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Enhancing Career Readiness of Students With Special Educational Needs Through a Career Planning Programme

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Students with special educational needs (SEN) have a hard time moving into employment or post-school education. Many previous research on students with SEN and career guidance, focused on primary to secondary students. With more students enrolled to higher education, there is a strong need to discover the ways to improve their career guidance and planning. To improve their self-efficacy and planning, a programme named "Career, Ambition & Resilience (CAR) Programme" was launched focused on their development. Significant differences between the preand post-test score after the programme in the participants. This study has shown the contributions of endeavour for students with wide-spectrum capacity and education strategy.

Keywords: student affairs, special educational needs, leadership development, career readiness, future skill training, higher education

Introduction

A career is defined as the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during a lifetime (Super, 1957). People play a variety of roles as they mature, and these roles include those of child, pupil, or student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner (Super, 1980). To help students develop their careers, career guidance is often offered. It is an inclusive term that has been used to describe a range of interventions including career education and counselling, that help people to move from a general understanding of life and work to a specific understanding of the realistic life, learning, and work options that are open to them (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2015). Career guidance (includes career counselling) embraces all services provided to students when assisting them in making informed decisions on occupational choices, and also the ongoing support provided to individuals to help them manage their career development (Wong & Yuen, 2019). In Hong Kong, career guidance was recommended to be integrated with the school's curriculum in 2014, through which students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitude to make wise choices in accordance with their interests, abilities, and orientations as well as connecting their career/academic aspirations with whole-person development and life-long learning (Education Bureau, 2014a).

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Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Hong Kong

According to the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, in very broad terms special educational need is likely to take the form of the need for one or more of the following: (1) the provision of special means of access to the curriculum through special equipment, facilities, or resources, modification of the physical environment, or specialist teaching techniques; (2) the provision of a special or modified curriculum; (3) particular attention to the social structure and emotional climate in which education takes place (Warnock, 1978). In Hong Kong, SEN includes the needs of students with various types of disabilities. For example, specific learning difficulties, speech and language impairment, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, visual impairment, physical disability, hearing impairment, and mental illness (Education Bureau, 2014b). In a Statistical Highlights of SEN produced by Legislative Council Secretariat (2019), it was reported that the number of students with SEN has been increasing steadily from the school years 2013/2014 to 2017/2018. In the 2017/2018 school year, students with SEN accounted for 8.6% of all secondary school students in public sector mainstream schools.

Students With SEN and Future Career

Students with SEN have a hard time moving into employment or post-school education. Sin and Yang (2018) reported that teachers concluded students with SEN always faced a lot of difficulties in post-school education or employment. These difficulties came from individuals, families, and communities. According to the teachers' observation and experiences, most students with SEN had low confidence in learning, weak cognitive abilities, feeble physical disabilities, or immature emotional problems. Sin and Yang further found that jobs with less training or in sheltered workshops were undesirable for students with SEN. The school education, instead of academic pursuits, should be more focused on training students with SEN with academic skills, communication skills, social and interpersonal skills, and occupational and vocational skills, which are closely related to life learning and career planning in schools.

Career guidance and planning are also crucial for students with SEN for their future employment. Previous research showed that career readiness could predict later educational and employment outcomes for adolescents with SEN. Gutman and Schoon (2018) found that high career aspirations at age 14 were more predictive of later educational and employment outcomes from ages 16 to 20 for adolescents with SEN compared to those without SEN. They underlined the importance of helping adolescents with SEN identify their career aspirations in early adolescence and adopt appropriate strategies to encourage them to reach their potential. Studies also had shown that adolescents with learning difficulties not only have lower career aspirations (Rojewski, 1996a; 1996b; 1999), they also experienced significantly worse educational and employment outcomes compared to their peers without learning difficulties (Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg, 2014; Newman et al., 2011). Students with SEN require help to plan for their careers in the future.

Our Project

Hong Kong Community College (HKCC) is a tertiary education institution under the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. One of its objectives is to offer equal learning opportunities and appropriate support to students with SEN. In 2019, HKCC received Quality Enhancement Support Scheme funding for a project named "Comprehensive support services for students with special educational needs". The project covers the period from October 2019 to September 2021. It aims at providing customized and individualized support for SEN

students, equipping them with psychological readiness and practical experiences, as well as preparing them to have a smooth transition to advanced study in tertiary institutions and future career development.

In Hong Kong Community College of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the number of students with SEN is increasing. From the school years 2016/2017 to 2018/2019, the number of students who disclosed their status of SEN raised from 50 to 106. The actual number will be higher if all the students are willing to disclose their status of SEN. Regarding the increasing number of students with SEN, more resources are required to support these students' needs, from further study to future employment.

Research

Although there is previous research on students with SEN and career guidance, they are mainly focused on the students in primary to secondary schools. There is not a lot of evidence on this in higher education. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to discover the ways to improve the career guidance and planning of students with SEN in higher education. A few attributes of career guidance and planning were summarised from previous research (Gysbers, 2013; Yang, Yuen, Wang, Wang, & Sin, 2020). The first attribute is planning. Gysbers (2013) emphasised the importance of planning on anticipating and preparing for the future. Career-ready students understand how to plan and how to anticipate the possible impact that planned and unplanned events may have on them and their career planning (Gysbers, 2013). Therefore, students will need planning skills to anticipate their future. The second attribute is self-efficacy. According to Yang et al. (2020), self-efficacy now refers broadly to an individual's beliefs concerning his or her efficacy across a wide range of tasks, decisions, and behaviours. They suggested that students' career self-efficacy has a pivotal role in shaping their career development. Career self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations are needed to help students develop personal goals and plan for employment (Panagos & DuBois, 1999).

In the current study, five elements were derived from the two attributes. They are goal setting, self-motivation, CV writing, interview skills, and career planning. Figure 1 shows the derivation of the two attributes.

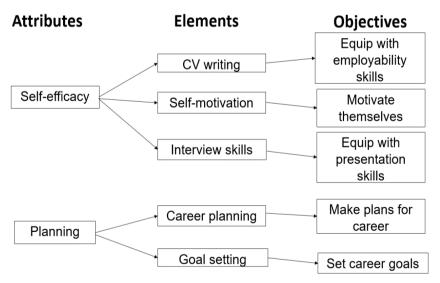


Figure 1. The derived elements and their objectives.

To improve these attributes, a programme named "Career, Ambition & Resilience (CAR) Programme" was launched. It consists of five sessions, and each session would focus on the elements derived from the two

attributes, namely CV writing, self-motivation, interview skills, career planning, and goal setting. The first session is on goal setting; the second session is on self-motivation; the third session is on CV writing; the fourth session is on interview skills; and the last session is on career planning. Each session has its own objectives. For instance, the objective of the CV writing session is to equip students with SEN with employability skills; the self-motivation session is to teach them how to motivate themselves; and the interview skills session is to equip them with presentation skills. These sessions can enhance students' abilities and confidence in using the skills, and thus, increase their self-efficacy. Furthermore, the career planning session aims to help students with SEN make plans for their future career; and the goal setting session aims to assist them to set career goals. These sessions can help students with SEN plan for their career and achieve their goals afterwards.

Methods

A total of 20 students with SEN from Hong Kong Community College joined the programme on a voluntary basis, including four females and 16 males, from January 2021 to March 2021. Table 1 shows their status of SEN.

Table 1

Types of SEN Participants Have

Types of SEN	ASD	ADHD	VI	SLD	HI	PD	Others
No. of participants	2	7	2	4	5	1	1
Total No. of participants	20						

Notes. ASD = Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD = Attention Deficiency/Hyperactivity Disorder, VI = Visual Impairment, SLD = Specific Learning Difficulties, HI = Hearing Impairment, PD = Physical Disability, and Other includes dementia. Participants may have multiple SEN at the same time.

Procedure

Before the programme starts, participants were required to fill in the Career readiness inventory (Chui, 2012) as a pre-test and a consent form. After that, they participated in a seven-session long training programme. The programme includes an introductory session, a session on goal setting, a session on self-motivation, a session on CV writing, a session on interview, a session on career planning, and a conclusive session. Participants who finished five out of the seven sessions were required to fill in the same career readiness inventory as a post-test.

Career Readiness Inventory (CRI)

Johnson, Jones, and Cheng (2014) define career readiness as the degree of career maturity (readiness to make choices about one's future career and affirm one's decision made with confidence) and vocational identity (self-awareness about one's interests, competencies, values, personality in relation to future employment). Chui (2012) defined and measured career readiness in terms of career planning (self-understanding), career planning (ideal career), career planning (personal development), career decision self-efficacy, career decision outcome expectation, career decision-making intention, and career exploration. The current research adapted the Chinese version published by Chui in 2020. The 42-item inventory was constituted by seven subscales, including Career Exploration (Thinking), Career Exploration (Activity), Career Decision Making (Self-efficacy), Career Decision Making (Outcome expectation), Career Decision Making (Intention), Career Planning (Self-understanding), and Career Planning (Understand world-of-work). Please see Appendix 1 for the full version of the inventory.

Results

Demographics of Subjects and Performance in the Career Readiness Inventory (CRI)

Table 2 shows participants' demographic information, their performance in each subcategory of the CRI before and after the CAR programme. There are seven subcategories in the CRI, which are career exploration thinking, career exploration activity, career decision making self-efficacy, career decision making outcome expectation, career decision making intention, career planning (self-understand), and career planning (understand world-of-work).

Table 2

Demographics of Subjects and Variables

	Female $(n=4)$				Male		Total (n = 20)			
	Mean	$\frac{n=4}{\text{SD}}$	Range	Mean	$\frac{i = 16)}{\text{SD}}$	Range	Mean	$\frac{(n=20)}{\text{SD}}$	Range	
D										
Pre-test	124.75	11.95	26	123.81	22.21	80.00	124.00	20.31	80.00	
ECarET	3.13	0.14	0.25	3.14	0.56	2.00	3.14	0.50	2.00	
ECarEA	2.19	0.48	1.12	2.18	0.55	2.00	2.18	0.53	2.00	
ECarDSE	3.33	0.45	1.00	3.23	0.83	3.25	3.27	0.76	3.25	
ECarDEO	3.45	0.25	0.60	3.79	0.60	2.40	3.72	0.56	2.40	
ECarDI	3.60	0.16	0.40	3.84	0.51	2.00	3.79	0.47	2.00	
ECarPSU	2.50	0.43	1.00	2.31	0.77	2.33	2.35	0.71	2.33	
ECarPWoW	2.40	0.63	1.40	1.94	0.58	2.40	2.03	0.60	2.40	
Post-test	125.50	8.66	21.00	136.69	18.74	57.00	134.45	17.61	56.00	
OCarET	2.81	0.24	0.50	3.38	0.34	1.00	3.26	0.39	1.25	
OCarEA	2.57	0.46	1.00	2.71	0.58	1.63	2.63	0.50	1.63	
OCarDSE	3.40	0.40	0.92	3.56	0.54	1.83	3.53	0.51	1.83	
OCarDEO	3.45	0.57	1.20	4.01	0.48	1.60	3.90	0.54	2.20	
OCarDI	3.55	0.38	0.80	3.93	0.47	1.60	3.85	0.47	1.60	
OCarPSU	2.33	0.47	1.00	2.75	0.82	2.67	2.67	0.77	2.67	
OCarPWoW	2.25	0.44	1.00	2.26	0.65	2.20	2.25	0.60	2.20	

Notes. n = 20.

ECarET: pre-test career exploration thinking; ECarEA: pre-test career exploration activity;

ECarDSE: Pre-test career decision making self-efficacy; ECarDEO: pre-test career decision making outcome expectation;

ECarDI: pre-test career decision making intention; ECarPSU: pre-test career planning (self-understand);

ECarPWoW: pre-test career planning (world-of-work); OCarET: post-test career exploration thinking;

OCarEA: post-test career exploration activity; OCarDSE: post-test career decision making self-efficacy;

OCarDEO: post-test career decision making outcome expectation; OCarDI: post-test career decision making intention;

OCarPSU: post-test career planning (self-understand); OCarPWoW: post-test career planning (world-of-work).

Effectiveness of CAR programme

A related-samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to examine the effect of CAR programme on CRI performance (see Table 3). The score participants gained on CRI before and after CAR programme was recorded.

Variables/subscales	Pre-test		F	Post-test		Asymptotic sig.
	Median	SD	Median	SD		
Wilcoxon signed-rank test results/sign	test results					
Total Scale (Career Readiness Scale)	(129.50)	(20.30)	(131.50)	(17.60)	$(2.78)^a$	(0.005)*a
Career exploration thinking	3.25	0.50	3.25	0.39	0.82	0.415
Career exploration activity	2.19	0.53	2.75	0.50	3.13^{a}	0.002*a
Career decision self-efficacy	3.50	0.76	3.58	0.51	2.27 ^a	0.023*a
Career decision outcome Expectation	3.80	0.56	3.80	0.53	1.52 ^b	0.128 ^b
Career decision-making intention	3.80	0.47	3.80	0.47	0.55^{a}	0.582^{a}
Career planning (self-understanding)	2.33	0.71	2.67	0.77	2.09^{b}	0.037*b
Career planning (world-of-work)	2.00	0.60	2.30	0.60	1.67 ^b	0.096^{b}

Table 3

Changes in the Career Readiness Scale Based on the CAR Programme

Notes. *p < 0.05 (two-tailed);

1. Overall performance in CRI (difference between post- and pre-test)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is not violated.

The CAR programme elicited an enhancement in the career readiness level in 15 participants, whereas five experienced a decrease in score. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test determined that the CAR programme elicited a statistically significant median increase in the score of CRI in post-test (Median = 131.50) compared to pre-test (Median = 129.50), z = 2.78, p = 0.005 (see Table 3). The programme significantly enhanced the career readiness of students with SEN.

2. Career Exploration (thinking)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is not violated.

The CAR programme elicited an improvement in the score of career exploration thinking in 10 participants, whereas three participants saw no improvement and seven participants experienced a decrease in score. Related-samples Wilcoxon signed-test determined that there was no statistically significant increase in the performance in career exploration thinking after (Median = 3.25) and before (Median = 3.25) the program, z = 0.82, p = 0.415 (see Table 3). The programme did not significantly enhance the career exploration (thinking) element of career readiness inventory of students with SEN.

3. Career Exploration (activity)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is not violated.

The CAR programme elicited an improvement in the score of career exploration activity in 17 participants, whereas three participants experienced a decrease in score. Related-samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test determined that the CAR programme leads to a statistically significant median increase in the performance in career exploration activity in post-test (Median = 2.75) compared to pre-test (Median = 2.19), z = 3.13, p = 0.002 (see Table 3). The programme significantly enhanced the career exploration (activity) element of career readiness inventory of students with SEN.

4. Career Decision Making (self-efficacy)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is not violated.

^a Wilcox signed-rank test was run as the symmetric distribution assumption was not violated.

^b Sign test was run as the symmetric distribution assumption was violated.

The CAR programme elicited an improvement in the score of career decision making self-efficacy in 13 participants, whereas two participants saw no improvement and five participants experienced a decrease in score. Related-samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test determined that there was a statistically significant median increase in the performance in career decision making self-efficacy in post-test (Median = 3.58) compared to pre-test (Median = 3.50), z = 2.27, p = 0.023 (see Table 3). The programme significantly enhanced the career decision making (self-efficacy) element of career readiness inventory of students with SEN.

5. Career Decision Making (outcome expectation)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is violated, as assessed by a histogram without a normal curve (see Figure 1). Hence, a related-samples sign test was run.

The CAR programme elicited an increase in the score of career decision making outcome expectation in nine participants post-intervention, whereas five participants saw no improvement and six participants experienced a decrease in score. There was no statistically significant median increase in career decision making outcome expectation (Median < 0.001) from post-test (Median = 3.80) to post-intervention (Median = 3.80), z = 1.52, p = 0.128 (see Table 3). The programme did not significantly enhance the career decision making (outcome expectation) element of career readiness inventory of students with SEN.

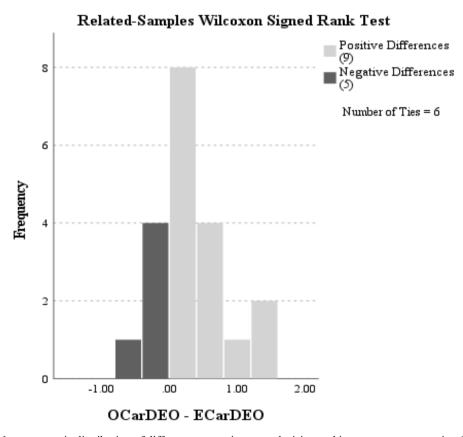


Figure 1. Non-symmetric distribution of difference scores in career decision making outcome expectation from post- to pre-test.

6. Career Decision Making (intention)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is not violated.

The CAR programme elicited an improvement in the score of career decision making intention in 10 participants, whereas three participants saw no improvement and seven participants experienced a decrease in score. A Wilcoxon signed-test determined that there was no statistically significant increase in the performance in career exploration making intention after (Median = 3.80) and before (Median = 3.80) the program, z = 0.55, p = 0.582 (see Table 3). The programme did not significantly enhance the career decision making (intention) element of career readiness inventory of students with SEN.

7. Career Planning (self-understanding)

The symmetric assumption in Wilcoxon signed-rank test is violated, as assessed by a histogram without a normal curve (see Figure 2). Hence, a related-samples sign test was conducted.

The CAR programme elicited an increase in the score of career planning (self-understanding) in 10 participants, whereas three participants saw no improvement and seven participants experienced a decrease in score. There was a statistically significant median increase in career planning (self-understanding) from post-(Median = 2.67) to post-test (Median = 2.33), z = 2.09, p = 0.037 (see Table 3). The programme significantly enhanced the career planning (self-understanding) of students with SEN.

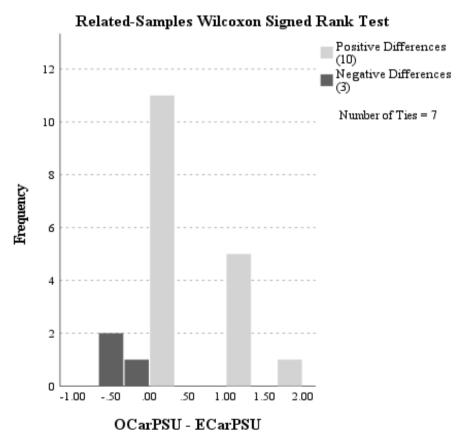


Figure 2. Non-symmetric distribution of difference scores in career planning (self-understand) from post- to pre-test.

8. Career Planning (understand world-of-work)

The difference scores were not symmetrically distributed, as assessed by a histogram without a normal curve (see Figure 3). Hence, a related-samples sign test was conducted.

The CAR programme elicited an increase in the score of career planning (word-of-work) in 13 participants post-intervention, whereas two participants saw no improvement and five participants experienced a decrease in score. There was no statistically significant median increase in career planning (world-of-work) from post-(Median = 2.30) to post-test (Median = 2.00), z = 1.67, p = 0.096 (see Table 3). The programme did not significantly enhance the career planning (understand world-of-work) of students with SEN.

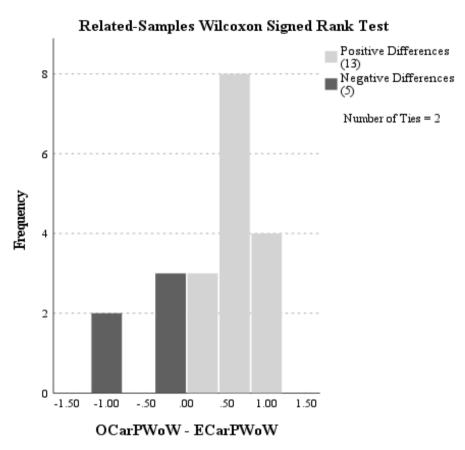


Figure 3. Non-symmetric distribution of difference scores in career planning (world-of-work) from post- to pre-test.

Discussion

The CAR programme, funded by Quality Enhancement Support Scheme, was launched to enhance the career guidance and planning of students with SEN. A set of Career Readiness Inventory (Chui, 2012) was distributed to 20 participants. Statistical analyses showed that the programme was effective in improving the overall career readiness of students with SEN, including the subscales Career Exploration (activity), Career Decision Making (self-efficacy), and Career Planning (self-understanding). There were significant differences between the post-test score of CRI (after CAR programme) and pre-test score of CRI (before CAR programme). It shows that the CAR programme significantly improves the career readiness of students with SEN.

Furthermore, there are also significant differences found in the subscales of CRI. First, it was found that participants had significantly higher scores in the subscale—career decision making (self-efficacy) after joining CAR programme. It may be due to the fact that the CAR programme was designed to meet the attributes of career guidance and planning, namely self-efficacy, and career planning. Participants' self-efficacy was improved after

joining the CV writing skills workshop, self-motivation workshop, and interview skills workshop. Second, it was observed that participants performed better in the subscale—career exploration (activity) after joining the CAR programme. In the CAR programme, participants joined a lot of activities (i.e., CV writing skills and interview skills workshops) related to career. As a result, participants had higher scores in this subscale after joining the programme. At last, since participants participated in activities about career planning and self-motivation in the CAR programme, their scores in the subscale—career planning (self-understanding) were found to significantly increase after the CAR programme as well.

However, there was no significant difference in other subscales such as Career Exploration (thinking), Career Decision Making (outcome expectation), Career Decision Making (intention), and Career Planning (understand world-of-work). It echoes with the results of Wong et al. (2016). They found that their programme design did not offer chances for participants to make their career decisions and realistically assess or revise their outcome expectations. The CAR programme suffered from the same challenge that it did not provide opportunities for participants to put their skills and knowledge learnt into practice.

Limitation such as low number of participants was found in the current study. It may be due to the fact that it is hard for students with SEN to commit themselves to participate in a long programme like CAR programme since they face a lot of challenges in daily life.

Conclusion

The current study reflects the effectiveness of a CAR programme related to career guidance and planning on the career readiness of students with SEN. The CAR programme consists of workshops on CV writing skills, interview skills, self-motivation, goal setting, and career planning. The programme was effective in career exploration (activity), career decision making (self-efficacy), and career planning (self-understanding). This may suggest that the CAR programme could be one of the ways to improve the career readiness of students with SEN in higher education. Future research may focus on how to improve other areas such as outcome expectations.

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Appendix 1

Code:

「事業發展準備」量表 (標準版)

(一) 請選出你認為最適合的答案,並在方格內畫上√號。					
Career Exploration Activity	從來沒有	很少	間中	Ħ	經常
我思考未來擇業問題 (包括轉職、留職或求職)					
我思考如何計劃進修、訓練或爭取相關工作經驗					
我思考我的學歷、所受訓練及工作經驗能如何配合未來職業					
我思考個人選擇職業的方向					
我參與課外或工餘活動,協助自己為未來作出就業抉擇					
我透過工作經驗協助自己為未來作出就業抉擇					
我透過家人或親友得到協助探索進修與事業發展計劃					
我透過導師或輔導人員協助探索進修與事業發展計劃					
我透過有相關見識的人士協助探索進修與事業發展計劃					
我參與與事業發展有關的輔導活動					
我翻看書本、資料冊或宣傳簡章,協助探索進修機會與事業發展		$\overline{\Box}$			
我透過上網或電子媒體探索進修機會與事業發展					
	_		_		
(二)請問你是否同意以下的說法?	非常	不同意	無意見	同意	非常
	不同意				同意
Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy	1	2	3	4	5
我有能力就自己有興趣的五個行業找到有關資料					
我有能力針對自己未來三年的進修目標定下一個計劃					
我有能力從我正考慮的職業中選定一項					
我有能力決定哪一項是我的最佳職業					
我有能力分辨一項職業裏自己最重視的東西					
我有能力不受家人或朋友的影響,拒絕從事自己認為不適合的職業					
我有能力敍述我想投入的職業所需的工作技巧					
我有能力選擇一項符合我興趣的職業					
我有能力確定自己要接受什麼教育才能達成事業目標					
我有能力知道一些職業的平均薪金					
我有能力找一位正從事自己有興趣行業的人士交談					
我敢於選擇一項多數由異性擔任的職業					
Career Decision Making Outcome Expectation 假如我對不同職業有更多認識,我會作出更好的事業決定			_		
假如我對个同職業有更多認識,我曾作而更好的事業決定假如我對自己的興趣和能力有更多認識,我就能為自己選擇一項理想					
版如我到自己的 兴 趣和能力有更多祕藏,我就能為自己选择。					
假如我作出好的事業決定,便能得到家人認同					
假如我知道不同職業所需接受的教育,在面對與事業相關的問題時,					
我就會作出更好的決定					
如果我用足夠時間搜集不同職業的資訊,就能知道更多做決定所需要					
知道的 Career Decision Making Intention					
我有意用更多時間了解各項不同聯業	П	П	П	П	П

我計劃與更多人談論不同職業					
我決定與人談談自己事業發展的機會					
我定會熱切發掘自己的興趣和能力					
我有意接受決定從事的事業所要求的教育					
(三)請選出你認為最適合的答案,並在方格內畫上✓號。					
Career Planning (Self-understanding)	毫無頭	有- 頁緒 概念	一些 念	尚算清楚	非常清楚
我對日後的出路					
我對自己的專長和能力					
我對自己的缺點和限制					
Career Planning (Understand World-of-work)					
我對心目中理想職業的入職要求					
我對心目中理想職業的入職方法					
我對心目中理想職業的工作環境和性質					
我對心目中理想職業的薪酬和待遇					
我對心目中理想職業的晉升機會和途徑					

問卷完成,謝謝!