. This, in turn, over time can help to increase a professional’s threshold, thereby making them a more effective career influencer. In Melissa’s case, for example, Career Services might gauge her interest in learning how to access and navigate the central job portal herself, so that she can more effectively promote its features and capabilities to her industry colleagues, and consequently enhance her own connections with them as well. Once Melissa becomes experienced with using the portal, she might even be able to provide user feedback to help improve it for both students and employers.

For professionals to be most effective, they must be aware of their role threshold, which may be more challenging for some. In these circumstances, then, the role of a career centre would be to help professionals understand what career-related activities they can facilitate, when they should make a referral, and how career centres can assist those they refer. Career centres can work with career influencers to increase their threshold over time by helping them gain knowledge and confidence in conducting career-related activities that are closest to their current threshold; arguably, these activities might have the highest impact on student career development due to requiring
more involvement and effort on professionals’ part. On a related note, it also may be worthwhile to revisit the findings for this study’s sub-question four where participants were asked to identify competencies and resources that would further their impact on student career development. Since professionals saw themselves needing support with these items, their responses could shed light on where their role thresholds might be situated, which can inform the types of resources provided. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Brief overviews of career development theories and their applicability to various student scenarios and needs.

- “How to” guides that address issues such as how to conduct a basic review of student applications (for practicum opportunities); how to find and interpret labour market information; how to network with employers to create opportunities for students; and how to have career conversations when the topic comes up in meetings and appointments.

In addition, to formally recognize people who participate in these professional development experiences, institutions might consider issuing electronic (eBadges) to serve as a form of ‘certification.’ Many institutions, including KPU (KPU, 2018b) already have a badging system in place to recognize employees and students for pursuing professional development opportunities (Diaz, Finklestein, & Manning, 2015). Therefore, institutions can consider using eBadges to recognize career influencers; a good place to start might be creating eBadges for each of the seven career functions.

Finally, returning to David’s scenario, perhaps in the inaugural year of the career fair, Career Services would lead the event organization and he would assume an observer role where he introduces himself and forges connections with employer participants. Then, as he develops a stronger working relationship with Career Services, he might become more comfortable taking on a more active role, to eventually hosting the fair in future years. The role of Career Services, then, would shift from primarily organizing the event, to empowering David by providing ongoing administrative support, guidance and resources such as how to identify new companies who might be a fit for the event, and how to extend a compelling invitation. In addition, Career Services can document this collaboration along the way, recognize the partnership as a model
practice, and together with David share their experience with other department chairs in hopes of collaborating with them to set up career fairs and events for other students. This in turn can promote consistency across the institution for career event organization, even when events are primarily organized in a decentralized manner.

5.3. Sharing Life Stories and Demonstrating Personal Attributes

When study participants were asked to consider their individual contribution to student career development, their responses indicated two primary activities: sharing their life story with students and demonstrating key personal attributes that promote meaningful student interactions and relationships. Imparting experiences and lessons from their life stories require professionals to transfer learning from one life-role to another, as well as to recognize the role happenstance plays in their lives. The key attributes of being approachable, authentic, empathetic, a natural coach, and vulnerable, are deemed by participants as qualities that enabled them to be successful in cultivating high quality relationships with students. The three vignettes featured in the Results chapter (see Section 4.8.1) are used to illustrate ideas discussed in this section.

5.3.1. Integrating Life-roles

Participants alluded to sharing their life experiences with students through various means, such as imparting personal wisdom during advising appointments, or incorporating their own life lessons into experiential learning components. The three vignettes (see Section 4.8.1) demonstrated ways in which professionals drew from personal experiences to influence their practice:

- Jacques, who formerly held management positions, thought it was important to cultivate professional etiquette in the classroom. As such, he implemented a professionalism mark in his classes and has students self-evaluate their punctuality, participation, and preparedness.

- Angelica recounted her new student experience: After failing her first undergraduate semester, she explored courses and programs outside her original plan. In her professional role working with new students and student
leaders, she emphasized the value of academic exploration during post-secondary studies.

- Shayan’s story highlighted the importance of heeding advice and feedback from trusted individuals in his network, who have helped him identify his hidden talents and potentials, and therefore he would like to do the same for students by being in service to them and attending to their needs.

In each example, the participant transferred previous learning from another life-role to their professional capacity, thereby illustrating Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) idea that a person’s life-roles “interact to reciprocally shape each other” (p. 128). Furthermore, Magnusson and Redekopp’s (2011) concept of career integrity also relates to this: when individuals make connections between life-roles, the connections strengthen their career context and help maintain identity congruence. For instance, Jacques’ assignment of a professionalism mark in his classes, in a sense, has allowed him to continue his role as a supervisor, even though the context has shifted from managing professionals in a company to overseeing students who are aspiring professionals in the classroom.

This study also led to another interesting discovery: That at first, professionals do not necessarily make explicit connections between the learning derived from their various life roles. The interviews began with soliciting background information on their professional experiences within and outside of post-secondary education, so that participants were primed for later questions that involved identifying commonalities and transfers between their experiences. This study has found that to make these associations, participants at times needed prompting questions such as, “How do you think your former experience as an educational advisor enables you to help students with their careers in your current capacity?” As well, it was observed that sometimes participants only made associations long after the question, often providing these realizations at the end of the interview or at the follow up interview. Having provided an account of their work experiences, participants of this study acknowledged that they bring their previous experiences into their current roles; as Sumra stated, “I certainly wasn’t a blank slate when I started this job. I applied what I learned from my last few jobs to help me get up and running”. However, it seems that transferring learning across life-roles might not be as apparent and immediate; the connections instead were
afterthoughts for many study participants. Therefore, professionals ought to consider how they can increase their awareness of potential connections and learning between life-roles. How might activating these connections further enhance their role and practice as professionals and career influencers?

For institutions and campus career centres, there are tremendous benefits in helping professionals acknowledge, or even celebrate, the various life roles they bring to their work with students. As mentioned in the Results chapter (see Section 4.5.1, “Personal Life-roles”), Cristel was able to channel her role as a parent to understand the mindset of prospective students’ parents and address their concerns. By the same token, she also leveraged her professional experience in encouraging her children to explore their interests and passion through hobbies and co-curricular activities. When professionals are encouraged to transfer learning across life-roles, they can generate insights on how their experiences influence their practice, enabling them to be more reflective and cognizant of why they do what they do; these self-realizations could help them become more fulfilled both within and outside of their professional work context. Moreover, they can then role model the practice for students and help them consider how their roles as students and aspiring professionals can be enhanced by other roles and activities they conduct.

5.3.2. Recognizing Happenstance

Krumboltz’s (2009) and Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz's (1999) theory of planned happenstance were also apparent in the three vignettes on two levels. On the first level, participants took advantage of unplanned events in their own lives. This was exemplified by Shayan when he continually acted on the advice given to him by trusted individuals: first from his friend’s mother to pursue a program in child and youth care, where he met a classmate who shared a job posting to oversee university transition program. The opportunity brought him to KPU where he was recommended to pursue graduate studies in counselling; obtaining the credential helped him eventually secure a management position at the institution. In his story, the interactions Shayan had with the various individuals were unplanned in the sense that he did not actively seek these conversations, but with each conversation, he acted and capitalized on his actions, which led to his professional success.
The second level pertained to participants’ interactions with students and how professionals seized opportunities to help students with their career development. Angelica’s story, while illustrating both the first and second level, also demonstrated the five critical qualities recommended by Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz (1999) to increase the likelihood of unplanned events. Upon failing her first university semester as an intended science major, instead of dropping out of school, Angelica decided to take elective courses to explore other academic program options (persistence and curiosity). After much exploration, she elected to major in business with a concentration in entrepreneurial leadership, which was a new program at the time so pursuing the concentration involved, in her words, “being a guinea pig for the Faculty” (risk taking). Nevertheless, she embraced the challenge (optimism and flexibility) and started excelling in her business courses, ultimately earning the support of an influential faculty member who served as an important reference – and a career influencer – for her first professional role upon graduation. In her role overseeing first year transition programs, Angelica saw her own story as valuable in promoting two important lessons: learning from failure and exploring one’s options while in post-secondary education. Whenever appropriate, she imparts these lessons upon students, whether it is part of her opening remarks during new student orientation, or during one-on-one conversations with student leaders when they sought her advice.

Krumboltz (2009) states, “Every situation can be seen as presenting potential opportunities if individuals can recognize them and then take action to capitalize on them” (p. 135). In both examples, Shayan and Angelica were presented with unplanned events and new options; both saw the potential in pursuing a new direction and as a result, took action and maximized their gain. When professionals become aware of how happenstance and the interaction of planned and unplanned events have influenced their own lives, they can better identify their personal actions that shaped and contributed to their circumstances. In addition to engaging in retrospection and thinking in hindsight, professionals should also consider how they can be mindful of happenstance in future interactions. An example was described in Chapter Two where a faculty member, when evaluating term papers, noticed a student’s knowledge and interest in her research area. In addition to attributing a grade, in her remarks she also identified the student’s strength and potential and encouraged him to consider opportunities to explore his interest further, such as applying to work in her research lab.
When professionals can see their potential in helping students with their careers in every interaction, they can better recognize and capitalize on unplanned opportunities, and thereby turn impromptu, accidental discoveries into proactive, intentional conversations.

5.3.3. Finding Career Influencers with the Five Attributes

This study has found that in order to foster meaningful student interactions and relationships, professionals should be:

- **approachable**: having an open-door policy and a strong presence on campus (i.e., common areas and at public events), and making a safe space and forum for students to share their issues and concerns;

- **authentic**: being transparent and honest with students when providing feedback or outlining options available to them, even when the feedback or options are not favourable to the student;

- **empathetic**: having the ability to relate to students’ experience, understand their issues and concerns and how they impact the students’ context, and then exercising the Platinum Rule of “treating others the way they want to be treated”;

- **a natural coach**: being in service to students by helping them gain a deeper perspective into their issues and circumstances, and in turn self-generate insights, lessons, and develop skills that are helpful for their future; and

- **vulnerable**: being willing and open to share their own experiences – both successes and failures – that are relevant to students’ situation.

Study participants alluded to these attributes in their interviews, regardless of the professional capacity they held. If institutions wish to encourage career influencing tendencies in employees, they may consider infusing these attributes when hiring and onboarding new professionals to the organization, as well as helping current professionals foster the same attributes. A later section, “Contribution to Practice”, elaborates on recommendations for institutions to incorporate the five attributes in their human resources practices.
Campus career centres can also teach students strategies to identify and seek career influencers who exhibit the five attributes; observable behaviours can be derived from each attribute for students to note. For example, if a student deems vulnerability to be an important attribute when looking for career influencers, they would be looking for professionals who use positive and negative examples from their own lives to illustrate concepts, similar to how Angelica shared her undergraduate student experience to show the importance of perseverance and exploration. Students can also start by reflecting on recent conversations with professionals whom they found helpful and insightful; they can consider how each professional demonstrated the five attributes, in order to gather a sense of what attributes they value when seeking career influencers. Hence, by using the five attributes as “selection criteria”, students can develop a sense of agency and savviness in identifying career influencers who can best provide support specific to their concerns and situations.

5.4. Conceptualizing “Career” and Formulating Career Contexts

In response to the question, “what comes to mind when you hear the term ‘career’?”, participants’ descriptions informed five categories of conceptions (see Section 4.6):

- **Career as an instrumental purpose**: The professional solely denotes career as their professional and work-related activities, which is separate from their personal life.

- **Career as a progression from one job to the next**: The professional compares career to climbing a ladder; as they advance in their profession, their scope of responsibilities also increases as a result.

- **Career as a way of learning**: The professional views the performance of their role as an opportunity to continually discover and develop their strengths.

- **Career as a way of living**: The professional sees career as a channel to derive intrinsic benefits such as personal fulfilment and satisfaction.
- **Career as a means to contribute to society**: The professional believes their career must allow them to give back and serve their community.

As discussed in the Results chapter, participants’ conceptions of career were laden with their personal background and experience. Their context, in turn, informs their professional practice and potentially even their values and beliefs that they convey to students. For instance, Jacques prefers to make a clear distinction between his personal and professional pursuits, due to his prior experience of going through work burnout. In his current role, he emphasizes the importance of maintaining health and work-life balance with students.

Likewise, it is important for professionals to recognize that students also arrive on post-secondary campuses with distinct backgrounds and experiences, resulting in contexts that are different from that of the professionals. Hence, if professionals are providing guidance based on their lived experience without considering the difference in contexts, then the generated advice might not be as applicable, and in some circumstances, even harmful. For example, a professional who had the benefit of taking a breadth of courses in her undergraduate studies might have the tendency to promote to students the value of taking their time to fully explore their academic options until they find a fit, since the approach worked for her. However, students may have circumstances and constraints that prevent them from adopting her approach, such as lacking the time and financial resources to take elective courses, or facing familial or employer pressures to graduate within a certain time frame. With this in mind, it is imperative that professionals be mindful of how their experiences, values, and assumptions – in other words, their *habitus* (Bordieu & Passeron, 2011) – may influence their practice, so that when they offer advice and support they can also be aware and explicit about the context from which their counsel is generated. Furthermore, professionals have a responsibility to help students become aware of their unique context, so that students can decide how to best proceed with the advice given their own circumstances.

Generating awareness of one’s context and recognizing assumptions and biases that may influence one’s approach require ongoing reflection, which was identified by study participants to be a valuable informal learning activity (see Section 4.9.1, “Formality of Activities”). There is much potential for institutions to consider ways to
encourage and promote reflection as part of professionals’ regular routine. Human resources departments and supervisors of professionals may incorporate self-reflection components as part of professional development and performance reviews. As well, this study asked if participating in this research has helped participants generate insights about their career, role, and approach. The majority (14 out of 15 participants) believed that their involvement enhanced their understanding of their own career, and helped clarify their motivation to assist students with their career development. Hence, the interview questions used in this study could be used to design interventions that can help professionals become reflective practitioners who regularly seek opportunities to enhance their practice.

5.5. Summary of Significant Findings

Three significant findings resulted from this study. First, post-secondary professionals saw their role impacting student career development by performing seven functions: advising, guiding, counselling, teaching, advocating, external liaising, and leading. Professionals may perform multiple functions simultaneously, exercising the selected functions to varying degrees, much like turning rheostat dials (with one dial per function), adjusting based on several factors: their role as a professional, their experience and training, the type of activity or request, and/or their relationship with the student(s) or stakeholder(s).

Career activities under each function can be arranged along a rheostat dial, in order to help professionals determine where their role thresholds are within each function. If a career-related activity is below their threshold, then professionals will tend to see the activity as a responsibility they can take on and assume the responsibility; if the activity is above the threshold, they may instead make a referral or consult expertise, which in most cases would be their campus career centres, for further support.

Secondly, as individuals, professionals saw themselves contributing to student career development through imparting life lessons from their own experience and demonstrating personal attributes that enhance student interactions and relationships. Participants described transferring learning between life-roles to inform their practice; this illustrated Super, Savickas, and Super’s (1996) notion that life-roles interact and influence one another. Krumboltz’s (2009) and Mitchell, Levin, and Krumboltz’s (1999)
theory of planned happenstance were also exemplified as participants accounted circumstances where they took advantage of unplanned events in their own lives, as well as capitalizing on unplanned, organic opportunities to help students with their career development. The five personal attributes – being approachable, authentic, empathetic, a natural coach, and vulnerable – have the potential to inform employee recruitment practices and professional development opportunities. They also generate a list of attributional criteria for students to look for when seeking career influencers.

Lastly, participants’ responses revealed five ways they conceive career: career as an instrumental purpose, career as a progression from one job to the next, career as a way of learning, career as a way of living, and career as a means to contribute to society. Professionals’ background and experience are implicit in their conceptions of career; together these elements inform their practice and possibly, the values and beliefs they pass onto students. Therefore, when providing guidance to students whose context might differ from theirs, professionals need to be aware of the lenses they employ, in order to generate advice applicable to students’ circumstances.

5.6. Contribution to Theory

This study contributes to theory in several ways. The three functions of advising, guiding, and counselling were described by Hiebert and Borgan (2002), in their report to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) Division of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education. The publication was created as a resource for developing countries to inform their development of a career education framework suitable for their citizens. This study, conducted within a post-secondary education context in a developed country, confirmed the three functions and introduced four new additions: teaching, advocating, external liaising, and leading. These additional functions also differ from their original counterparts in their tendency to take place in a group setting, such as teaching groups of students and external liaising with multiple visitors at recruitment events. Given that the role of a career influencer is informal, this expanded set of functions enable professionals to recognize how their role and work contribute to student career development. If institutions wish to empower professionals to become career influencers, they must help those professionals to identify linkages between performing their roles and promoting student career success.
Another contribution to theory is the notion that professionals have a role threshold, and that ideally, campus career centres should work with them to increase their role threshold and capacity in helping students with their careers. The role threshold concept has much potential with implications to enhance career services delivery and warrants further exploration. Future research might examine the common experiences of professionals with the same roles, and in multiple institutions, in order to map out the career-related activities they believe they can facilitate. Doing so might help pinpoint where the role threshold might be situated; its location would also indicate the highest impact activity professionals can do to influence students’ careers, generating insights for career centres to better support professionals' roles as career influencers. In addition, data generated from this exercise might yield a list of competencies professionals should consider developing in order to further their impact on student career development.

Finally, study participants generated five main conceptions of career; each conception can be traced back to one or more career development theories discussed in Chapter Two. For instance, two of the conceptions, career as a way of living and career as a means to contribute to society, can both be linked with Parson’s (1909) trait and factor theory of occupational choice, since the theory was concerned with aligning individuals’ interests and skills to their daily work and ensuring citizens contribute to their society to their fullest extent. Career as a way of living can also be connected to Savickas’ (2005, 2011, 2013) career construction theory, which is concerned with how individuals find meaning in their lives, so that they can derive their purpose at work. These conception-to-theory examples demonstrate that traditional theories, such as the trait and factor theory, remain very much relevant today. In fact, traditional theories that place emphasis upon professional progression, or laddering, are seen to form a foundation on which contemporary theories are built, as is the case with career construction theory using Holland’s (1959, 1996, 1997) RIASEC model as an initial assessment, and applying Super’s (1957, 1980) life-span model to describe the life cycle stages of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline within a single job, rather than extending over an individual’s lifetime.
5.7. Recommendations for Practice

A major conclusion of this study is that professionals can be career influencers based on their roles and their personal qualities. Some career influencers, due to their role and responsibilities, can be viewed as logical helpers given that they assume one or more of the seven career functions and are primed to help with student career development; faculty members, academic advisors, and librarians would belong to this category. On the other hand, there are professionals who possess personal experiences and qualities, such as the five attributes, that make them inclined to help students with their careers, regardless of their specific job function. This latter group may be viewed as natural helpers due to their inherent characteristics. This section outlines ideas for professionals to consider how to leverage both their roles (logical) and personal qualities (natural) to become more intentional as career influencers. It concludes with specific recommendations for faculty members who are well-positioned as career influencers.

For current employees who wish to better identify their contributions to student career development, they might begin by reviewing their job description, and then considering how their responsibilities are related to the seven functions. They may conduct a sorting activity where they list their responsibilities, indicate the frequency and importance of these responsibilities, and then assign each responsibility to a function(s). Figure 5 features a template for a sorting activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>On a scale of 1 to 5, how often do I perform this responsibility? (1 = rarely; 5 = often)</th>
<th>How important is this responsibility in relation to my role? (1 = not important; 5 = very important)</th>
<th>Which function(s) does this responsibility fulfill? (Check all that applies)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Advising Guiding Counselling Teaching Advocating External Liaising Leading</td>
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**Figure 5. A Responsibility Sorting Activity Template.**

To consider how their professional practice might be influenced by their life-roles and experiences, employees may conduct an exercise where they construct their “constellation of social positions” (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996, p. 128). Completing tactile activities such as this one invites professionals to consider how they might apply their talents and strengths outside of work to their professional role, in turn enhancing student career success and their own work satisfaction. Figure 6 presents an example of Jacques’ constellation based on his description of his life-roles.
Figure 6. Example of a Participant’s Constellation of Life-roles.

Upon completing these reflective activities, professionals may choose to share their reflections and learning with colleagues and even their supervisors. This leads to the next recommendation based on the fact that participants in this study would like to connect with other career influencers, exchange experiences and practices, and find opportunities for collaboration. Career Influencers within an institution (or inter-institution) can form a community of practice (CoP) – either face-to-face and/or leveraging technology to support online engagement - to convene professionals interested in student career development and to enhance their practice as career influencers. Providing that campus career centres have the capacity, they would ideally be in the position to lead these CoPs since they can gain insights into issues career influencers face in their informal role. Career centres can also curate resources needed to further professionals’ impact on student career development, so that they can provide support and training accordingly. For instance, career centres can provide labour market and sector-specific information to professionals on a regular basis, or even demonstrate how to conduct such research to enable student recruitment coordinators to generate program-specific career advice to prospective students with more confidence and credibility. In turn, career centres can also harness the perspectives of CoP members by
soliciting their advice on services and programming, and leveraging their support to promote and refer students to utilize these services.

With respect to attracting prospective employees with career influencer tendencies, the five personal attributes can be considered. Human resources departments, in collaboration with hiring managers, can devise recruitment and selection tools requiring candidates to articulate how they practice the attributes. Interview questions can solicit candidate examples of demonstrating the attributes, such as “Walk us through your resume or curriculum vitae and discuss how you demonstrate the attribute [of approachability, authenticity, empathy, being a natural coach, and/or vulnerability]”. Interviewers may also design role plays or scenario questions inspired by actual student scenarios, in order to assess how candidates would demonstrate these attributes in their demeanors and response.

5.7.1. Specific Recommendations for Faculty Members

Faculty members were prominently identified as career influencers, both in the literature and by students from the student poll, likely due to the fact that they have regular interactions with students from teaching courses and therefore have high propensity to help students with their careers. However, it was noted in Chapter Two that faculty members may lack career education and knowledge that enable them to provide comprehensive support to students (Gordon, 2006; Halonen & Dunn, 2018) and therefore, career centres would need to provide appropriate training and support in order to activate their potential as career influencers. To start, career centres may work with faculty members in their classes and help them recognize how they are contributing to student career development through simply teaching their students. Then, as they become more comfortable with providing career support to students, career centres can gradually work with faculty members to increase their role threshold in all other functions. The following are some initial ideas to engage faculty members and to increase the likelihood of career conversations between them and students.

At the beginning of each course, when introducing themselves, faculty members may also discuss how they became an educator (and if research is a part of their role requirement, a researcher and/or a scholar), highlighting any happenstential elements in their journey as a way to inspire students to be mindful of chance events and how they
influence their own lives. In addition, faculty members may choose to share how their other life-roles, such as being a parent or community volunteer, can enhance their role as an educator. This, again, might encourage students to consider how their life-roles integrate with one another.

To enhance their approachability, faculty members may invite students to discuss their career aspirations and concerns at any time. The typical classroom where the course takes place is a natural location to facilitate these conversations, which also enables other students listening to the advice or insight being shared as they may be in similar circumstances. Certainly, the feasibility of this idea would depend on logistical factors such as the availability of the classroom before or after the class, and also on individual student factors such as a student’s comfort level in sharing their career issues in public, and whether or not privacy is required for the conversation (e.g., students might be competing for the same role and would like independent advice). These conversations might also take place over the phone or online. Also, if service is a part of their role requirement, faculty members can consider how they might extend their presence beyond the classroom, such as participating in student events and activities on campus, similar to how Jacques attended networking events and offered on-the-spot tips to students on how to converse and connect with prospective employers.

Many institutions, including Kwantlen Polytechnic University and Simon Fraser University, have a Teaching Fellows program, whereby appointed faculty members specialize in an area of practice or pedagogy and advise their colleagues in those areas accordingly. Leveraging this notion, institutions can consider creating a new Teaching Fellow in Career Development to support faculty members with integrating career education components into their courses and curriculum. This practice not only can help faculty members better support students in their career development through their courses, it can also inspire and embed best practice within a broad range of academic courses and programs.

A final recommendation involves an adaptation of the early alert program if available at the institution. Early alert programs are typically used by instructors to identify students experiencing academic, personal, and behaviour difficulties, so that support services can proactively follow up and offer support and appropriate intervention. An additional program feature could be introduced where faculty members
can identify students who can benefit from targeted career interventions, from those who lack a sense of direction, to those who display immense potential through their coursework. In fact, if it is possible to develop such a feature, any professional, not just faculty members, should be able to utilize the program and help students gain career support. Upon receiving referrals, career centres then can follow up directly with each student on a more personal level by leveraging the students’ connection with the faculty or staff referee.

5.8. Study Limitations

Limitations to the study were primarily related to its methodology. The student poll generated a list of post-secondary professionals whom students saw as career influencers (see Table 2). This study assumed that its 15 participants, by way of their current and past professional roles, had fulfilled this list of post-secondary career influencers. This assumption could be problematic in that participants’ past professional experiences might be outdated and therefore potentially irrelevant. For instance, in describing these former roles, participants may have referenced in-person student interactions that due to technological advances have now been replaced by online form submissions. For future researchers who wish to replicate or adapt this study, when reviewing the list of career influencer roles derived from the student poll, they may wish to only qualify participants’ recent professional experiences (e.g., within the last five years) to ensure currency. That being said, this parameter should be removed during the interviews since participants’ past experiences, no matter how recent, might influence their current context, conceptions, and practice. Adhering to the qualitative, constructivist approach, interviews should be concerned with participants’ interpretation of, and the meaning they assign to, their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Blumer, 1969; Cassell & Symon, 1994; Crotty, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Young & Collin, 2004).

In regard to the student poll, as mentioned, Fee and Forsyth’s (2010) student engagement cycle and its four stages of access, transition, persistence, and graduation informed the professional roles in the poll, with the assumption being these roles interact with students in one or more stages. However, professionals whose role do not have regular student interaction might also contribute to student career development. While there was also an option in the poll for students to indicate additional roles outside of the list, it might not have been enough to prompt the consideration of other professional
roles that do not have regular student interactions but might still contribute to student career development. For example, professionals working in post-secondary finance departments might visit accounting classes to share their knowledge and experience and help students understand the realities of working in the industry. Future studies might consider expanding upon this current list of roles in order to be more inclusive of all post-secondary professionals.

The last limitation of the study pertains to the transferability of these research findings to other post-secondary institutions. Of note, KPU is a teaching-intensive polytechnic university – the only one of its kind in the province of British Columbia. KPU also began as a community college, and many faculty and staff members have remained with the institution during that transition; consequently they are more accustomed to working in a smaller, community-oriented institution, and generally place significant emphasis upon facilitating a high-value experience for students that helps them meet their vocational goals. If this study were replicated in one of the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities which are significantly larger in scale and scope, it is conceivable that respondents would be less inclined to support student career success given that the primary focus for faculty members is on research excellence (and less about the student experience or student success).

5.9. Recommendations for Further Research

It was mentioned earlier that a limitation of the study is the transferability of its results to other post-secondary institutional contexts, since the study was conducted within a single teaching institution. Therefore, it would be important to replicate the study in other institutional contexts, such as in research universities. Replicated studies may yield different results between types of institutions (research-intensive, teaching-intensive, universities versus colleges versus technical institutes). Those findings could be used to develop more customized frameworks that can identify what, if any, supports would be most appropriate to enhance professionals’ support of student career development within various institutional archetypes.

A survey instrument might be created based on this study’s data to determine the prevalence of these findings within and across institutions. For example, participants may be asked to identify the extent to which they perform the career activities within the

133
seven functions. If there are a sufficient number of people who fill out the survey that share the same professional role, we might begin to detect patterns where people in the same roles perform certain functions more than others. From there, we can then design function-specific interventions targeted to individuals who perform the same roles. The survey can also enable participants to add additional career activities they don’t see included on the existing survey, which may inform updates and/or additions to the existing seven functions, or create new functions.

Future research might also explore common experiences of professionals holding the same roles, such as department chairs, in order to identify the career-related activities they facilitate. Doing so might help career centres gauge where a role threshold might reside based on participants’ collective experiences, allowing them to better support professionals with the same roles. Researchers might consider holding focus group interviews, so that participants can share their personal experience, build on their counterparts’ perspectives, and exchange practices. As a starting point, this study’s interview questions can be adopted for the focus group interviews, especially the questions soliciting information on participants’ roles and their conceived contributions to student career development. Data generated from these questions would pertain to the role’s responsibilities, career-related activities, as well as knowledge, skills, and attributes required to fulfill these responsibilities and activities. From there, participants can engage in a group exercise where they determine the common activities shared within their role and map these activities to the seven functions. During this process, participants might find differences in perspectives due to their unique contexts; for example, a department chair might have a direct mandate from their Faculty to promote career development in classes, whereas their counterparts might not. Therefore, it will be important for participants to share their realities and negotiate a common experience for their professional role. Bringing participants together also serves a secondary purpose of providing an opportunity for professionals to connect; in fact, these focus groups might naturally evolve to become communities of practice for professionals in the same or similar roles.

Researchers who wish to build on this study may investigate ways to help professionals better recognize how happenstance and transferring learning between life-roles influence their professional practice. In this study, some participants only realized these influences as an afterthought, indicating a potential to help professionals enhance
their awareness of how chance events and other life-roles can impact their current approach with students. An investigation might take a case study research tradition where professionals construct their constellation of life-roles (see Figure 6) and then discuss their creations; in fact, researchers might consider using the career mapping method employed by Forseille (2013) to “contextualize the participants’ stories, helping to illuminate possible recurrent patterns” (p. 93). What were some key moments and milestones that led to their professional role? How do their past experiences and life-roles inform their approach to the role? It may also be worthwhile to conduct follow up interviews to see how the career mapping method helps participants better identify future connections and capitalize on these opportunities to enhance their practice.

Yet another approach can be to explore an experimental research design that assesses the effectiveness of implementing the recommendations from this study, respectively. For example, a group of career influencers could be divided into two subsets. The experimental group would be subject to a specific intervention that is intended to enhance their threshold. For instance, an action-oriented workshop can be hosted to help professionals identify and conduct a career activity they wish to pursue that is close to their threshold. The workshop could focus on helping professionals identify the steps they need to take to build their confidence around conducting this activity and provide them with resources to support those steps. A pre-and-post assessment can be designed to evaluate the impact and outcome of the intervention upon the experimental group versus the control group; the latter would consist of professionals who did not complete the workshop (but who should be offered the opportunity to do so after the research experiment, particularly if the workshop proves to make a positive impact). Assuming that the experimental group reports a perceived increase in their respective thresholds, it may be determined that the intervention was successful.

The final recommendation for future research expands on the preliminary student survey, which confirmed the findings from previous research (Brainstorm Strategy Group, 2017; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Environics Research Group, 2011) by indicating that students were more likely to consult other post-secondary professionals prior to visiting campus career centres – if at all. Researchers might conduct a follow up study with students by asking them to recall recent interactions with post-secondary professionals that involved the career development topics and then answer questions
such as “Why do you think consulting with a librarian would be helpful for your career? What career-related questions or concerns would you seek their help with?” Responses to these questions might yield career-related activities that can be mapped onto the seven functions, and potentially reveal a role threshold from the student perspective. Researchers might also wish to know from students: “Given this list of career-related activities a librarian can help you with, what career-related questions or issues might be beyond their capacity that would prompt you to visit your campus career centre or to consult another professional?” Lastly, researchers might also want to better understand the interactions between students and their career influencers: “Thinking back to your recent career conversations, what did these professionals do or say that made you comfortable in talking with them about your career concerns?” A list of personal qualities and behaviours can be generated to compare with the five attributes found in this study.

5.10. Final Reflections as the Researcher

In Chapter One, I introduced myself as the researcher, to explain my curiosity for this work and to provide my personal context as a way to understand how I approached the work. I would now like to return to my sense of self as a researcher, and share how I have changed and grown through this process.

As a budding researcher, I had the privilege to learn about my participants’ life stories and to showcase many of these stories in this dissertation in order to construct a narrative of post-secondary professionals as career influencers. While gathering these stories, I was constantly reminded of Scott’s (2011) notion of “the conversation is the relationship” (p. 5), which asserted that the quality of an individual’s relationship with another person is reflected in what they say and how they communicate with one another. This notion reinforced my intention to practice evocative empathy (Martin, 1983) during the data collection period, where in addition to capturing what participants were sharing with me, I was also listening for their intended message. This meant that I, as the researcher and the key research instrument (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), aimed to go beyond gathering surface-level data to identify the subtleties of my participants’ unique stories, resulting in two positive outcomes. First, the approach strengthened my relationships with the participants and in turn enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. Second, I believe exercising such an approach was also why all the participants thought their participation in this study was valuable, as it afforded them the opportunity to
deeply explore their practice and draw meaningful connections between their work and other life-roles.

As a professional, not only has career development become a lens in which I see the world, I have also become more aware of my impact on students and colleagues. Conducting this study had given me the chance to reflect on my own role and practice; it also led to the realization that when professionals become aware of their influence, they can act with intention and as a result amplify their impact on both students and their institution. I believe there is much to do in helping professionals see the important role they play in student career development. This study has provided a glimpse into what is undoubtedly a much larger constellation of work to be explored in the career influencer phenomenon.

Ultimately, the conclusion of this study marks the beginning of many future conversations – and collaborative relationships – with these inspiring professionals and their colleagues as we consider how to enhance student career success as individuals and as an informal collective. Conducting this study has given me a heightened awareness of my impact; this gift also means I have a responsibility to champion career development – as deemed by Hopkins (2019) as a ‘superpower’ – in various key arenas within and outside of my institution.

5.11. Conclusion

Student career development is every post-secondary professional’s responsibility. This study presented a strong case that professionals have the potential to influence students in their careers through their role and everyday practice, and by drawing from their own life and career experiences. Anyone can be a career influencer.

In its inaugural Gallup-Purdue Index report, Gallup (2014) surveyed over 30,000 college graduates in the United States and identified six key undergraduate experiences that contributed to their work and life success after graduation. These are:

- having at least one faculty member who makes learning exciting;
- perceiving that faculty members care about them as individuals;
• having a mentor who encouraged the pursuit of goals and aspirations;

• working on a project that spans over a semester or longer;

• pursuing an internship or job that enabled them to apply classroom learning; and

• being actively involved in extracurricular activities and organizations.

Professionals such as faculty members, academic advisors, and work and co-curricular program coordinators are critical to facilitating these key experiences. Their informal role as career influencers can have lasting impact that extends beyond their undergraduate studies to enhance their overall lifelong success and wellbeing.

Within the Canadian context, PSE Systems’ (2017b) reference guide on impressive post-secondary career services models identified institutions seen as having a best-practice career services delivery model and highlighted the systems and practices that earned them this recognition. In particular, the guide saw partnerships and collaboration with campus stakeholders as the dominant theme for success. Therefore, it is imperative that career centres consider how they might engage campus departments and individuals in ways that are beyond typical requests of promoting career services and programming to students, and instead, establish “[campus] communities that serve the career and professional needs of students and alumni for a lifetime” (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014, p. 15). Career centres ought to help professionals realize that by performing their roles and responsibilities, and whenever appropriate, sharing their unique career and life lessons to inspire students, they are already serving as career influencers and making a positive impact on student career development.

When student career development becomes every professional’s responsibility, the entire institution becomes the career centre. The notion of student career success permeates and transcends beyond the physical career centre offices, becoming a mission shared by every professional because they see it as critical to the success of their institutions. Consequently, career centres become stewards of this important mission through the activation of career influencers: empowering professionals within their institutions to guide students towards their own career success.
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## Appendix A.

### Career Influencers’ Professional Types and Sample Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Type</th>
<th>Sample Role</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Recruitment Manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions</td>
<td>Admissions Officer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation and Transition</td>
<td>Orientation Coordinator</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>Educational Advisor</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Services</td>
<td>Aboriginal Services Coordinator</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid and Awards</td>
<td>Scholarship and Awards Coordinator</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic and Learning Support</td>
<td>Learning Strategist</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Services</td>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility Services</td>
<td>Disability Advisor</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation and Wellness</td>
<td>Recreation Coordinator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life and Development</td>
<td>Student Life Officer</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Society</td>
<td>Peer Support Coordinator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operative Education</td>
<td>Co-operative Education Instructor</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>Career Services Coordinator</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni Services</td>
<td>Alumni Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B.

Sample Initial Poll to Identify Career Influencers

I am conducting a study to better understand the ways that people in an institution like KPU support career success for students. As a first step, I want to identify who the “natural career helpers” are at KPU. Your participation in this poll is completely voluntary.

This brief poll asks you to identify the kinds of KPU professionals who support your career success by providing advice, guidance, and/or counselling. They may be instructors who teach your classes, or professionals you interact with regularly or occasionally.

The information you provide is anonymous and confidential. The results will be compiled and individuals within the categories of professionals that are identified may be invited to participate in a research study on professionals who contribute to student career development. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Candy Ho.

1. (Circle one) I am in my first / second / third / fourth (or more) year in my study.
2. My (intended) major is in ___________________.
3. For the next two-part question, please check all options that apply to you.

If I were to seek career help from someone at KPU tomorrow, I would meet with a/an...

- aboriginal services coordinator
- academic advisor
- admissions advisor/coordinator
- alumni services officer
- assessment and testing coordinator
- career services coordinator/advisor
- counsellor (personal or career)
- disability advisor
- financial aid and awards coordinator
- instructor/professor
- interfaith centre staff member
- learning strategist/facilitator
- librarian
- orientation leader
- recreation coordinator
- registrar’s office staff member
- student club executive
- student life coordinator
- student recruiter
- student society staff member
- university administrator (e.g., dean, department chair)
- volunteer services coordinator
- Other ____________________

During my time as a KPU applicant and/or student, I have already sought career help from a/an...

- aboriginal services coordinator
- academic advisor
- admissions advisor/coordinator
- alumni services officer
- assessment and testing coordinator
- career services coordinator/advisor
- counsellor (personal or career)
- disability advisor
- financial aid and awards coordinator
- instructor/professor
- interfaith centre staff member
- learning strategist/facilitator
- librarian
- orientation leader
- recreation coordinator
- registrar’s office staff member
- student club executive
- student life coordinator
- student recruiter
- student society staff member
- university administrator (e.g., dean, department chair)
- volunteer services coordinator
- Other ____________________
Appendix C.

Letter of Invitation

Letter of Invitation

Project Title:
“Professionals in Post-Secondary Education: Conceptions of Career Influence”

Dear [Participant],

I am conducting a research project as part of my doctoral degree requirements at Simon Fraser University (SFU), which explores the research question: How do post-secondary education professionals conceive their influence in student career development?

The reason I am contacting you is because [the professional type] have been recognized by students as one that impacts student career development, and therefore because you currently hold a position as a [the professional type], your perspective will be tremendously valuable to the study.

Purpose

The goal of this study is to better understand how professionals in post-secondary institutions conceive of their influence on the career development of students. To achieve this goal, we ought to begin by learning their definition of the term “career”; identifying the contributions they believe they make – as professionals and as individuals – towards student career development; and finally, identifying the resources and support they feel would be helpful to further their impact.

Study Procedures

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve two one-on-one interviews that are each between 60 to 120 minutes long. The first interview will ask you to describe your background and role and answer questions that pertains to your definition of “career”, your perception of your role and approach to the role, and resources you need or would like to be successful. The second interview will take place six to eight weeks after the first interview. You will be asked to review summary notes from the first interview and consider if you have experienced any changes in your perception since then.

The interviews may be held in-person, through phone or online, and will take place at a time and location at your convenience. Please note that conducting interviews by phone or online are not considered to be confidential mediums. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences to your role at KPU.
With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information and transcribed for analysis; you may also participate without your interviews being recorded. Audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed by the principal investigator or a third-party transcriber who will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The third-party transcriber will not have access to the participant’s name. Audio-recordings will be deleted six months after the study is completed.

To protect participant identities, identifiers such as names and email addresses will be removed from all data documents (e.g., audio files, transcripts, participant quotes, field notes) and assigned a participant code/pseudonym. This means that the data will be anonymized. All information you provide is considered completely confidential.

Audio recordings will be deleted one week after they have been transcribed. Other data such as transcriptions will be deleted six months after the study is completed. Other data such as transcriptions will be deleted six months after the study is completed. It is anticipated that the study will be completed by July 31, 2017.

Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission (which you can indicate via the consent form) anonymous quotations may be used.

Potential Benefits of Participation

Your participation will help enhance the understanding of professionals’ conceptions of practice, which in turn may allow the university to better support their work.

Appreciation

As a thank you for your participation, you will be given a $30 gift card.

Potential Risks to Participant

By conducting research at KPU where I am also an employee, I am interviewing and gathering information from colleagues that may be sensitive and confidential. There may also be perceived power imbalances and/or conflicts of interest between my dual role as researcher-employee and the roles of those I interview. Being cognizant of this, I want to reiterate that participating and/or withdrawing from this study will not result in any negative consequences to our work relationship and your employment at KPU.

There may be risks involved for participating in this study, yet the risks are assessed as minimal and are not greater than those you may encounter in your everyday life. Due to the nature of the research, you may share personal experiences and information, but there are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with the questions. You are not required to respond to any question if you so wish, and you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. Your refusal to participate will have no adverse effects on your employment in the university in any way.

Please note that KPU employees have free access to counselling through the Employee and Family Assistance Program, www.homewoodhealth.com or 1.800.663.1142.
Confidentiality and Ethics

All information gathered from the interviews will be coded and personal identifiers will be removed; doing so assures your confidentiality. All data will be stored (password-protected), analyzed, and reported by the participant’s pseudonym. Paper data, such as handwritten interview notes, will be transcribed within 24 hours after the composition of the document and saved electronically; then the physical paper copy will be destroyed immediately.

A password-protected master file containing identifying information (e.g., names and contact information) linking to pseudonyms will be created and stored separately from the data. The data will be kept in a locked office at KPU and password protected on a computer hard drive. Only I, Candy Ho, as researcher along with my supervisors, Dr. Kris Magnusson and Dr. Cindy Xin, will have access to the data.

Your confidentiality will be respected during this research project and in the dissemination of its results; at no point will your name and/or affiliation be disclosed. Data will be deleted six months after the study is completed.

Contact Information about the Study

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Candy Ho, or my supervisor Dr. Kris Magnusson. If you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, please contact Dr. Jeff Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics.

Thank you for considering your participation. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Candy Ho, MEd
Principal Investigator & Doctor of Education Candidate
Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University
Appendix D.

Interview Questions

INTERVIEW #1 (90-120 minutes)

0. Introduction and background
   • How did you end up working at KPU?
   • How long have you worked at KPU, and in your current role?
   • Describe your role and your day-to-day work.
   • Most recently, we conducted a quick poll with students to help us identify their career influencers at KPU. Career influencers (CIs) are defined as individuals working in a post-secondary institution who informally provide career-related advice, guidance, and/or counselling to prospective and current students and/or alumni. [Print the definition on a piece of paper to serve as a visual aid]. You have been identified by students as being a CI, and that is why I have approached you.
   • Based on this definition, do you see yourself as a CI? Why or why not?

1. How do you conceptualize the term “career”??
   • When you hear the term “career”, what comes to mind for you? [As participant responds, note down key points and themes to inform follow up questions]
     o I hear you mention [key point/theme]. Why is it important?
     o What would an example of [key point/theme] look like? Please draw from your own experience to help me understand your context.
     o [Participants may naturally discuss their key points/themes within their work context, making it a smooth transition to the next set of questions]

2. How do you see your role as having an impact on student career development?
   • Let’s explore your definition of “career” in relation to your work here at KPU.
   • Given what we’ve just discussed, what role and/or function do you think [professional type, e.g., academic advisors] should play to support your definition of “career”? [Again, note down key roles/functions to inform follow up questions]
     o Why do you think it is important for [professional type] to perform [key roles/functions, e.g., ask students for their career goals]?
     o How does successfully performing [this role/function] contribute to student career development?
   • What knowledge, skills, and attitudes are required to perform these roles and functions? [Ask for further examples]
     o What is an example of this [knowledge/skill/attitude] in action?

3. How do you see yourself as having an impact on student career development?
   • Okay, we’re now going to shift the focus from how you see your role, to specifically how you, [participant name], see yourself in the role and what you individually bring to the role, and therefore, your responses to my questions might be different from how another colleague with the same role would respond. [Confirm their understanding, which will likely be non-verbal cues]
We talked about your definition of career and the roles/functions as well as knowledge/skills/attitudes that would be important in your role to impact student career development. What do you see are your personal contributions to student career development?
  - Why do you think [this personal contribution] is important?
  - How does [this personal contribution] impact students and their career development?

Who might be your career influencers (which can be individuals working within or outside of post-secondary education)? How do they contribute to the professional you are today?

4. What resources and/or competencies do you believe are important in furthering your impact on student career development?
   - What challenges do you face in providing career help to students?
   - What would make you more successful in providing career help to students?

5. Conclusion
   - Having just responded to the series of questions from this interview, were you able to generate insights that might be helpful to understanding your career, your role, and your approach with students?
   - Finally, is there anyone from the KPU community you feel would be suitable to participate in this study? If so, I would greatly appreciate it if you can forward my invitation letter [a hard copy will also be provided] and have them to contact me.

INTERVIEW #2 (60-90 minutes, 6-8 weeks after the first interview)

Recap from the first interview
   - [If possible, have the participants review the first interview transcript prior to the meeting, but have a summary to each research sub-question available]
   - To begin, I have prepared a summary key points/themes for you to review...

Reflections on the summary
   - Given that our first meeting was [number] weeks ago, what key points/themes from your summary has remained consistent for you?
   - Conversely, what key points/themes have shifted since we last met?
     - Providing that there are shifts, how would your respond differently now?
     - What has changed for you since our last conversation that may have resulted in this shift in thinking?

Reflections on the study as an intervention
   - Has participating in this study had any effect on how you think about “career”? If so, how?
   - Has participating in this study changed how you see your role? Your approach to your role? If so, in what ways?

Conclusion
   - Having just responded to the series of questions from this interview, were you able to generate insights that might be helpful to understanding your career, your role, and your approach with students?
Appendix E.

Sample Interview Summary

Having worked at KPU for over a decade, you served in various capacities from helping students navigate their transition to the university, to coaching them for academic and personal success. As a manager, you lead a team of dedicated staff and oversee the day-to-day department operations. You see yourself as a career influencer because you help students align their educational goals with their professional aspirations, whether it’s ensuring they are on track with their course planning, or encouraging them to consider options better suited to their strengths and skills set.

You define career as “pursuing something one is passionate about”, as opposed to pursuing a job where the goal is to make ends meet. Passion and interest are important in your definition because they help one develop a sense of purpose and meaning in their life. You practice this yourself by choosing a path in post-secondary administration because you believe you can make a difference and invoke positive change. As you help students, your sense of self also continually evolves.

You believe managers should facilitate a holistic, developmental approach when working with students; it’s difficult to isolate and only address students’ academic aspects because their non-academic lives and contexts need to be taken into account. To this end, you support a narrative framework to discover the students’ life stories when meeting with them one-on-one. Doing so requires managers to possess a graduate degree; listen actively and communicate effectively; be knowledgeable in their field and generally resourceful; and remain active in their own learning and professional development.

As an individual, your counsellor training helps you quickly build rapport with students so that they are honest and comfortable with sharing their personal issues and struggles with you. Channeling your empathy, you are able to anticipate their needs and provide tailored resources to help them be successful. You handle student concerns with tact and diplomacy, and whenever appropriate, you also challenge students to consider their options in a realistic manner. Finally, your open-door policy indicates to students they are welcome to drop by any time and will always be treated with respect.
In terms of resources to support career influencers, you’d like help from senior administrators to understand the institution’s - as well as Student Services’ - big picture and vision, so that you can use them to guide your daily operations. You want to learn how to better obtain buy-in and believe that adopting evidence-based practice is essential. To better assist students with their career development, you think learning how to use assessment tools would be helpful.

This conversation reinforced your professional purpose and reminded you of why you do what you do everyday - so that you can make a difference in students’ lives. A mentor once advised you to “just be” and this helped you remember that your role consists of both “being” and “doing”, and that it is important to keep the former in mind when you are so busy “doing”.

Follow up questions for the second interview:

• Tell me more about the narrative framework. How do you use it in your interaction with students?

• How do you think your experiences working in multiple KPU departments enhance your role as a career influencer?

• When you said you would like to learn how to get buy-in, who do you need to obtain buy-in from, and for what purpose?
Appendix F.

Participant Consent Form

Project Title:
“Professionals in Post-Secondary Education: Conceptions of Career Influence”

Who is conducting the study?

Candy Ho, MEd (Principal Investigator)
Doctor of Education Candidate
Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

Kris Magnusson, PhD (Faculty Supervisor)
Professor & Dean
Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

Cindy Xin, PhD (Collaborator & Co-Supervisor)
Educational Consultant
Teaching and Learning Centre, Simon Fraser University

Why are we doing this study? Why should you take part in this study?

The goal of this study is to better understand how professionals in post-secondary institutions conceive of their influence on the career development of students. To achieve this goal, we ought to begin by learning their definition of the term “career”; identifying the contributions they believe they make – as professionals and as individuals – towards student career development; and finally, identifying the resources and support they feel would be helpful to further their impact.

[The professional type] have been recognized by students as one that impacts student career development, and therefore because you currently hold a position as a [the professional type], your perspective will be tremendously valuable to the study.

Implications and recommendations from this study will shed light on the role of professionals in supporting student engagement and retention, contributing to overall student and institutional success.
How is this study done?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve two one-on-one interviews that are each between 60 to 120 minutes long. The first interview will ask you to describe your background and role and answer questions that pertain to your definition of “career”, your perception of your role and approach to the role, and resources you need or would like to be successful. The second interview will take place six to eight weeks after the first interview. You will be asked to review summary notes from the first interview and consider if you have experienced any changes in your perception since then.

The interviews may be held in-person, through phone or online, and will take place at a time and location at your convenience. Please note that conducting interviews by phone or online are not considered to be confidential mediums. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences to your role at KPU.

With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information and transcribed for analysis; you may also participate without your interviews being recorded. Audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed by the principal investigator or a third-party transcriber who will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The third-party transcriber will not have access to the participant’s name.

To protect participant identities, identifiers such as names and email addresses will be removed from all data documents (e.g., audio files, transcripts, participant quotes, field notes) and assigned a participant code/pseudonym. This means that the data will be anonymized. All information you provide is considered completely confidential.

Audio recordings will be deleted one week after they have been transcribed. Other data such as transcriptions will be deleted six months after the study is completed. Other data such as transcriptions will be deleted six months after the study is completed. It is anticipated that the study will be completed by July 31, 2017.

Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission (which you can indicate via the consent form) anonymous quotations may be used.

Potential Benefits of Participation

Your participation will help enhance the understanding of professionals’ conceptions of practice, which in turn may allow the university to better support their work.

Appreciation

As a thank you for your participation, you will be given a $30 gift card.

Potential Risks of Participation

By conducting research at KPU where I am also an employee, I am interviewing and gathering information from colleagues that may be sensitive and confidential. There may also be perceived power imbalances and/or conflicts of interest between my dual role as researcher-employee and the roles of those I interview. Being cognizant of this, I want to
reiterate that participating and/or withdrawing from this study will not result in any negative consequences to our work relationship and your employment at KPU.

There may be risks involved for participating in this study, yet the risks are assessed as minimal and are not greater than those you may encounter in your everyday life. Due to the nature of the research, you may share personal experiences and information, but there are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with the questions. You are not required to respond to any question if you so wish, and you have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. Your refusal to participate will have no adverse effects on your employment in the university in any way.

Please note that KPU employees have free access to counselling through the Employee and Family Assistance Program, www.homewoodhealth.com or 1.800.663.1142.

Your Participation Is Voluntary

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to the education, employment, or other services to which you are entitled or are presently receiving. You have not waived your right to legal recourse in the event of research related harm. If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

Confidentiality and Ethics

All information gathered from the interviews will be coded and personal identifiers will be removed; doing so assures your confidentiality. All data will be stored (password-protected), analyzed, and reported by the participant's pseudonym. Paper data, such as handwritten interview notes, will be transcribed within 24 hours after the composition of the document and saved electronically; then the physical paper copy will be destroyed immediately.

A password-protected master file containing identifying information (e.g., names and contact information) linking to pseudonyms will be created and stored separately from the data. The data will be kept in a locked office at KPU and password protected on a computer hard drive. Only I, Candy Ho, as researcher along with my supervisors, Dr. Kris Magnusson and Dr. Cindy Xin, will have access to the data.

Your confidentiality will be respected during this research project and in the dissemination of its results; at no point will your name and/or affiliation be disclosed. Data will be deleted six months after the study is completed.

Organizational Permission

Permission to conduct this study has been granted by both Simon Fraser University’s and Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s Research Ethics Boards.
Study Results and Future Uses

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. The main study findings may be published in academic journal articles and/or presented at academic conferences.

Contact Information about the Study

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Candy Ho or my supervisor Dr. Kris Magnusson.

If you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, please contact Dr. Jeff Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics.
Participant Consent Form

Project Title:
“Professionals in Post-Secondary Education: Conceptions of Career Influence”

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your employment in the university.

☐ Your quotation(s) may be used anonymously in the report, or presentations and publications resulting from this study. Check this box if you provide us with your permission to display your quotation.

☐ Check this box if you agree to have the interviews audio recorded.

☐ Check this box if you would like to obtain a report on the findings once the study is complete. Please also provide your email address: ______________________

☐ Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

☐ Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

☐ You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

___________________________ Name (Signature)

___________________________ Name (Print)

____________________________________ Date
Appendix G.

Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement: Transcription Services

Research Project:
Professionals in Post-Secondary Education: Conceptions of Career Influence

Transcription Company: Transcription Ninjas

This research is completed by Candy Ho, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University. The purpose of this study is to better understand how post-secondary professionals conceptualize practice.

I, ______________________________, have read and understand the following terms of this Confidentiality Agreement.

As a transcriber of this research, I understand that I will be listening, and in some cases seeing, recordings of confidential interviews. The interviewees agreed to participate on the condition that their participation and information would remain strictly confidential and anonymous. I understand that by transcribing the information I have a responsibility to honour this confidentiality agreement.

By way of this document I agree to uphold the confidentiality and anonymity requirements of this research project. I understand that any violation of the terms of this agreement would be considered a serious breach of ethical standards and I therefore agree to adhere to the following terms conditions:

- Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing content of the interviews in any form (e.g., recording files, transcripts, documents) with anyone other than the researcher;
- Ensure that all research documents (e.g., recording files, transcriptions, documents) are secured while in my possession;
- Not to discuss research project or information presented in the interviews with anyone accept the researcher,
- Return all documents associated with the research project and destroy any files, electronic or paper, when transcription is complete.

Transcriber:

(Print name)  (Signature)  (Date)

Researcher:

(Print name)  (Signature)  (Date)