

Parental involvement in career education and guidance in secondary education

Annemarie Oomen

A European political focus on involving parents in education seeks to reduce the dropout rate, in order to improve the efficiency of the educational system. This is a valuable drive because the research literature suggests that parents are important influencers and advisers. Internationally, interventions have been designed to involve parents more in adolescents' career development since the 1960s. These interventions can be arranged in three models: (a) career information-centred; (b) family learning; and (c) family therapy. Moving forwards, it is important to develop stronger models for parental engagement in career guidance, alongside an accompanying research agenda.



Introduction

European countries that have a political drive to involve parents in the educational and career decision making of their children in secondary education include Denmark (Katznelson and Pless, 2007), Northern Ireland (Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister for Education, 2016) and the Netherlands. The latter assumes that involving parents to a larger extent will reduce the dropout rate in education and thus improve the efficiency of the educational system (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2013).

Involving parents in the educational setting in the career building and career decision-making of their child(ren) is valuable, considering the way in which parental influence on career development is highlighted in the literature.

Parents¹ lay the foundations of career development in childhood (see for an overview Watson et al, 2015). In adolescence, parents (Schultheiss et al, 2002) influence careers outcomes such as vocational aspiration and achievement; career decisiveness; career exploration; career commitment and career self-efficacy (Young et al, 2001: 191). Older adolescents, in dealing with the demands of transition from school to further, higher education or to work, can benefit from parental influence (Whiston and Keller, 2004). And as Levine and Sutherland (2013) observe in 'History Repeats Itself': adults take the initial result of the parent-child interaction with them and subsequently reproduce this in their own parenting (also see: Grotevant and Cooper, 1985; Youniss and Smollar, 1985).

Parents can be unconscious of influencing their child's careers. Examples of these implicit, unplanned forms of influence include the psychological elements in the family processes such as parental attachment (e.g. Ketterson and Blustein, 1997) and the daily pattern of decision-making in family life (Penick and Jepsen, 1992).

Parents also influence careers in explicit and purposeful ways. Young et al (1988), Young and Friesen (1992) identified 10 categories of parental intentions to facilitate their adolescents' career development:

1. skill acquisition;
2. acquisition of specific values or beliefs;
3. protection from unwanted experiences;
4. increasing independent thinking or action;
5. decreasing sex-role stereotyping;
6. moderation of parent-child relationships;
7. facilitation of human relationships;

¹ Where referred to parents in the text, please also read carers and family (members).

8. enhancement of character development;
9. development of personal responsibility; and
10. achievement of parents' personal goals development.

Regardless of socio-economic status (SES), parents report a need for help in providing support in career development and in educational planning throughout their children's childhood and adolescence (Otto, 1989; Arrington, 2000). Thus, aside from a political drive, there are additional reasons to involve parents more in their child's career in an educational setting, including their role as important influencers and as a response to their own need for help in providing career support.

Parent-involved career interventions

There is a wide range of career interventions which have been designed to involve parents and to help them to support their child's career. These can be observed internationally, both in- and out-side of the educational context and in examples dating back to the 1960s. My own impression of a number of career development interventions involving parents that I have examined makes me agree with the recent professional call for 'informed' interventions by family, schools and community or collaborative interventions of schools and families (see special issue IAEVG-Journal 2015, 15(2)).

In this section I will explore further the career interventions found in the literature and on the internet. To clarify my position in this research: I am interested in this subject, as I designed and conducted research into a parent-involved career intervention.

The variety of career interventions that involve parents includes: guides to inform parents about the educational system, or about their role; booklets with tools for parents or with exercises for parents and child; programmes to support all or specific parents (e.g. lower SES); and materials to support school staff in parental involvement.

While exploring the interventions from the perspective of a secondary school, I could distinguish various aspects such as the aims of the intervention, who is involved, its format and underlying assumptions on the participants and those supporting the

intervention. I developed a taxonomy for the interventions found.

Is this career intervention

- i. initiated by the school?;
- ii. aiming to provide information and/or support/help?;
- iii. focusing on parents only or on the pairing of parents and child?;
- iv. assuming an active role of the participants?; and
- v. assuming trained facilitators?

In applying the taxonomy, I could distinguish the approaches of the parent-involved career interventions in (a) information-focused interventions; (b) family learning; and (c) family counselling or family therapy. Their main features can be found in Table 1. In the sections that follow, each category will be described briefly, examples given and, if available, the research findings.

Information-focused interventions

General, non-personalised, information-focused interventions by schools and targeted at parents is a common practice in many countries. Such interventions may not use or recognise the label 'parental involvement'. In such interventions there is no specific role assumed for the parent, other than being the parent. School-staff will stay in their assigned school-role: being a teacher; a tutor or a careers teacher/leader. An information-focused intervention can take the form of a one-off plenary, an individual parent-teacher session, a website or making the offer to parents to contact school staff by email or telephone. These interventions aim at all parents to notify them about and raise awareness of a current issue in the educational and career planning of their child. Important features of this category are that the intervention is one-off, directed to all parents and is supply driven: the school takes the initiative and decides what will be presented. Parents can have an active role in these interventions, for instance, by being invited to talk about their occupation for all students or, as in an example below, to be an active observer and feedback provider.

Table 1.
Categories and main features of parent-involved career interventions

	Information-focused interventions	Family learning	Family counselling or family therapy
Aim	Informing Notify about and raise awareness of current issues	Help parents in 'remedial' or preventive ways	Address specific issues that affect the psychological health of a particular family
Labelled as 'parental involvement' at school?	No	Yes	No
Directed to	All parents	(Particular) parent(s) together with child/student	Particular family: parent(s) together with child/student
Role assumed of parents and child	No specific role	Teacher, coach and/or adviser for their child; Both parent and child being actively involved	Clients; Both parent and child being actively involved
Role assumed of school-staff	Assigned school-role	Professional facilitator	n/a
Form	One-off plenary; Individual parent-teacher meeting; Learning package; Written information; Website; Offerings parents to contact school staff. One-way direction	Resource and small group session(s) facilitated by trained school/specialised staff. Interactive	Family group session(s) facilitated by professional trained career development staff Interactive
Frequency	One-off	A subsequent series	A consecutive series of meetings
Initiated by	School; supply driven Individual parent: demand driven	School; supply driven but tailored to needs of participants	Parent; needs driven

The career interventions found are either directed at parents (and their child) at home or school staff.

Examples of information-focussed provision which are targeted at parents (and their child) at home include:

- A guide and resources for American Indian parents to support the career development

of their daughters (USA - Thomson, 1978). Research found no evidence that parents could significantly improve the career development of their child assisted by this programme;

- A career search program, including testing interests and values (USA – Castricone et al, 1982);

- A handbook with background information and exercises (USA - Otto, 1989);
- An interactive learning pack and set of six short leaflets (Scotland - Semple, 1993). Research showed that both the learning pack and leaflets were effective in changing both perspectives on educational/employment possibilities and the parent/child relationship;
- An online resource empowering parents to engage in a career conversation with their child (Australia - State Government of Victoria, 2013a);
- An online resource with tools for parents for personal and identity developmental help while their child transfers to and through secondary education and to post-secondary (Canada - Ordre de conseillers en conseillères d'orientation du Quebec, no date); and
- A national strategy for the 'upskilling of parents in career guidance', with online tools (New Zealand - Careers New Zealand (CNZ), 2014).

Examples, targeted at school-staff to achieve an information-focussed provision, involve:

- A handbook, involvement strategies and a student portfolio (USA - Burkhardt et al, 1977);
- A web portal to compile own webpages to inform parents about the CEG the school offers (Netherlands - VO-raad, 2014); and
- A national strategy for the 'upskilling of parents' engagement in career guidance', with online tools and good practice in schools (New Zealand - CNZ, 2014).

Family learning interventions

Family learning interventions help parents to support their children and aim to improve the quality of their child's career development and educational planning. Schools will label these interventions as 'parental involvement'. The role assumed for the parents is 'teacher', 'coach' and/or 'adviser' for their child (Ladd and Pettit, 2002). The intervention may be a resource accompanied by small group sessions, or small group sessions with guidance or facilitation undertaken by

school/specialised staff. This professionalised guidance is considered important to make the intervention work, to achieve learning. Further core features of this category are that the intervention consists of a series of sessions; aiming at particular parents: either 'remedial' or preventive in educational terms (low-educated, minority parent, parents with a child with special educational needs or disabilities). The intervention is supply driven (the school takes the initiative and decides what will be presented) but tailored to particular needs. Both parents and their child are supposed to be actively involved in this type of intervention. Examples are:

- Three sessions through which a group of parents of 10 students are introduced to a Career Conversation Manual and parents sharing their experiences in having conversations with their child. Osguthorpe (USA – 1976) found that parents felt more able to help their children in career planning;
- A self-administered programme with three workbooks with exercises supplemented by (work) groups. Research suggested that parents can function effectively in fostering the career development of their children, when provided with a structured programme (Canada - Palmer and Cochran, 1988);
- A parent, observing during a single counselling session with their child, is asked for feedback after each step. Research showed that the impact was modest, however surprising when taking the time spent (60 to 90 minutes) into account. (Canada - Amundson and Penner, 1998);
- Background materials and resources for workshops 'Future To Discover' (FTD) by guidance practitioners and educators, directed to parents of youth that are under-represented in post-secondary, lower SES (Canada – CCDF, 2001, 2007). Research showed a rise in high school graduation/educational attainment and increased post-secondary enrolment (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation/ SRDC, 2012).
- The 'Engaging Parents In Career Conversations' Framework (Australia - State Government of Victoria, 2013b) supports career practitioners

and teachers with resources for various two-hour workshops with parents/families of students with a disability, lower SES or English as an additional language.

- A structured parent-involved career intervention provided by trained teachers took place in the class before and after students went on a one-week internship in a company (Germany - Mayhack and Kracke, 2008, 2010). Research showed increased parental involvement in career development and enhanced exploration activities and planning strategies of students.
- The needs-tailored 'Parents as Career and Transition Supports' programme with three workshops to equip disadvantaged parents to support their child. National findings (Australia - Borlagdan and Peyton, 2014) showed that parents felt more confident in supporting their children's transition decisions and felt it helped them to navigate complex post-school systems.
- Individualised Learning Plans (ILPs) as a college and career readiness strategy in the USA (Solberg et al, 2014) may engage families in ILP activities. This might be an annual student-led parent-teacher conferences, as for instance in Milwaukee, where research is being planned.

Family therapy

Family counselling or therapy is designed to address specific issues that affect the psychological health of the family, such as major life transitions. These interventions will not take place on the school site. The role assumed for the parents is client. The intervention takes the form of a family group session with guidance undertaken by professionally trained career development staff. The intervention is a consecutive series of meetings, aiming at a particular family, and is (their) demand driven. Both parents and their child are supposed to be actively involved. Examples include:

- Greenough (1976 in Palmer and Crochan, 1988) reported on a parent counselling series of interviews, lasting 30 to 45 minutes, between the counsellor and the parents of

high school students in their last year during three weeks. These were centred around the needs, abilities, and aspirations of the student; the available career options and the likelihood of success in terms of the student's potential. Greenough concluded that satisfaction with a vocational choice five to six years later was strongly related to parental involvement.

- Whiston (1989) described a counselling group for parents in high school which was designed to blend information concerning students' career choices and techniques from the family systems theory (e.g. Minuchin, 1974; Bowen, 1978), to promote effective family communication patterns and more productive family environments.
- The research by Young and his colleagues since the 90s, involved parents and adolescents, (young) adults with family challenges, such as the effects of immigration or disabilities, that could affect the family career development and relationship "project". Young et al, (2006: 6-7) emphasise that their procedure is not meant as a programmatic intervention nor can it be routinely implemented in counselling or career development (ibid.: 18).

Some final reflections on school-based, parent-involved interventions

The different rationales to look for good practice in school-based, parent-involved interventions are the political drive in some European countries, the important influence of parents/family in their child's career and the parental need for help in supporting their child, as found in the literature.

Various interventions were found in the literature and internet. According to the taxonomy applied, these interventions were arranged in three models: (a) information-focused interventions; (b) family learning; and (c) family therapy.

In general, few examples of researched career interventions can be found in the literature (Watson

et al, 2015), and these are even more rare for school-based, parent-involved career interventions. This may have to do with the limited practice and maybe too with the relative short period of existence of such practice. For example, the German project of 2010 has vanished and the Canadian “Future To Discover’ delivery is now piecemeal” according to R. Ford, research director of the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation/SRDC (personal communication, 2 December 2014).

Having an excellent programme with excellent research results is not enough to make an intervention work in a school. Barriers at various levels (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) need to be considered. In the literature, a whole-school approach for parental involvement in careers work is generally preferred. Moving forwards, it is important to create stronger models for parental engagement in career guidance and in meeting conditions for implementing a lasting and sustainable intervention, alongside an accompanying research agenda.



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For correspondence

Annemarie Oomen,
PhD student at University of Derby, UK.

a.oomen@outlook.com