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Career and Guidance Counsellors Working in French Language Secondary Schools in Ontario: An Inventory of Current Tasks and Perceived Competence

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Abstract

In a North-American context, the practice of career and guidance counselling is plagued with many issues depending on jurisdiction. Usually those issues are related to the fact that career and guidance counsellors are obliged to engage in practices that are not always related to their profession. Considering the fact that career and guidance counsellors in Ontario are mainly teachers with little formal education and no clinical training, the current study's objective was to identify, describe, and conceptualize the tasks accomplished by N = 73 career and guidance counsellors working in French-language secondary schools in Ontario. Results suggest that career and guidance counsellors in Ontario spend a great deal of time on tasks unrelated to career and guidance counselling. Furthermore, a correlation between the amount of time allocated to, and the perceived level of competence in, completing some of the daily tasks accomplished by participants was identified. Finally, results suggest that career and guidance counsellors in Ontario often perceive themselves as being incompetent when it comes to some of the essential tasks associated with career and guidance counselling.

Key words: Career and guidance counsellors, Perception of incompetence, Training of career and guidance counsellors.

Résumé

Dans un contexte nord-américain, la pratique du conseiller d'orientation est confrontée à de nombreux problèmes selon la juridiction. Habituellement, ces problèmes sont liés au fait que les conseillers d'orientation sont obligés de s'engager dans des pratiques qui ne sont pas toujours liées à leur profession. Considérant que les conseillers d'orientation en Ontario sont principalement des enseignants sans aucune formation clinique, l'objectif de la présente recherche était d'identifier, de décrire et de conceptualiser les tâches accomplies par N = 73 conseillers d'orientation scolaire travaillant dans les écoles secondaires de langue française de l'Ontario. Les résultats suggèrent que les répondants consacrent une part importante de leur temps de travail à l'accomplissement de tâches étrangères à celles qui sont généralement associées à l'orientation professionnelle en milieu scolaire. De plus, une corrélation entre le temps alloué et le niveau de compétence perçu pour accomplir certaines des tâches quotidiennes accomplies par les participants a été établie. Finalement, les résultats suggèrent que les conseillers d'orientation en Ontario se perçoivent généralement comme incompétents en ce qui concerne l'accomplissement certaines des tâches essentielles associées au counselling d'orientation.

Mots clés: Conseillers d'orientation, Sentiment d'incompétence, Éducation des conseillers d'orientation

Within North America, the practice of career and guidance counselling has been the subject of many studies mainly

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emerging from the United States. Whereas in Canada, research on this topic has been mainly undertaken in two jurisdictions: Québec and Ontario. In general, Canadian and American research demonstrates that many issues currently plague the profession of guidance and school counselling (Dietsche, 2013; Viviers, 2016; Nadon, Samson, Gazzola and Thériault, 2016).

For example, in the United States, school counsellors report struggling to identify the specificity of their role. Studies conducted by American researchers identified four potential factors associated with the difficulties guidance counsellors experience in school settings. Specifically, (A) their training may not reflect the needs of the students or the schools (Brott & Myers, 1999); (B) they experience difficulties identifying and defining their roles and work practices (Bardhoshi & Duncun, 2009); (C) other individuals (i.e., school principals) sometimes define the practices undertaken by counsellors, leading to a lack of understanding concerning their role; and (D) counsellors are often asked to fulfill an administrative role, rather than performing the responsibilities or practices typically associated with guidance and career counsellors. In essence, this confusion may be summarized by Foster (2010), who concluded that "the focus of school counsellors is largely dependent on the systems in which they find themselves" (p. 32).

Research has identified numerous potential consequences that may be attributed to career and guidance counsellors' confusion associated with these roles and practices. Firstly, the nature and quality of services provided to students has been found to vary from one school to the next (Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Milde, Leitner & Skelton, 2006). Secondly, the availability of career and guidance counsellors to students is dependent on the number of administrative tasks they have completed (Sears & Granello, 2002). Lastly, the confusion around the tasks accomplished by career and guidance counsellors can also contaminate the students' perception of the counsellors' role, which may thereby make students reluctant to use their services (Baker, 2000).

In the same vein, research that has been undertaken in Québec reflects similar concerns to those that have been identified by American researchers examining the experiences of career and guidance counsellors in the United States. Specifically, even though career and guidance counsellors in Québec are board licensed, which requires at minimum a master's degree, they nonetheless experience issues concerning their practices. From a psychodynamic work perspective, Viviers (2016) identified that those issues could be a source of suffering. This suffering results from a constant tension between what the counsellor was educated to do, what he or she has been asked to do by the school administrator, and what he or she

is actually able to do considering the demands and the paucity of resources available. Forced to react concretely to these situations of suffering, counsellors use defensive strategies that help them maintain employment as a school and guidance counsellor.

The reality in Ontario differs from that described in Québec and the United States. Contrary to what is required for career and guidance counsellors practicing in the latter jurisdictions, those practicing in Ontario do not need to hold a Masters degree or to complete supervised internships. Indeed, a report published in 2002, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) showed that, with the exception of Québec, the training of career and guidance counsellors in Canada was insufficient. Furthermore, the report described career and guidance counselling in Canada as weakly professionalized and also demonstrated that Canadian career and guidance counsellors were typically trained in areas other than career and guidance counselling.

In a second report published in 2004, the OECD underlined that the training competencies required to fulfill the role of career or guidance counsellors in Anglophone provinces, including Ontario, were imprecise and variable. Similarly, Keats and Laitsch (2010) add that Canadian guidance counsellors are usually teachers with very limited training in career and guidance counselling. For example, in Ontario high schools, career and guidance

counselling is primarily provided by teachers who have inherited the title of career and guidance counsellor. In essence, most of the Ontarian teachers who take on the role of career and guidance counsellor usually acquire their training through three undergraduate additional qualification (AQ) courses in career and guidance counselling offered online by various universities or through the Ontario School Counsellor Association. Each AQ course carries a workload of 115 hours. The training of career and guidance counsellors in Ontario does not include a supervised internship or any clinical training (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014).

The formal academic training of career and guidance counsellors in Ontario is at best, somewhat limited, and at worst, nonexistent (Nadon, Samson, Gazzola & Thériault, 2016). Moreover, the identified theoretical foundations of the guidance and career education AQ, as outlined in the course guidelines (see Ontario College of Teachers, 2014), do not reflect the competency standards established by career and guidance counselling organizations, such as the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG, 2004). Rather, AQ course guidelines reflect the *Standards for the Teaching Profession*, a part of the Ontario College of Teachers act (Ontario College of Teachers, 2014). These guidelines are teaching and teacher-focused and do not reflect the main areas of practice related to the domain of career and guidance counselling (i.e., theories of counselling, theories of guidance and career counselling, or testing).

A recent study demonstrated that there are numerous negative consequences resulting from the imprecise and limited training required to fulfill the role of career and guidance counsellors in Ontario high schools. Nadon, Samson, Gazzola, and Thériault (2016) described the practices of career and guidance counsellors as not being grounded in a scientific theoretical framework. Rather, guidance and career counsellors in Ontario use past teaching experiences, their intuition, and the informal supervision of senior guidance counsellors, as guides to perform their duties.

Dietsche (2013) examined Ontario high school career and guidance counsellors' practices, and found that guidance and career counsellors spend a small portion of their time providing career counselling to students (25%), with the remainder of their time (75%) being spent on academic issues (40%), personal counselling (20%), and social issues (15%). Adding to the fact that career and guidance counsellors spend a small portion of their time providing career counselling, research has also identified a discrepancy between the actual role of career and guidance counsellors in Ontario schools, and the role outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (Dietsche, 2013; Mustaine & Pappalardo, 1996).

In summary, the issues around the tasks accomplished by career and guidance counsellors that have been identified and described in research emerging from Québec and the United-States appears to be mainly resulting from expectations that are imposed upon career and guidance counsellors by the schools' administration. This systemic problem, as described by Foster (2010), depends very much on the context in which career and guidance counsellors practice.

On the other hand, in Ontario, the issues surrounding the profession of career and guidance counselling appear to result from insufficient training. Indeed, in Ontario's high schools, teachers/career and guidance counsellors not only dedicate a small portion of their time to career and guidance counselling, but they also do not seem to have the formal training required to provide the necessary services to their students in line with international standards (International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG), 2004).

Objectives

Given the lack of supervision and formal training currently provided to career and guidance counsellors in Ontario, it was deemed important to examine how they identify, conceptualize, and describe the tasks they perform. Consequently, the first objective of this research was to identify and describe the different tasks accomplished by career and guidance counsellors.

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In relation to the first objective, the second objective of this study was to assess how Ontario career and guidance counsellors perceived their level of competency in relation to the international standards.

Method

Sample

Seventy-three career and guidance counsellors working for the 12 French-language school boards that exist in Ontario responded to the study questionnaires. Seventy-four percent of participants reported to be working as a career and guidance counsellor on a full-time basis, while 26% of participants reported working part-time as teachers and part-time as career and guidance counsellors in their high school. Furthermore, 52 participants reported their gender to be female (71.23%) while 21 reported to be male (28.77%), with a mean age of 44 years. Participants reported to have an average of 17 years of experience as a teacher and an average of 8 years of experience as a career and guidance counsellor. In relation to the training participants had received in order to be considered a career and guidance counsellor, 3% reported not having completed any of the AQ courses, while 22% had completed part one, 12% had completed part one and two, and 63% had completed part one, two, and three.

Instruments

Tasks Accomplished by Career and Guidance Counsellors. In order to develop an accurate list of tasks performed by career and guidance counsellors in Ontario, three distinct steps were undertaken. Specifically, (a) eighteen career and guidance counsellors were individually interviewed by the main author during which time they were asked to list and discuss the different tasks they performed at their school; (b) from those interviews, the first and fourth authors identified and described seventeen different tasks performed by guidance counsellors in Ontario; finally (c) three focus groups in three different school boards were consulted in order to corroborate the study's findings. In total, 14 guidance counsellors participated in the three different focus groups. Participants in all three focus groups confirmed that the list was representative of the daily tasks they accomplished, and that these had been adequately and accurately described.

As described in Table 1, seventeen tasks or practices were identified. Respondents were asked to rate them following a two-step procedure. The first procedure consisted of assessing each task using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not important* (1) *to very important (*5). The second procedure consisted of providing an estimation of the percentage of time allocated for each task. The electronic questionnaire calculated the total amount of time delegated to each activity and ensured that the total percentages added up to 100 for each participant.

Career and Guidance Counselling-related Knowledge and Skills. Since, as previously discussed, career and guidance counsellors in Ontario lack formal training, it was deemed important to assess their perceived level of knowledge and skills of 13 essential competencies associated with the practice of career and guidance counselling, as identified by the College of Career and Guidance Counsellors of Québec and the IAEVG. Participants rated the 13 essential competencies on 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all mastered* (1) *to very well mastered* (5). The list included *theoretical* (e.g., theories of vocational development), *technical* (e.g., knowledge of tests and measurement), and *practical* aspects (e.g., job search strategies) of the 13 essential competencies associated with career and guidance counselling. Among the 13 essential competencies associated with the practice of career and guidance counselling, participants were asked to select 5 tasks for which they believed they might benefit from additional training.

Procedure

The questionnaire was made available to participants online through the main author's web page (www.choixdecarriere.com) over the course of three months. All twelve French-language school boards in the prov-

Table 1

Descriptions of the tasks undertaken by Career and Guidance Counsellors Working in French Language Secondary Schools

Tasks	Descriptions
Informing students (one on one)	Regarding postsecondary education programs, careers, and job market trends
Organizing academic and professional information relating to students	Reading information, filing documents, planning career fairs, contacting postsecondary institutions, etc.
Providing information to students	Regarding bursaries and financial aid
Managing students' academic progress	For instance, regarding: enrolment, course selection, student scheduling
Participating in the school's promotional and public relations activities	Organizing school tours for new students, visiting feeder schools, information kisosks for the school
Providing consultation	To teachers as well as other professionals in the school and to the members of the administration
Providing individual career counselling	To students so as to promote the development of their self-awareness
Testing through the use of psychometric tools	For example, to assist students with their career choices using recognized and standardized tests such as: Strong, Jackson, GROP, etc.
Providing personal (and individual) counselling	Crisis situations, anxiety, emotional problems, etc
Providing classroom instruction	For example, within the scope of the GLC2O course
Completing various tasks	Completings tasks assigned by the school principal
Collaborating within multidisciplinary teams	Collaborate on interventions to promote student success and learning
Guiding students using career-related software	For instance, with tools that help students make career or academic choices : "Career Cruising"
Assisting with job searches and co-op placements	Assisting students who are writing a curriculum vitae (cv)
Managing other activities	Such as the graduation ceremonies or sport teams
Paperwork	Managing student files
Planning interventions and activities	Specifically geared towards helping grade 11 and 12 students choose career paths and postsecondary school programs

ince of Ontario agreed to participate in the study. Each School Board forwarded the invitation to participate in the study to each of their high school career and guidance counsellors via email. This research was approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, and informed consent was obtained from all participating career and guidance counsellors online prior to the completion of any study questionnaires through the study's website.

Results

All of the analyses were conducted using SPSS 24.0.

Relationship Between Perceived Importance and Time Allocation for Each Task

As can be seen in Table 2, managing students' academic progress (M = 4.86, SD = .35), informing students (M = 4.60, SD = .57), and planning interventions and activities (M = 4.46, SD = .56) were perceived as the most important tasks undertaken by career and guidance counsellors. On the other hand, providing personal counselling (M = 2.93, SD = 1.08), assisting with job searches and co-op placements (M = 3.07, SD = .81), and completing various tasks (M = 3.37, SD = 1.10) were perceived as less important.

As for time allocated to the various tasks associated with career and guidance counselling, participants reported that they generally dedicated most of their time to informing students and managing students' academic progress (respectively, M = 9.86, SD = 5.71 and M = 16.80, SD = 8.77). However, participants claimed that they spent the least amount of time completing various tasks (M = 2.56, SD = 2.15) and assisting with job searches and co-op placements (M = 2.44, SD = 2.02). Whereas participants spent a great deal of time informing students and managing their academic progress, they reported spending much less time providing individual career counselling (M = 5.89, SD = 3.68). Descriptively, these results demonstrate that the perceived importance of tasks is generally

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Table 2

Importance and Time Allocated to Each Task

Tasks	Importance				Time allocation (%)			
	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max
Informing students (one on one)	4.60	.57	3	5	9.86	5.71	0	30
Organizing academic and professional information relating to students	4.12	.73	2	5	6.77	4.77	0	35
Providing information to students	4.11	.64	3	5	5.01	2.92	0	15
Managing students' academic progress	4.86	.35	4	5	16.80	8.77	0	48
Participating in the school's promotional and public relations activities	3.67	1.05	1	5	5.18	3.13	0	15
Providing consultation	3.66	.71	1	5	4.62	2.45	0	10
Providing individual career counselling	4.29	.74	2	5	5.89	3.68	0	20
Testing through the use of psychometric tools	3.48	1.00	1	5	2.80	2.62	0	10
Providing personal (and individual) counselling	2.93	1.08	1	5	5.01	3.99	0	21
Providing classroom instruction	4.03	.97	1	5	5.95	5.16	0	30
Completing various tasks	3.37	1.01	1	5	2.56	2.15	0	9
Collaborating within multidisciplinary teams	4.25	.80	2	5	7.90	5.67	0	40
Guiding students using career-related software	3.96	.86	2	5	4.62	2.98	0	15
Assisting with job searches and co-op placements	3.07	.81	1	5	2.44	2.02	0	9
Managing other activities	3.45	1.09	1	5	4.43	3.61	0	20
Paperwork	3.50	1.15	1	5	4.41	3.96	0	25
Planning interventions and activities	4.46	.56	3	5	5.78	3.81	0	20

commensurate to the amount of time career and guidance counsellors allocate to them. Notwithstanding, further analyses were essential in order to better understand the individual differences from a between and within-subjects perspective.

Since the data were not normally distributed, a rank-based procedure was utilized (Brace, Kemp & Snelgar, 2013). Consequently, the importance of each task was ranked from 1 (*the least important*) to 17 (*the most important*) and the amount of time allocated to each task was also ranked, namely from 1 (*tasks associated with the lowest time allocation*) to 17 (*tasks associated with the highest time allocation*). The average rank per task is presented in Table 3. Friedman's test was found to be significant [$\chi^2(16) = 397.96$,

$p < .01$] for the ranking of the perceived importance of tasks, suggesting that each was associated with a specific rank by each participant. In addition, Kendall's W was found to be .34, indicating a moderate agreement between career and guidance counsellors. More specifically, managing students' academic progress (Average Rank = 14.22) and informing students (Average Rank = 12.79) received the highest ranks.

Similarly, Friedman's test was found to be significant [$\chi^2(16) = 369.30$, $p < .01$] in terms of time allocated to each task, indicating participants specifically ranked and ordered the amount of time spent per activity. Kendall's W was found to be a value of .32, which also suggests a moderate agreement across the sample. Post-hoc Wilcoxon signed-rank test of

paired comparisons indicated that more time was allocated to managing students' academic progress ($Z = -3.81$, $p < .01$) and providing personal (and individual) counselling ($Z = -5.29$, $p < .01$). Alternatively, career and guidance counsellors appeared to allocate less time to: providing information to students ($Z = 2.08$, $p = .04$), testing through the use of psychometric tools ($Z = 2.37$, $p = .02$), providing classroom instruction ($Z = 2.00$, $p < .05$), completing various tasks ($Z = 2.60$, $p < .01$), and planning interventions and activities ($Z = 2.84$, $p < .01$).

In order to conduct a within-subject comparison, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test was also used. Results ranged from $Z = -.96$ ($p = .34$) to $Z = 0$ ($p = 1.00$) with a median of $Z = -.22$. In other words, about 49% of

Table 3

Ranks for Importance and Time Allocation to Each Task

Tasks	Rank for importance		Rank for time allocation		Wilcoxon signed-rank test	
	M	SD	M	SD	Z	p
Informing students (one on one)	12.79	2.99	12.76	3.82	.67	.50
Organizing academic and professional information relating to students	10.34	3.12	10.70	3.55	.81	.42
Providing information to students	9.92	2.88	8.74	3.87	2.08	.04
Managing students' academic progress	14.22	2.01	15.48	2.71	-3.81	< .01
Participating in the school's promotional and public relations activities	8.03	4.37	8.99	3.63	-1.64	.10
Providing consultation	7.56	3.05	8.52	3.38	-1.87	.06
Providing individual career counselling	10.95	3.65	9.99	3.78	-1.85	.06
Testing through the use of psychometric tools	6.88	4.23	5.63	3.95	2.37	.02
Providing personal (and individual) counselling	4.62	3.75	8.45	4.09	-5.29	< .01
Providing classroom instruction	9.77	4.29	9.03	4.74	2.00	.04
Completing various tasks	6.53	4.20	5.21	3.38	2.60	< .01
Collaborating within multidisciplinary teams	10.94	3.92	11.47	3.95	-.87	.38
Guiding students using career-related software	9.37	3.95	8.45	3.87	-1.48	.14
Assisting with job searches and co-op placements	4.78	2.84	4.73	3.43	.65	.52
Managing other activities	7.08	3.94	7.49	4.40	-.43	.67
Paperwork	7.45	4.81	7.55	4.50	-.01	.99
Planning interventions and activities	11.76	3.31	9.79	4.23	2.84	< .01

career and guidance counsellors participating in this study were more likely to allocate additional time to the tasks they considered as most important, while 44% engaged in opposing behaviour. Nonetheless, no significant results were found to support that the rank associated with the perceived importance of tasks was similar to the rank associated with time allocation within the present sample.

How Career and Guidance Counsellors Knowledge and Skills relate to Tasks

As the number of career and guidance counsellors' identified knowledge, skills, and tasks was too voluminous, a cluster analysis was chosen to reorganize them into subgroups. Data from the rating procedure were computed using the Ward method and squared Euclidean distances. Thus, tasks were grouped according to the similarity of perceived importance reported by respondents. The number of clusters was determined by inspecting the scree plot of coefficients (Yim & Ramdeen, 2015), and a four-cluster solution was found to be the most suitable. The first cluster comprised four tasks that encapsulated more *individual-oriented career activities* (Tasks 1, 4, 7, and 17). The second cluster included seven tasks more related to group-oriented career activities (Tasks 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, and 13), whereas the third cluster included four tasks that were more consistent with *administrative-oriented career activities* (Tasks 9, 14, 15, and 16). Finally, the fourth cluster was composed of two tasks that corresponded to *technical-oriented career activities* (Tasks 8 and 11). On average, individual-oriented career activities (M = 4.55, SD = .35) were perceived as *very important* while group-oriented (M = 3.97, SD = .47), administrative-oriented (M = 3.58, SD = .57), and technical-oriented career activities (M = 3.42, SD = .83) were considered to be *somewhat important.*

Following the method proposed by Bertrand, Peters, Pérée and Hansez (2010), the percentage of time allocated to each cluster, associated with each career and guidance counsellor was calculated. Subsequently, the association of these factors to career and guidance counsellors' perceived level of knowledge and skills was calculated and presented in Table 4.

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Table 4

Level of Mastery Perceived by Participants for the Core Skills and Specific Knowledge Related to Career and Guidance Counselling

	Descriptive statistics		Correlations with tasks clusters			
	M	SD	ICA	GCA	ACA	TCA
Theories of vocational development	2.15	1.00	.03	-.08	-.07	.24*
Mastery and use of a specific theoretical approach in counselling	2.32	.96	.06	.14	-.20	.01
Knowledge of tests and measurement	1.60	.92	.05	-.13	-.09	.31**
Providing professional and academic information	2.95	.33	.26*	.14	-.50**	.11
Group facilitation	2.89	.46	-.06	.26*	-.15	-.03
Job search strategies	2.37	.94	.18	-.02	-.26*	.13
Psychology of human development and personality	2.43	.91	.08	.09	-.16	-.06
Knowledge of psychopathology and mental health	1.82	.99	-.13	.05	.04	.18
Learning support	2.89	.46	-.03	.01	.05	-.03
Working with multicultural and diverse populations	2.32	.96	-.12	.10	.03	.07
Ethics and standards of practice	2.75	.66	.00	.07	-.04	-.04
Use of career models to facilitate decision-making	2.59	.81	.02	.09	-.15	.11
Use of self-exploration and planning programs in careers	2.64	.77	.08	.05	-.28*	.29*

Note. ICA = Individual-oriented career activities, GCA = Group-oriented career activities, ACA = Administrative-oriented career activities, TCA = Technical-oriented career activities.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

As it is clearly demonstrated, career and guidance counsellors who reported to allocate a high percentage of time to individual-oriented career activities also reported a high perceived level of skills related to providing professional and academic information ($r = .26$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, participants who stated that they spent more time on group-oriented career activities also reported a high-perceived level of group facilitation ($r = .26$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, a negative correlation was found between percentage of time allocated to administrative-oriented career activities and perceived level of knowledge and skills related to providing professional and academic information ($r = -.50$, $p < .01$), use of self-exploration and planning programs in careers ($r = -.28$, $p < .05$), and job search strategies ($r = -.26$,

$p < .05$). Finally, when career and guidance counsellors were found to allot a high percentage of time to technical-oriented career activities, they were also likely to report a high perceived level of knowledge and skills related to knowledge of tests and measurement ($r = .31$, $p < .01$), use self-exploration and planning programs in careers ($r = .29$, $p < .01$), and in theories of vocational development ($r = .24$, $p < .01$). In summary, the results demonstrate that the manner in which career and guidance counsellors allocate their time across the various tasks is associated with differences in perceived level of knowledge and skills.

Perceived Competence and Need for Continuing Education

Given the variation in participants' perceived level

of knowledge and skills, their self-reported perceived competence and need for continuing education was assessed. In general, participants identified 5 themes for which they would require further training (See Table 5). The task which participants identified as needing the most additional training consisted of theories of vocational development (24.7% or respondents), followed by testing through the use of psychometric tools (17.8% of respondents).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the current practices of career and guidance counsellors in the province of Ontario. Furthermore, their perceived level of competency was examined.

Table 5

Tasks Associated with a Perceived Need for Continuing Education

Task	Percentage of Career and Guidance Counsellors who Endorsed this Task
Counselling theories	24.7 %
Testing through the use of psychometric tools	17.8 %
Ethics	15.1 %
Psychopathology and mental health	6.8 %
Group work	5.5 %
Counselling skills associated with specific populations: mental health, immigrants, sexual orientation, etc.	5.5 %

The current study's findings suggest that career and guidance counsellors perceive administrative-type tasks, such as managing students' academic progress or planning interventions and activities, as most important. When the amount of time spent on activities was examined, career and guidance counsellors reported that they spent the greatest amount of time managing students' academic progress and providing individual counselling to students. In fact, further analyses showed that nearly half of career and guidance counsellors reported spending the most time on tasks they considered being most important for their work. Finally, a cluster analysis was conducted in order to examine the manner in which career and guidance counsellors' knowledge and skills related to the perceived importance they attributed to tasks. In essence, individual-oriented career activities were found to be most important, and overall, career and guidance counsellors appear to allocate their time according to their perceived competence for the tasks being accomplished.

The results obtained through the current study suggest that there may be a correlation between the perceived importance of tasks performed by career and guidance counsellors, and their perceived feelings of competence. More specifically, from a descriptive perspective (see Table IV), the level of mastery perceived by participants in terms of the competencies related to career and guidance counselling, is surprisingly low. This finding needs to be put into context to pre-existing findings. Indeed, fifteen years ago a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2002) showed that with the exception of Québec, the training of career and guidance counsellors in Canada was insufficient. In fact, there is no existing training standard designated for use by career and guidance counsellors in Ontario (OECD, 2002; OECD, 2004). Eight years later, Keats and Laitsch (2010) confirmed the OECD's statement by reporting that Canadian guidance counsellors, including career and guidance counsellors from Ontario, are typically teachers with very limited training in career and guidance counselling. A qualitative study conducted by Nadon, Samson, Gazzola, and Thériault (2016) further showed that the formal academic training of career and guidance counsellors in Ontario is at best, somewhat limited, and at worst, nonexistent.

The current research not only confirms but also adds to previous findings (Keats & Laitsch, 2010; Nadon, Samson, Gazzola, & Thériault, 2016; OECD, 2002) by demonstrating

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the consequences of Ontarian career and guidance counsellors' lack of formal training. Specifically, results of the current study suggest that career and guidance counsellors in Ontario do not perceive themselves as competent in the core practice of career and guidance counselling, for instance in topics such as: theories of vocational development; knowledge of psychopathology and mental health; and knowledge of tests and measurement.

Given the findings obtained through this research, it is difficult not to consider the following question: how do career and guidance counsellors in Ontario meet the various needs of students in Ontario schools? While meeting the general needs of students does not necessarily require an in-depth knowledge and clinical training, the opposite is true when attempting to meet the needs of students struggling with more severe career indecision and related issues. Nevertheless, it is clear that promoting self-awareness, the use of standardized tests, and dealing with severe career indecision, crisis situations, anxiety, and emotional problems requires specialized clinical training, theoretical knowledge, as well as clinical supervision. This leads to a second question; that of whether the current practices of career and guidance counsellors in Ontario meet ethical standards knowing that they did not receive the necessary clinical or formal training to perform these aforementioned tasks.

The current study's results show that participants spend an important percentage of their time on tasks unrelated to career and guidance counselling. Secondly, as previously mentioned, it appears that participants' perceived competence in tasks related to career and guidance counselling is rather low. Finally, there appears to be a relation between the perceived skill level and amount of time spent on various tasks performed by career and guidance counsellors, which are surprisingly of an administrative nature.

These results are in line with the current literature in career and guidance counselling. In particular, research demonstrates that American and Canadian guidance and career counsellors tend to report challenges associated with the different aspects of their role within the high school system. First of all, Brett and Myers (1999) reported that career and guidance counsellors' training might not be in line with the needs of students or the school. The current study's findings not only complement those of Brott and Myers (1999), but also contribute to the literature by providing information about the context in French-language secondary schools in Ontario. Given the paucity of research on career and guidance counselling in Canada and Ontario in general, the current study's findings demonstrate that in Ontario career and guidance counsellors likely do not meet the needs of their students simply because they report feeling incompetent and tend

to allocate more time to administrative tasks rather than the core tasks associated with career and guidance counselling.

In comparison to career and guidance counsellors working in Québec, career and guidance counsellors in Ontario seem to have a very different experience. For instance, one of the main issues or challenges for career and guidance counsellors in Québec is that they must adhere to very specific tasks, as prescribed by the school board, but not necessarily to tasks they deem to be important or essential to their profession (Viviers, 2016). While this is often a source of frustration for career and guidance counsellors in Québec, who would prefer to dedicate their time to tasks that they perceive to be more important (Viviers, 2016), the reality in Ontario is quite different. Specifically, the tasks prescribed to career and guidance counsellors in Ontario by the school board, and the official policy of the ministry of Ontario as described in the document entitled *Creating Pathways to Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), are rather vague. This may explain why career and guidance counsellors in Ontario appear to engage in such a variety of tasks, for instance seventeen were identified in the current study. Furthermore, the current study highlights that the amount of time spent on these tasks by career and guidance counsellors is associated with their perceived competence rather than the tasks that have been identified as

essential when it comes to career and guidance counselling. In other words, students attending French-language secondary schools in Ontario are not receiving services commensurate to international standards, but rather to the perceived level of competence of the career and guidance counsellor. Hence, the quality of services varies from school to school and counsellor to counsellor.

The current study must be considered in light of certain limitations. Firstly, this research was conducted in a minority context, specifically a French-language school system in Ontario. Even though school and guidance counsellors in Ontario, whether in the English or French school boards, are subject to follow the same policies and receive the same training, results cannot necessarily be generalized to career and guidance counsellors working in the English school system. Secondly, there are about 125 career and guidance counsellors working in French-language secondary schools in Ontario so it was particularly difficult to reach a large number of participants in the present study. Finally, while our focus was to examine the perceived importance and amount of time allocated to each task, further investigations should be conducted. Specifically, considering the variety of career and guidance challenges experienced by Franco-Ontarian secondary school students (Sovet, DiMillo & Samson, 2016), the appropriateness and effectiveness of how these tasks are performed and

selected should be examined.

In conclusion, the current study provides another argument to support the need for additional training for career and guidance counsellors in Ontario, not only to better support students' needs, but to increase career and guidance counsellors' awareness of the essential tasks associated with career and guidance counselling and to increase their feelings of competence. A second important implication that can be derived from this study's findings includes the fact that it might be important to revise and further specify what tasks should be accomplished by career and guidance counsellors, so as to provide a more consistent service for students and schools in general throughout the province of Ontario.

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