

**POST-SECONDARY COUNSELLING:
UNDERSTANDING THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS TO STUDENT
SUCCESS AT SASKATCHEWAN POLYTECHNIC PRINCE ALBERT**

A Field Practicum Report

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By

Rona Pelletier

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Abstract

As a social worker, I believe that education constructs fundamental skills essential for personal wellbeing. It builds knowledge, enhances socialization, improves communities, and opens occupational opportunities that lead to financial security. This report discusses my experience as a Master of Social Work practicum student at a post-secondary institute, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert campus. It illustrates the agency's profile, describes the services offered within the agency, and explains the role of a social worker at their institution. Job shadowing, interviewing, assessing, researching, advocating, and counselling were major components within this placement. The report displays the overarching goal of my experience in addition to the nine objectives that were achieved. Theories utilized in practice are discussed when illustrating how I achieved my objectives. This report describes barriers to post-secondary education that were applicable to my practicum placement and it elucidates thoughts of how these barriers can be overcome. I discuss how these barriers can be subjugated as well as offer deliberations towards achievable post-secondary education for those who wish to advance their careers. I illustrate the ethics used while in my placement as well as describe the limitations in practice. I conclude with how this experience and the knowledge gained will be utilized in my future practice as a Master's-level social worker.

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Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Table of Contents iv

Introduction 1

Table 1: Field Practicum Overarching Goal and Emphasis Areas 2

Host Agency Profile 4

Role of a Social Worker at Saskatchewan Polytechnic 9

Skills Enhanced in Practicum 11

Table 2: Field Practicum Objectives 11

 Objective 1: Counsel Individuals in a Post-Secondary Institution 12

 Objective 2: Develop Clinical Skills in Individual Counselling 13

 Objective 3: Develop Knowledge of Academic Counselling and Assessments 14

 Objective 4: Develop Knowledge of Career Counselling and Assessments 16

 Objective 5: Gain Knowledge of Social Work and Counselling Theory 18

 Objective 6: Become Familiar with Clinical and Applied Counselling Services at
SPPA 21

 Objective 7: Learn About Assessment Tools Used Within Saskatchewan Polytechnic
..... 23

 Objective 8: Become Familiar with Counselling Skills and Clinical Social Work
Practice 26

Objective 9: Gain a Clearer Understanding of Barriers to Post-Secondary Education

Completion	27
Knowledge Enhanced in Practicum	30
Access to Child Care	30
Women in Trades	31
Differing Benefits of Advanced Education	34
Predisposition to Higher Education	36
Familial Factors	38
Situational Barriers	42
Mature learners.	43
Younger learners.	46
Institutional Barriers	48
Discussion	52
Ethics and Field Practicum	53
Limitations in Practice	55
Areas for Growth	56
References	57

Introduction

After fourteen years of working with elementary school children in the capacity of a school social worker, I decided to broaden my knowledge in education and gain experience working with adult learners who are either seeking or engaging in post-secondary studies. I chose a post-secondary field practicum placement to continue learning how social work is integrated into advanced education. I completed my practicum placement at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert campus from April 2015 to June 2015.

This field practicum report is presented in nine sections. The first section introduces the administrative and logistical details relating to my placement and the goals that I hoped to achieve through this field education experience. The second section of the report presents descriptive information relating to the host agency where my placement took place. The third section illustrates the role of a social worker at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. The fourth section describes the skills that I enhanced while in placement. The fifth section describes the knowledge that I obtained through carrying out the identified activities. In the sixth section of the report, I discuss the implications of the findings I identified during my field placement. In the seventh section, I discuss the ethics utilized while in my practicum placement. In the eighth section of this report, I illustrate the limitations in practice, and the concluding section discusses areas for future growth that I have identified for myself as a result of having completed my field placement and this report.

As negotiated in my field education contract, the overarching goal of my field practicum was to gain graduate-level social work knowledge and practice of clinical and applied counselling for individuals attending, or wishing to attend, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert Campus (Table 1). In order to achieve this goal, I developed a strategy that identified a

number of activities that would enable me to achieve the subgoals of my field placement (identified in Table 1 as Emphasis Areas).

Table 1: Field Practicum Overarching Goal and Emphasis Areas	
Overarching Goal	To gain graduate-level social work knowledge and practice of clinical and applied counselling for individuals attending, or wishing to attend, Saskatchewan Polytechnic , Prince Albert Campus
Emphasis Area 1	Gain knowledge of Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert Campus
Emphasis Area 2	Gain graduate-level social work knowledge
Emphasis Area 3	Gain graduate-level social work practice of clinical and applied counselling for individuals

To meet the objectives associated with the subgoal of gaining knowledge of Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert campus (SPPA), I undertook a range of activities that enabled me to identify and communicate with key informants and to gather together grey literature relating to the operations of SPPA.

Because I also wanted to gain graduate-level social work knowledge during my placement, I felt that it would be important for me to complete a scholarly literature review with respect to barriers to adult education. To better understand the grey literature, scholarly literature, and comments of the key informants I encountered, I identified and analysed key themes relating to adult education and job-preparedness training in Saskatchewan generally with specific emphasis on the Prince Albert region and the implications of the programming on the lives of women. In order to further advance my understanding of the sorts of assessment and evaluation activities that graduate level social workers routinely display in adult education

environments, I participated in several performance review activities (e.g., mid-point evaluation, public presentation, final report). In writing this final report, I undertook activities that enable me to demonstrate my capacity for the kind of graduate-level writing that is necessary for Master's-level social work practitioners across Canada.

In order to gain graduate-level social work practice of clinical and applied counselling for individuals, I completed numerous activities that enabled me to achieve this component of my overarching field education goal. I participated in job shadowing of select SPPA employees as collaboratively identified with the professional associate who oversaw my day-to-day interactions during my field placement. Throughout my placement and while writing up this final report, I routinely practiced critical self-reflection that enabled me to better understand my role as a helping professional who works with adult learners attending post-secondary education. As a component of my self-reflection activities, I also paid particular attention to matters relating to professional social work ethics as I considered how best to meet a variety of needs – whether within myself, my colleagues, service users, my host agency, or my profession. A more detailed description of the activities I participated in over the course of my field education experience will be further illustrated in a later section of my report (Skills Enhanced in Practicum).

Host Agency Profile

The information gathered to describe my host agency, the Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert Campus, was obtained through personal exchanges with staff and personal observations, in addition to researching grey literature around the site and internet sources.

The host agency within which I performed my field practicum for my MSW degree has undergone several changes over the past two years. Prior to September 2014, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) was known for its technical, applied science, skills, and apprenticeship programs. However when the institution was formally granted authority to offer degree programs by the Province of Saskatchewan, the institution formerly known as SIAST was renamed as Saskatchewan Polytechnic, as of September 24, 2014.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic's name change came as a surprise to many people in Saskatchewan. President and CEO of Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Larry Rosia, explained that Saskatchewan Polytechnic was formerly known as a college of nursing and a school for the skilled trades. He emphasized that the name change would bring awareness of all the opportunities that the organization has beyond the former role. He also clarified that Saskatchewan Polytechnic is not in competition with Saskatchewan universities; rather, they are placing themselves in a better partnering position with them (Piller, 2014).

Polytechnics across Canada offer a variety of bachelor degrees, apprenticeship training, certificates, and diplomas. Additionally, they offer practical, hands-on experience as well as theoretical learning. According to the Polytechnics Canada website, there are 11 polytechnic members across the country and all are degree-granting institutes. Across Canada, polytechnics offer 109 publicly funded bachelor-level degrees (Polytechnics Canada, 2015).

Aside from offering educational opportunities for their students, polytechnics address the needs of potential employers. As industry-responsive institutions, polytechnics regularly assess the demands of employers within the communities they serve. Based upon local industry priorities, polytechnics develop programming to meet identified needs. Saskatchewan Polytechnic programs educate students on how to utilize industry-standard equipment and technology. Their programs also prepare students to enter and maintain jobs for which they are trained. These technical and applied skills training programs prepare graduates to enter the employment market with the tools necessary for success. These programs, being industry-responsive, are developed with the intent to assist students with employment success, while meeting the needs of industry (Polytechnics Canada, 2015).

Distinct from other post-secondary institutions, such as universities and colleges, polytechnics offer an array of vocational opportunities (Polytechnics Canada, 2015). All Canadian polytechnics offer four-year bachelor degree programs with a focus on applied studies, joint bachelor degrees with universities, diplomas at the technologist and technical levels, apprenticeship programs, post-graduate certificates, specialized corporate and government training, on-line learning and distant education, solutions for industry through applied research, and newcomer integration assistance (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2015).

Saskatchewan Polytechnic serves 26,000 students on four campuses: Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2015). The Prince Albert campus delivers programs tailored to the needs of a range of adult learners, including applied, technical, and clinical certificates, diplomas, and undergraduate degree programs. Some certificate programs ladder into diploma programs or a degree program within Saskatchewan Polytechnic or at a partnering university. Accordingly, students may enrol for programs lasting from one to

four years. Beyond the four-year degree, Saskatchewan Polytechnic offers post-graduate certificates as well (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2015).

The Prince Albert campus offers learning opportunities to individuals beyond its students. I learned through administrative services that they contract courses to other agencies such as the RCMP and Saskatchewan Ministry of Forestry. They also rent space to other educational institutions such as Cumberland College, the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship Board, the University of Regina, and the University of Saskatchewan. All students on the campus must adhere to Saskatchewan Polytechnic Prince Albert (SPPA) campus policies. In rare cases when SPPA campus policies are breached, non-Saskatchewan Polytechnic student issues are dealt with by their home institution. However, if a student appeals a disciplinary action, the final decision may fall with Saskatchewan Polytechnic (K. O’Brodivich, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Saskatchewan Polytechnic employs many employees with differing expertise and educational backgrounds. The Saskatchewan Polytechnic website indicates that it employs 95 staff in out-of-scope positions and 1,632 full-time-equivalent staff who are members of one of two unions (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2015), namely the Saskatchewan Polytechnic Faculty Association (SPFA) and the Saskatchewan Government Employee Union (SGEU). The SPPA collective agreements cover instructional staff, student support service staff, and administrative staff including those employed as office administrators, information technologists, accountants, schedulers, etc. (K. O’Brodivich, personal communication, 2015).

A Saskatchewan Polytechnic union representative on the Prince Albert campus explained that their organization is similar to many unionized institutions with respect to human resources. They advertise each career opening internally, unless the position became vacant through

retirement in which case they may designate the position as one to be filled through an external posting restricted to Aboriginal applicants. It was further explained that seniority does not guarantee a position once the position is posted internally. Seniority does not carry over from one union to another, and anyone wanting to be considered for the position must first apply and, if more than one person meets the minimum requirements, the applicants complete an interview. The interviews are graded and the interviews are ranked. The most senior person is given a 10% grading advantage over the other participants; however, if another applicant with less seniority surpasses the ranking of the more senior candidate without question, that applicant is then offered the position. Finally, if no applicant passes the interview, the position will be opened to the public (A. Jonasson, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

There are not many job opportunities for people possessing Master of Social Work degrees at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. When positions do open that require a Master's degree, such as in post-secondary counselling, typically not many employees within the unions will meet the minimum requirement and the position will therefore be opened to the public.

Counselling service functions at Saskatchewan Polytechnic encompass both the Adult Career and Education (ACE) and Post-Secondary Education (PSE) programs. At the Prince Albert campus, there are four counsellors and two program heads in ACE and five counsellors and one program head in PSE. In order to be a counsellor in the ACE program, one must have completed a bachelor-level degree in a relevant discipline. At the time of my placement, the ACE counselling team was comprised of individuals with social work, education, and social justice degrees. The PSE counselling program employs counsellors with diverse backgrounds, and all PSE counsellors must have completed a Master's degree in a relevant field. At the time

of my placement, PSE counsellor team members possessed graduate degrees in Educational Psychology, Psychology, and Counselling.

The SPPA campus is housed in two buildings. The smaller building is identified as the academic centre and the larger one is called the technical building. The academic centre houses the ACE program and the Saskatchewan Polytechnic nursing degree. Classroom and office space are sublet for University of Saskatchewan Arts and Science classes and the University of Regina for research. The technical building houses all other SPPA programs, including skilled trades training, certificate and diploma courses, and various other courses. The PSE counselling team provides services in both buildings, and therefore so did I.

Although my placement was in post-secondary academic and personal counselling, I did gain extensive experience in ACE and career counselling as well. During my placement, I worked 2.5 days per week with the PSE counselling program, 2 days per week with the ACE counselling program, and the remaining half-day per week was spent learning about and practicing career counselling. My work days began at eight and finished at five, and I worked Monday to Friday. Although I observed many differing professional disciplines during the course of my practicum, I did notice an essential need for a social worker at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. The following section will illustrate the role of a social worker at this institution.

Role of a Social Worker at Saskatchewan Polytechnic

At Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the social worker's role is to work one-on-one with clients and/or to become part of a multidisciplinary team. When working one-on-one with clients, the role is to assist in identifying targeted needs to best support the client with their academic achievement at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. Once the needs are identified, the role advances into career or personal assessing, personal or academic counselling, referrals to other agencies, and problem solving in order to find appropriate solutions and develop skills to use the client's personal resources or community resources in solving their identified issues (CASW, 2008).

Saskatchewan Polytechnic has a diverse counselling team from differing disciplines. The social worker within their agency addresses the person as well as the systems that are in play, for example, the education system, family system, and welfare system, that are affecting the individual's overall wellbeing. The counselling team also address the community's well-being (CASW, 2008) as assisting individuals in achieving their career of choice through education improves both the individual and society as a whole. Those who achieve their post-secondary education are less likely to be unemployed and more likely to increase their income for themselves and their family (Government of Alberta, 2013). Further to this, once earning a higher income, there are more dollars to spread to local businesses, which improves the community and ensures that more taxpayers are contributing to government funds, making Canada stronger and more competitive.

Being part of a multi-disciplinary team offers various viewpoints when addressing issues. At Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the counsellors address the issues of the client; the education staff addresses the issues of academics and educators; the disability workers address the identified needs of the client in their focal disciplines; and the administration addresses the policies and

procedures that need to be followed while making the final decisions. Although several disciplines have their own interests, the social worker is at an advantage as they view the individual within all their systems (education, academic concerns, and disability concerns). This viewpoint is useful in making positive, trusting, and understanding client/counsellor relationships as it allows us to be empathetic with the client and the issues being addressed.

Skills Enhanced in Practicum

As described in the introductory section of this report, the overarching goal of my MSW field practicum at Saskatchewan Polytechnic was to gain graduate-level social work knowledge and practice of clinical and applied counselling for individuals attending, or wishing to attend, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert Campus. In order to better assess my achievement during my placement, my field placement contract also stipulated nine separate field practicum objectives. These objectives are listed in Table 2.

Throughout the course of my MSW practicum, I concentrated on achieving these nine learning objectives. In the following section of this report, I will provide a more detailed description of how each of these objectives was fulfilled.

Table 2: Field Practicum Objectives

Table 2: Field Practicum Objectives	
1	Gain practical experience in counselling individuals in a post-secondary institution.
2	To develop clinical skills in individual counselling.
3	To develop knowledge and experience in academic counselling and assessments.
4	To develop knowledge and experience in career counselling and assessments.
5	Gain knowledge and employ various social work and counselling theoretical frameworks.
6	Gain knowledge about various issues that arise at a post-secondary facility and become familiar with clinical and applied counselling methods used within Saskatchewan Polytechnic.
7	Become aware of and learn assessment tools used within the organization to help identify the client's needs or goals.
8	To provide a comprehensive understanding of counselling skills used within the agency and become more familiar with clinical social work practices within the organization.
9	Gain a clearer understanding of barriers to post-secondary education completion.

Objective 1: Counsel Individuals in a Post-Secondary Institution

The first objective of my field placement was to gain practical experience in counselling individuals in post-secondary education. I gained this practical experience by job shadowing master's-level counsellors. I observed academic, career, and personal counselling sessions. Following individual sessions, I debriefed and consulted with my professional associate.

Typically, the counselling process began with an intake session that would move into information-gathering and assessments, and finish with academic and life planning. The career counsellor would often book between three and seven sessions in order to have a complete plan ready for her client to confidently move forward. Some assessments utilized throughout this process were Type Focus, Career Cruising, and Strong Interest Inventory. Although more formal assessments were utilized in career counselling, post-secondary counsellors relied heavily on informal assessments. I learned appropriate questions to ask while using informal assessments. Some of the interview questions asked were: "Where do you see yourself living?", "Does length of time in school matter?", "Do you have a family?", "Are you willing to relocate?", "Do you need housing?", "Do you need child care?", and "Will you need financial assistance?". At times, I would use a scripted guided imagery tool to help guide the client to begin to see what they wished their future to look like. These techniques could also be advantageous to counselling while in ACE, however, their counselling focus is somewhat different. Their focus, for the time being, was mostly on helping students to complete grade 12 as opposed to considering what they will do beyond secondary education.

The social work functions applied while meeting this objective were acting as an enabler, broker, and advocate. The counsellor functions as an enabler as they counsel clients on a one-on-one basis and address the needs of the client. In some circumstances, the counsellor functions

as a broker as they will refer clients to other professionals within the community or within Saskatchewan Polytechnic's organization in order to better address the needs of the client that go beyond the realm of the counselling services. Often counsellors function as an advocate as they and the client work together in identifying the client's needs and she/he further assists the client in moving past the obstacles that are holding them back within the systems in which they live. This is performed by offering resources, tools, and talk therapy.

For all nine objectives, I used self-reflection, I was able to gain knowledge and strengthen my skills. After each session, whether it was a session I performed, or one my professional associate led, I would analyze and assess the counselling experience. I explored the conditions and needs of the client and examined if these needs were met. After every session, I would ponder areas to improve. Although most sessions went very well, I always found one skill that I could strengthen through research or by practice. Beyond this, I addressed these skills with my professional associate and further asked her how she would have handled situations that were similar, but in a different context or circumstance.

Objective 2: Develop Clinical Skills in Individual Counselling

Job shadowing was very useful in developing and enhancing my clinical skills in individual counselling. The clinical skills varied amongst the three areas in which I performed my practicum. The clinical skills developed while working with adult learners in secondary education were as follows: interviewing students to assess areas of difficulty; making appropriate referrals to the community services as required; following up with clients to assess if conditions improved; working closely with the educators and administrators to provide crisis intervention in areas of suicidal ideation, threats and violence, drug and alcohol related issues, or any other issue that required immediate attention (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.). The clinical skills that I

observed in career counselling were interviewing, formal assessments, following up and collaborating with those working in several professions within the Prince Albert community. Finally, the skills observed in post-secondary education counselling were a combination of both secondary and career counselling in addition to obtaining and delivering knowledge to students of programs that Saskatchewan Polytechnic offers as well as offering a list of community resources.

In the individual counselling capacity, I developed clinical skills while utilizing social work functions. I observed, practiced, and applied the skills of an advocate as the client and I identified issues and I further assisted the client to work through these issues while bearing in mind the systems that are in play. I acted as a broker by referring clients to resources in the community. These resources included, but were not limited to, financial resources, housing, and child care resources. Another social work function utilized in this capacity was acting as an enabler. I assisted in developing problem-solving skills with the client during counselling sessions.

As with my previous objectives, I utilized self-reflection while developing my clinical skills in individual counselling. After each counselling session, I would analyze the above-mentioned skills I had used and those that were most useful throughout the session. Through self-reflection, I developed and strengthened my clinical skills in interviewing and assessments. These skills allowed me to better assist clients in moving through great life changes.

Objective 3: Develop Knowledge of Academic Counselling and Assessments

My third objective was to develop knowledge and experience in academic counselling and assessments. I obtained this objective in several ways. I job shadowed graduate-level career and post-secondary academic counsellors. This assisted me in learning their interview

strategies, assessment tools, solutions to issues, as well as learning programs available. I observed, took notes, and later asked questions pertaining to the subject focussed on during the academic counselling session.

I demonstrated key social work functions by creating and maintaining professional relationships necessary to assist clients in meeting their needs. I acted as a broker by connecting clients to tutors as needed or to other services either within SPPA or the Prince Albert community. I served as an advocate for some clients as I assisted them throughout the post-secondary education process and systems. The service provided by the PSE counsellors is primarily relating to supporting the client; however, this service may at times extend into the environment, such as the client's home and community.

While meeting my third objective, I looked through all the on-campus brochures to review the array of programs offered by Saskatchewan Polytechnic. I also studied the scholarly literature to gain a better understanding of academic counselling while assessing and addressing the needs of adult clients. In this capacity, I researched the barriers adult clients faced while gaining or attempting to gain their advanced education (more on this is found in the Knowledge Enhanced in My Practicum section of this report). By gaining a better understanding of the barriers and situations adult learners face, I adapted my information gathering, focus, and counselling skills to meet the individual needs of adult learners who are obtaining an advanced education. While in the solution phase of counselling and while acting as a broker I researched several resources within the community that could assist select clients in meeting their academic goals.

In gaining knowledge and experience in academic counselling and assessments, I job shadowed and asked questions with those working in the field and other key informants to help

broaden my knowledge in this area. Self-reflection was also utilized as I would assess each situation afterwards in detail to assess where improvements could have been made. If I was unsure of a plan or how my session went, I would further discuss and collaborate with other counsellors while protecting the confidentiality of the client. All these techniques assisted in extending my knowledge in academic counselling.

Objective 4: Develop Knowledge of Career Counselling and Assessments

The fourth objective was to develop knowledge and experience in career counselling and assessments. This knowledge and experience was very similar to that of academic counselling. I job shadowed appropriate counsellors and observed their interviews, assessments, and action plans. If there were further questions, I would ask for clarification and discuss other possible scenarios that might have come into play.

In obtaining my fourth objective, I utilized several social work functions while developing knowledge and experience in career counselling and assessments. I functioned as an advocate with the client once their needs were assessed. I functioned as broker as I directed some clients to others who are employed in the community to give them an indication of what their desired career might look like. When clients had questions for the employed individual, I arranged for them to job shadow for a few hours to help them determine the viability of various options they were considering at the time. This experience allowed the client to visualize whether they could see themselves working in the possible profession. These resources were useful for clients while making their career decisions.

I researched scholarly literature exploring factors to consider when career counselling and assessing through use of psychometric tests as these tests were often used at SPPA in career counselling. A major factor career counsellors need to be aware of is the language the

psychometric test is written or administered in as if this differs from the client's primary language the results may not be accurate. For the best accuracy in psychometric career assessments, the questions must be understood in order for the client to answer correctly. Some tests have accounted for this important factor and developed some assessments in multiple languages. Best results will be obtained if the client is allowed to take the test in their primary language; however, the administrator must also confirm that they are both qualified to administer the test and qualified to interpret the findings in the language the test is administered in (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2007). As my professional associate and I only understood English, this was the only test we were able to give. In a case where the client's first language was not English but they understood much of the English language, we would read the questions to them and do our best to translate so they understood. However, it was also mentioned that tests are most accurate if they are performed in the client's first language. It may be a good idea to have a translator in cases where language is a severe barrier; however, the counselling sessions are confidential and therefore the client would have to agree to have a translator present.

Other factors that must be considered when administering psychometric tests are how closely the client matches the norm sample with which the results are compared, their reading levels, and how clearly they are able to comprehend their test results. It is necessary to administer tests where the client's characteristics are similar to the norm group. If the client is similar in areas such as sex, race, culture, and age range to the norm population, the results will be more accurate than if they are not comparable. Another factor to consider is the reading level of the client as, if the client does not understand a test, their responses will be inaccurate and therefore the results will not be a representation of the client's true self (Gersten, 2013). Finally,

when the counsellor is revealing the client's results, it is crucial that the client understand clearly what the results mean and how they can be applied to their life situation (Gersten, 2013).

In order to gain a clear understanding of post-secondary opportunities that are offered at SPPA, I read all the grey literature on the campus as well as researched other occupational opportunities off the campus. I researched, observed, and practiced assessments that were useful to clients while contemplating career choices. I used a feminist theoretical lens (Dominelli, 1986; Turner, 2011) as I found that many clients came in asking for career choices that have formerly been specific to traditional gender stereotypes. For example, over the three month's duration of my practicum, several women entered counselling hoping to be admitted into programs that are traditionally female-skilled work, such as child care worker or hair stylist, and only one student came in to learn about a traditionally male-dominated occupation – carpentry.

While observing and practicing in career counselling I learned of new interviewing techniques and I further studied assessment tools, which will be discussed in more detail in Objective 7. Through experience, I was able to self-reflect which assisted in my personal growth as a career counsellor.

Objective 5: Gain Knowledge of Social Work and Counselling Theory

The fifth objective of my field placement was to enhance my understanding of social work and counselling theoretical frameworks. To improve my knowledge in this area, I utilized many social work skills and functions. The social work functions I relied upon to achieve this objective included: having knowledge and understanding of human relationships, facilitating learning sessions for students and teachers, creating and maintaining professional helping relationships with clients, and assisting clients to increase their problem-solving and coping skills regardless of the diversity of clients.

I utilized an analytic lens as I assessed the counselling practices I saw being applied at SPPA. Through applying a feminist framework, I noticed inequalities, barriers, and the generalized lack of supports for young mothers and those without financial resources, primarily First Nations women. Completing professional education or training for a trade takes planning and working with government systems that are designed to support students. However, in observing the routines and procedures employed during my placement, I was able to identify the presence of numerous systems that create barriers for young families; these are discussed in the next section of this report.

Using a Marxist Feminist framework, I recognized the inequalities that were present while students were attempting to gain advanced education. The Marxist Feminist framework opposes the Marxist capitalist view that there is a division of labour amongst the sexes where women belong in the home to bear and raise children while men are in the workforce and bring the finances into the home; therefore women have more control over the home and men have more control over the finances. This dynamic leaves women financially dependent on men. The Marxist Feminist view is that women are as capable as men of earning a substantial income and that, if all things are equal, women will be in an equal class and have equitable opportunities to be as financially successful as men (Dominelli, 1986).

Utilizing a feminist approach within the realm of social work was conveyed by acknowledging injustices while promoting social justice as well as human rights (Turner, 2011). Many of the injustices that I identified over the course of my placement differentially affected women. Of particular note were the lack of affordable and regulated child care spaces and the failure of skilled trades training programs to promote equal opportunities for women to engage in

traditionally male-dominated occupations. I will discuss the barriers that I observed in greater depth in the next section of this report.

Although the SPPA counselling team members were fair, equitable, and ethical in all counselling areas, the systems that are in place to assist clients in being academically successful leave much to be desired. There is a shortage of childcare places, shortage of financial sponsorships, and a shortage of female skilled trades' courses. Many of these issues affect young women who are seeking to advance their education. These issues are discussed in greater detail in a literature review in the Knowledge Enhanced in My Practicum section of this report.

The counselling therapy that guided much of the PSE counsellors' work with clients was Solution-Focused in Brief Therapy (SFBT). SFBT focuses primarily on present and future solutions as opposed to focusing on the client's past issues. The core elements of SFBT are client-centered concerns, finding new meaning for the client's concerns where the counsellor assists the client in co-constructing a vision of the client's preferred future, drawing upon their past strengths in order to resolve the client's present concerns (Trepper et al., 2008). By following De Shazer and Berg's (1997) SFBT skills, I asked a miracle question, assigned homework, and set goals and timelines. I demonstrated these skills while in my practicum placement at SPPA by asking clients an SFBT miracle question, such as "If you went home this evening and a miracle happened and you were ten years older, what career would you see yourself doing?". I assigned homework by asking the client to go through the SP career guide and to watch YouTube videos that began with "a day in the life of a...". Together, the client and I would discuss timelines and goals as to when they would want to make a career decision by and how long would they want to commit to an education. By utilizing SFBT, the client was able to envision, plan, and work within the systems that were available to them. As Trepper et al.

(2008) clearly states, " SFBT helps clients develop a desired vision of the future wherein the problem is solved, and explore and amplify related client exceptions, strengths, and resources to co-construct a client-specific pathway to making the vision a reality".

Through observation and consultation, I was able to assess the varying needs of the SPPA clientele. Utilizing Malcolm Payne's (2014) model of social work theory selection, I analyzed the organization's professional expectations and matched this to the needs expressed by the client attending or wishing to attend SPPA. I found that a feminist theoretical model was the most appropriate lens with which to approach this issue.

In order to more fully understand the theoretical underpinnings of the counselling practices that I observed in my placement, I researched scholarly journals and articles to explore issues that came into play while I was working with clients.

Objective 6: Become Familiar with Clinical and Applied Counselling Services at SPPA

The sixth objective of my placement was devised to enable me to gain knowledge about various issues that arise at a post-secondary facility and become familiar with clinical and applied counselling methods used within Saskatchewan Polytechnic. One of the ways this objective was achieved was by shadowing Master's-level counsellors. I observed and noted the various issues that arose for Saskatchewan Polytechnic students, particularly those on the Prince Albert campus. I observed the methods used by the counsellors and would consult with the counsellor afterwards. When appropriate, I asked questions and discussed other possible scenarios to address how the session might have gone differently.

As I began to work with clients myself, I served as an advocate and broker. I assessed and identified the issues I was presented with by the clients I worked with. I further advocated for clients with identified issues where appropriate. I worked with clients to better understand

and work within the systems that may have been interfering with achieving their goals. I acted as a broker by advising clients of other professionals within the community that might be better able to assist them. I referred several clients for issues relating to financial assistance, mental health, addiction, rental and day care subsidies, in addition to disability services. The ancillary service providers such as Employment Canada that I referred the clients to were all capable of addressing the issues that the Saskatchewan Polytechnic students were presenting with.

Throughout my practicum, I utilized several theoretical frameworks, including, as previously mentioned, a feminist lens. I also utilized a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework throughout my practicum. CRT assesses and analyzes inequalities amongst the races in education (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Using this analytical CRT framework, I acknowledged that financial supports were minimal for First Nations students to live on without other sources of income. I further acknowledged language barriers and cultural differences in teaching and learning styles. These barriers will be discussed later in the report.

Finally, I used a social constructivist lens as I acknowledged that several of the barriers that adult learners faced were very similar to those of parents I worked with in my school social work position, in addition to my own experience as a post-secondary student. Knowing this, I became aware of the issues that many clients may have been experiencing before I actually interacted with the client. I routinely self-reflected on my past beliefs and knowledge so as to ensure that I was not entering into counselling sessions with these experiences in mind. Further to this, I would deconstruct the situations and further assess them piece by piece to analyze where systemic and interpersonal barriers might lie. This was useful in making plans to solve the current issues the client might be facing.

The sources that I used to obtain knowledge related to Objective Six were accessed through scholarly literature, consultation with key informants, and self-reflection. I researched scholarly articles and identified the different issues that may arise at post-secondary institutes and the counselling techniques used to address them, predominantly SFBT. Through conversations and questioning of key informants, I received applicable knowledge about issues that arise for post-secondary students, particularly those at SPPA. Further to this, I self-reflected on my experience as a post-secondary student and how this may come into play during a counselling session. I did not allow my own experiences to negatively influence my own counselling practice. I needed to review each session and reflect on what areas went well and which areas could benefit from improvement, and I attempted to integrate identified improvements into later sessions with clients where appropriate.

Objective 7: Learn About Assessment Tools Used Within Saskatchewan Polytechnic

My seventh objective was to become aware of and learn more about the assessment tools used within SPPA, especially those tools that the organization has identified to be the most useful in assessing and meeting the client's goals. My initial action plan to achieve this objective entailed job shadowing with the career and post-secondary counsellors who routinely administer psychometric assessments.

SPPA employs a half-time career counsellor. A primary activity of my placement was observing the career counsellor as she performed her counselling strategies and administered a variety of assessment tools. The assessment tools that she frequently utilized included Type Focus, Career Cruising, and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII) survey. After a few weeks of observation, I was given the opportunity to employ my learnings through applying the assessment tools with clients and assisting in interpreting the survey tool results.

Type Focus is a computerized personality assessment, which matches a person's personality to a career. This assessment is based on the psychological theory that there are differing personalities and the closer the match between personality and career choice, the greater the joy one will have while working in suggested career options (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2014a). In theory, this is a well-suited tool for career happiness and decision-making; however, it is not based on skill and is only based on the answers that the client enters into the computer program.

Career Cruising is a Saskatchewan Polytechnic resource that is also computerized. This assessment tool looks at a person's skills and interests and matches them to careers that Saskatchewan Polytechnic offers (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2014a). Clearly, this tool is biased as it attempts to fit prospective students into existing educational programs on offer at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. The counsellor who I job shadowed did not utilize this resource very often as she is a career counsellor for all the Prince Albert region and assists individuals to find suitable career choices that are tailored to their specific needs, rather than as a tool to direct prospective students into Saskatchewan Polytechnic programs.

The assessment tool that the career counsellor placed most emphasis on is the Strong Interest Inventory (SII). This assessment tool has a minimal fee, which is used to pay back the annual licensing fee that Saskatchewan Polytechnic incurs to utilize the program. The SII is a more in-depth assessment tool. It assesses student interests in a variety of areas, such as occupations, work activities, leisure activities, and school subjects. It compares every individual's answers with a series of answers that were provided by other individuals who are currently happily employed in over one hundred occupations (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, 2014a).

The social work function that is most commonly used to assist clients at SPPA entails enhancing interpersonal development and problem-solving capabilities. In addition, I functioned as a broker referring clients to a variety of individuals and organizations within the Prince Albert community who could assist the client in their career exploration phase.

While administering career assessments over the course of my placement, I often used a feminist framework. I witnessed many young women enter the office with hopes of taking training that would enable them to pursue the traditional gender-stereotyped careers that many women find themselves working within. For example, many female students enquired about hairdressing or child care training programs, whereas young men often enquired about the skilled construction trades. At times I would catch myself asking if the women had ever thought of pursuing careers within the skilled carpentry, welding, mechanic, electrical, and plumbing trades. The answer was most often no.

Because I have previously worked in male-dominated positions and believe that a feminist perspective is best able to expose the oppressive nature of patriarchy, I found that I needed to acknowledge that I was not asking this question from an entirely unbiased starting point. Through self-reflection, I understood that I needed to tread carefully when probing the career aspirations of many of the female clients I was interacting with during my counselling and career advising sessions. I frequently would ask myself, "Am I asking for my benefit, the benefit of Saskatchewan Polytechnic, or for the benefit of the client?". Armed with my sense of self-awareness in this area, I more frequently found myself asking clients what kind of environment they would be most comfortable working in or what hours did they want to work. Often this would give me a clearer indication of their true interests.

Through examining grey literature found around the Prince Albert campus and on the Saskatchewan Polytechnic website, I was able to gain a better understanding of the assessments that career counsellors at the institution commonly use. Further to this, I was able to speak to key informants who routinely use these assessment tools and I used such opportunities to ask for more detail, clarification, and direction. Together, the information that I gathered from these information sources was very useful to me in achieving this learning objective.

Objective 8: Become Familiar with Counselling Skills and Clinical Social Work Practice

The eighth objective of my field placement at SPPA enabled me to develop a comprehensive understanding of counselling skills used at Saskatchewan Polytechnic and to become more familiar with clinical social work practices within the organization. In order to achieve this objective, I participated in job shadowing with several SPPA employees with counselling, psychology, educational psychology, and social work backgrounds. Throughout my practicum, I found that these disciplines were quite complementary to each other.

The social worker that I job shadowed made frequent use of a person-in-environment theoretical approach to her work with clients, relying on this theoretical orientation to a far greater extent than counsellors whose graduate education had been within an academic discipline other than social work. This counsellor acknowledged multiple factors that may come into play from both within the client and beyond, including their social circumstances and the social structures that may be relevant in their life at the time.

Some of the social work functions I fulfilled focussed on the social work role of enabler. In this role, I practiced skills that enabled me to facilitate the empowerment of SPPA clients so that they could find solutions and move towards potential courses of action. As a student myself,

I frequently and ethically consulted with social work colleagues as I worked towards achieving my own plans and enhancing my professional development.

While achieving my objective of learning clinical social work skills, I employed a human behavior theoretical framework introduced by Saari (1986). This framework suggests that the relationship between the client and worker assists the client to develop reality-processing skills that can be adapted to situations beyond therapy. Within this approach, it is proposed that the client builds a bridge between themselves and their social structure as well as a bridge between the interpersonal and intrapsychic dimensions of themselves. It is believed that personal experiences in the outside world, such as oppression and racism, will also have psychological effects on the client (Saari, 1986).

This objective specifically references the Saskatchewan Polytechnic, so it was important for me to seek out information on the Saskatchewan Polytechnic website and in the numerous brochures and pamphlets that were available to staff and public at locations around campus. My key informants were the counsellors that I job shadowed, consulted with, or asked questions of. All of these resources were helpful in achieving my objective of improving and expanding my social work clinical skills within the Saskatchewan Polytechnic organization.

Objective 9: Gain a Clearer Understanding of Barriers to Post-Secondary Education

Completion

My last objective was to gain a clearer understanding of barriers to post-secondary education completion. This objective was accomplished through the use of various methods. While job shadowing Master's-level counsellors, I noted several barriers that appeared to be interfering with students' plans for completing their post-secondary studies. Whenever I encountered such circumstances, I discussed the issue with the person I was job shadowing once

the session was completed, and together we discussed many of the systemic issues that may interfere with identified groups of individuals while in pursuit of their post-secondary education. After having identified a structural barrier and discussed the procedures that SPPA uses to assist students to overcome this barrier, I sought out resources that might be beneficial to the clients who go to SPPA post-secondary counsellors.

The social work functions that I enacted while completing this objective were those of enabler, broker, advocate, and facilitator. In the role of enabler I empowered clients to problem solve and create action plans to address the issues they were dealing with. Often the plans we developed required the client to speak to other professionals or workers within their community. At several points within my placement, I acted on behalf of clients and I created opportunities for them to speak directly to the decision-makers whose policy systems were seen as presenting obstacles to the student's success. Because the barriers to post-secondary education are vast, I researched community resources and facilitated several SPPA information seminars that were attended by both staff and student audiences. These seminars were well received by both the staff and students as the topics were important yet not well known.

The analytic frameworks that I adopted to understand the barriers students face while studying or attempting to study at a post-secondary facility were informed by feminist and critical race theory. These frameworks acknowledge the inequitable opportunities facing women, particularly those with children, as well as those issues facing people who are not of European ancestry. The barriers that come into play are mostly due to predispositional, situational, and institutional factors. These barriers will be discussed in detail in a subsequent section of this report.

The resources that helped me to gain a clearer understanding of the barriers to post-secondary education were accessed through researching and producing a scholarly literature review, reading grey literature, and personal self-reflection. By identifying and reading up-to-date journal articles, I learned of several barriers that may interfere with students' completion of their advanced education. The grey literature that was available around campus was informational as it illustrated resources that may be of use to those who have difficulties. Basing my actions on what I was learning through self-reflective practice, I attempted to incorporate these new understandings into my interactions with clients and colleagues throughout the course of my placement when appropriate.

I found that throughout my practicum and following my professional associate's direction, I modified my focus as I spent much of my practicum understanding and working to better understand the barriers to post-secondary success that students were encountering. Upon completion of the field placement component of my practicum, I spoke with my practicum supervisor and together we decided that it would be beneficial for me to conduct more research into issues associated with barriers to achievement within post-secondary environments. My research and findings related to completing that phase of my MSW project are included in the following sections of this report.

Knowledge Enhanced in Practicum

In the following pages, I will discuss the knowledge enhanced in my practicum. Much of this material was developed through my literature review activities.

Access to Child Care

The number of regulated child care providers in Canada who are accepting new children is limited and often comes with a large price tag. In Canada, one in five children is able to attend a regulated child care facility. However, this number plummets to below one in ten in Saskatchewan (Beach et al. 2009). Not surprisingly, Saskatchewan has the highest percentage of children in unregulated child care: 79% compared with the national average of 60% (Beach et al. 2009).

Having a shortage of regulated child care spaces often forces families into undesirable options. In order for a parent to gain their education, they may be placing their child at risk in the "grey market" of unregulated care (Anderssen, 2013). Saskatchewan Polytechnic does have a facility which offers child care for children 18 months and older. However, there are no openings and the wait list is very long. The director of the facility states that it is best to place your child on a wait list the moment the child is born in order to have a fair chance at obtaining a child care spot in their facility.

Since child care is not universal in Canada, the cost varies greatly between jurisdictions. For example, in Quebec there is a \$7 per day child care system, equalling \$152 per month, while just a few hours away Torontonians pay 11 times as much at \$1,676 a month per child under the age of eighteen months (Friendly & MacDonald, 2014). Although regulated child care is scarce in Saskatchewan, it is on the lower end for cost at \$800 per month in Saskatoon (Friendly & MacDonald, 2014).

Parents who actually find accessible, affordable, quality child care consider themselves lucky. Parents and advocates believe that children should not be cared for based on pure luck. Rather, advocates see child care as a federal responsibility and have been advocating for a universal program for almost half a century (Friendly & MacDonald, 2014). Although the support is overwhelming in both literature and voice, it does not appear to be enough to create great change as the decision rests with those who are in political power.

Women in Trades

The issues relating to women's participation in the skilled trades is quite similar to that of child care as women struggle to achieve equal opportunities in the work force. Over the past century, women have been in and out of the workforce. Through much hard work, activists have helped build a nation where it is not only acceptable but also necessary for women to be active members of the Canadian labor force. Through this movement, women have become less financially dependent on their mates and have moved up the social and financial ladder to equality. A struggle in moving further up the ladder lies in the disparity of wages earned between men and women.

Conversely, men and women often choose different career paths. Although both men and women are involved in the skilled trades, the certification process and the professions themselves are often gender-specific. Skilled trade certificates are obtained through course study or through an apprenticeship program. Most often men are in the apprenticed fields and women are in full-time studies fields (Statistics Canada, 2013). Full-time students enrolled in academic programs pay tuition fees for their in-school course program whereas the apprenticeship program is characterized as an earn-while-you-learn program. Apprentices are hired by qualified employers and are trained while they are on the job. The apprenticeship program also requires the student

to attend school for approximately 8 weeks per year for three or four years in order to obtain their final journeyman certificate (Newfoundland Labrador Canada, 2015). While apprenticed workers are at school, the government subsidizes their wage (Alberta Advanced Education, n.d.). Therefore, the cost is minimal for apprenticed workers in comparison to full-time academic students.

Men and women also differ in career choices and salary outcomes within the trades sector. The two top earning trades according to Statistics Canada (2013) are crane operator and plumber, while the two lowest earning trades are hairdresser and early childhood educator. The positions of crane operator and plumber are both achieved through apprenticeships (NAIT, n.d.), earn over \$35.90/hr. as an average wage, and have female participation rates of 1.7% and 1.8% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2013). On the other end of the wage scale is in-school trades training for hairdressers and early-childhood educators. The hairdressing program takes 45 weeks and costs \$9,900, while the childhood educator certificate is 38 weeks and costs \$6,600 (Saskatchewan Polytechnic, n.d.). Both fields are female-dominated with women filling 85% and 96% respectively of the employment positions in these areas while earning on average \$15-\$18/hour (Statistics Canada, 2013). These statistics lead to some understanding of why men earn more than women do; however, it does not explain why more women do not choose to enter the male-dominated skilled trades.

Women are under-represented in the traditional male dominant trades, and the progress for increased representation is slow. Scullen (2008) found that education was lacking in regards to knowledge that women are capable of working in male-dominant trades. The following quote from Cynthia, a carpenter apprentice with one year experience, illustrates the social barrier that faces many women who are pursuing non-traditional employment: "The trades are typically not

pushed on women like they are on men; women are more pushed towards administrative jobs. Girls need to be informed that trades are an option. I didn't know about the apprenticeship system in high school." (Scullen, 2008).

In order to learn a new skill it is important to be in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Scullen (2008) addresses this need suggesting that training women in women-only, pre-apprenticeship training cohorts would be beneficial. She goes on to recommend that classes such as assertiveness training, conflict resolution, dealing with workplace harassment, and/or working in non-traditional work environments be integrated into the women-only cohort programs. Female role models, mentors, and work-placements could also be valuable. Scullen (2008) further recommends that apprentice programs should provide follow up and supports to all participants whether they are in or have graduated from the program.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic acknowledges the importance of women in trades to a certain extent, but it is my opinion that SPPA campus has miles to go before they reach male-female equality. They employ a female carpentry instructor, which is a definite move in the right direction. They further offer an all-female introduction to trades course. However, the dates and locations are not advertised broadly beforehand. It is not surprising that these courses do not fill as there is nothing concrete for a female, who is possibly a mother, to arrange their lives for. Therefore, it is not uncommon for the all-female introductory classes to be cancelled.

In 2014, then Employment Minister Jason Kenney said that Skills Canada estimated that one million skilled trades' workers would be needed by the year 2020 (Clancy, 2014). One of Minister Kenney's answers to the trade shortage was to implement an immigration program where 3,000-trained workers from other countries could be certified to practice in the skilled trades (National Post Wire Services, 2012). It is my belief that since women comprise almost

half the labor force and Saskatchewan Polytechnic attempts to be industry-responsive, they could regularly offer female-only courses as an introduction into the required trades, making it accessible, obtainable, and beneficial to all those involved.

Although assessing SPPA through a feminist lens was useful, I discovered I needed to address other issues as well. While researching, observing, and practicing, I came to realize many of the barriers individuals faced while obtaining a post-secondary education were similar to the barriers that I had observed families facing while I was working as a school social worker. As a result, I decided to employ a social constructivist approach to my practicum. This approach helped guide me to scaffold upon my prior knowledge while applying it to a new scenario. I believe this was an approach that fit both my personality and my practicum placement, allowing me to develop my own interpretation and construction of the knowledge process (Learning-Theories.com, n.d.).

Differing Benefits of Advanced Education

Advanced education is delivered through private or public institutions. The government does not financially support private institutions and therefore the costs of education through these institutions are prohibitive to those that are economically disadvantaged (Madore, 1992). The findings that I gathered over the course of my practicum focus more on public institutions as they are more financially accessible to Canadian adult learners. For the purposes of this report, the terms post-secondary, advanced, upper, and further education will be used interchangeably.

The following sections of this report demonstrate the key areas that I found to affect the success of adult learners as they pursue post-secondary studies in Canada generally and more specifically in Saskatchewan.

The benefits of advanced education are vast; however, the journey to obtaining this education may be problematic for many students as there are many barriers.

Advanced education builds knowledge, enhances socialization, and opens occupational opportunities that lead to financial security. Education advances growth for individuals themselves, their families, their communities, and their nations. Personal income increases dramatically with every level of education beginning with a grade 12 diploma and typically rises with each step of education achieved (University of Toronto, 2012). There is a direct relationship between levels of education and salary.

Madore (1992) suggests that education benefits individuals, businesses, as well as the government. She states that once education is achieved, individual income rises, which boosts productivity for local businesses and increases taxes paid to the government, thereby raising the standard of living for all Canadians. As the economy grows, it improves Canada's ability to compete in the international marketplace. As Porter (1990) states: "National Prosperity is created, not inherited."

Swail (2003) suggests that advancing education is one of the surest methods of increasing social and economic conditions while overcoming barriers such as poverty and deprived social conditions. Employment and Social Development Canada (2014) state that those who achieve higher education have lower risks of facing unemployment while gaining greater potential for higher net assets, benefits, and pensions (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). Ogilvie and Eggleton (2011) indicate that professional job opportunities have increased considerably over the past 20 years. They point out that post-secondary graduate employment in Canada has increased by 4.4 million from 1990 to 2010, whereas jobs declined by 1.2 million for those with less than a high school education over the same time period.

Although advanced education may offer substantial benefits, it is not easily obtainable for many. Drawing upon feminist theoretical principles and critical race theory, it is important to illustrate the difficulties and struggles that some people face while overcoming societal predispositional factors such as race, poverty, and deprived social conditions.

Many Saskatchewan Polytechnic clients are attending counselling as they pursue their educational paths at the institution; however, many students require additional guidance or access to an advocate who can assist them in their endeavors. Occasionally, counsellors in post-secondary institutions may advocate on the behalf of less-advantaged students seeking to obtain higher education.

Predisposition to Higher Education

Much of the literature describes variables that increase or decrease the likelihood of obtaining and succeeding in advanced education. Selwyn and Gorard (2005) found patterns of participation in formal education that are impacted by variables facing individuals earlier in their lives, such as ethnicity, gender, schooling, and the literacy culture of the family.

Finney (2008) found that in 2005 only 25-31% of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population completed grade 12 within the three-year grade 10-12 on-time rate. In comparison, 72% of non-Aboriginal students completed secondary education on time. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education further noted that Aboriginal student completion rates hike to above 50% when the three-year completion time moves to an eight-year span (Finney, 2008).

Turner (2013) found that many Aboriginal people are more likely to obtain education credentials as adult learners. They found almost one half (48.4%) of those who self-declared as Aboriginal between the ages of 25-64 furthered their education and had obtained at least some post-secondary education. Of these, 14.4% were in trades, 20.6% obtained a college diploma,

3.5% had some university, and 9.8% held a university degree. In comparison almost two thirds (64.7%) of non-Aboriginal peoples had obtained some post-secondary education. As this information suggests, the post-secondary gap closes somewhat if we compare post-secondary education at a more mature age. However, the disparities continue to remain apparent. As Straus (2011) states:

In many ways, our two economies have created two separate societies. Those with low educational attainment drift permanently between recessions and depressions, with little stability. Those with high educational attainment experience increased wealth, only mild recessions, and interesting projects with personal growth.

Understanding the factors that contribute to gaps in educational achievement is imperative for decreasing these variances.

Another barrier to post-secondary education comes though the manner in which information is presented to students of differing cultural backgrounds. There is a noticeable difference between Aboriginal teaching and Canadian mainstream instruction (Preston, 2008). Preston suggests that Aboriginal groups learn through alternative teaching methods, which differ from the Canadian style of education. Post-secondary institutions generally use the Canadian model as opposed to traditional Aboriginal models of teaching. This dynamic is illustrated in the evidence provided by Preston to the March 31, 2010 session of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology in the following statement:

The educational paradigm reflected in post-secondary programs predominantly epitomizes learning as an individualized, competitive, testable process. In contrast, Aboriginal pedagogy prioritizes learning acquired through cooperation,

storytelling, group discussions, modelling and observations. In many post-secondary institutions, the programs, curricula and presentation of content are misaligned with Aboriginal culture and pedagogy. (n.p.)

Differing instructional strategies may interfere with the confidence, practice, and abilities that students must draw upon to try a new model of learning or to feel more confident that they are at the same educational level as those who have learned from this model throughout their secondary education program.

My observations from my placement experience at SPPA indicate that SPPA appears to have a culturally sensitive environment, particularly for those who are Aboriginal and who are pursuing secondary education. The SPPA campus houses an Aboriginal Activity Center and employs an Aboriginal Student Advisor. For the most part, these Aboriginal programs are accessed by the secondary Aboriginal students. It is my opinion that this creates a divide between Aboriginal learners who are undertaking secondary upgrading and other students – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike – who are enrolled in other SPPA programs. Nevertheless, the SPPA campus does offer a welcoming environment for those Aboriginal students who may not otherwise choose to become learners at that institution. More research into the dynamics of this issue would certainly benefit SPPA administrators.

Familial Factors

Another indicator of propensity to enter into advanced education is dependent on the level of education one's parent has obtained. Literature suggests that those born to parents with advanced education are more likely to attend post-secondary studies themselves. *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2014) illustrates that those who grew up in families with less than upper secondary education are less likely to obtain advanced education themselves. A study by

Livingston and Stowe (2001) found those who grew up in professional/managerial families were three times more likely to obtain post-secondary degrees than those who grew up in working class families. The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (Martin, 2011) has also observed the impact of educational parental influence. They found that post-secondary participation doubled when comparing first-generation students to non-first-generation students: 26% to 54% respectively. They further found that first-generation students had less financial assistance from their families, had longer delay times between secondary school and post-secondary school, were more likely to work part-time while enrolled in post-secondary programs, and spent less time on their studies (Martin, 2011).

While some parents may not have achieved higher education themselves or earn less than a substantial income, many want to see their adult children doing well for themselves. De Broucker and Mortimore (2005) found that 93% of families, regardless of their income, aspired for their children to gain more than a grade 12 education. However, only 20% of families from lower-income homes (less than \$30,000 annual salary) were placing money aside for their children's education in comparison to almost two thirds of the families who were in the top quintile of household income. De Broucker and Mortimore's (2005) findings further revealed that having money available to pay for their child's education played an important role in whether their child would pursue post-secondary studies. Further to this, it is my belief that when a family earns more income, it is easier to budget for their children's future education as opposed to those who are living check to check.

Although research may show familial factors such as race, family income, and whether a parent has attended post-secondary education are influential in whether an individual attends post-secondary education, parental marital status does not seem to be a factor. Finnie and

Laporte (2004) found university participation rates to be similar for individuals who came from homes with a single mother who was university-educated or a two-parent home where both parents were university-educated. However, to my knowledge, research has yet to be performed to explain why this is. Further research is needed to understand whether these figures are the same for lone fathers raising children. This information would then determine if one-parent families are as influential as a two-parent family with education or if mothers have a primary role in their child furthering their education. Another explanation for this may be that more females have advanced education than males: 56% of women obtained post-secondary education as opposed to 44% of men (Marshall, 2010). Statistics Canada further breaks this down as they found that although post-secondary certificates and diplomas are similar for genders, both close to 37%, more women obtained university degrees as 34.3% of women graduated university as opposed to 26% of males (Marshall, 2010).

The literature further states the importance of parental expectations on their children to further their education. Telford, Cartwright, Prasil and Shimmons (2003) found that children respond to satisfying their parent's wishes for them. They further found that more youths attended post-secondary education if their parents expected this of them as opposed to those who did not have the expectation. I was able to witness this dynamic firsthand, as many of the students that arrived at SPPA in the company of their parents appeared to be very pleased to oblige their parents' educational wishes.

My final point lies within one's abilities. From what I have been able to gather, individuals with disabilities of varying natures are less likely to attend post-secondary education than individuals who do not have a disability. Statistics Canada found that in 2006 those with disabilities were half as likely to move on to advanced education as those who did not have a

disability (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2011). Further to this, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (n.d.) found that 35% of Saskatchewan parents reported that their children with disabilities (i.e., visual or hearing impairments, mental or physical health impairments, prenatal substance or substance-related disorders) did not have their needs met via primary or secondary assisted school supports. If these needs are not met while in primary or secondary education, and if an individual does not have a positive educational experience, it is my opinion that it is also difficult for them to move on to post-secondary education with any sort of confidence that the post-secondary education system will be any stronger.

As my professional associate was also a disabilities expert at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, I was able to witness and be part of several scenarios where disability supports were needed. After a diagnosed confirmation from a physician, my professional associate was able to accommodate several students' needs. For example, students with learning disabilities were able to access supports at examination time such as extended exam time or they could choose to have the exam read to them. I also observed purchase requisitions to accommodate others with disabilities who required custom laptops, programs, and chairs in order to be successful in their program. It was my observation that whatever would help a client have an easier time achieving their academic goal, my professional associate would make it happen. She would advocate on behalf of the client to bands, to teachers, and to the Learning Disabilities Association of Saskatchewan if need be.

As illustrated, many factors set a child up for furthering their education. If the individual can overcome the obstacles aforementioned, there remain situational factors that may impede on their decision to further their education. In the following section, I will discuss situational

barriers that may interfere with a potential learner entering or being successful in post-secondary education.

Situational Barriers

Although there is a long list of predispositional barriers that may impede on an individual's decision to enter into higher-level education, there are also several situational barriers. Situational barriers are circumstances surrounding an individual's current life situation that may interfere with the individual furthering their education. Many situational factors may be coupled with predispositional factors that make it even more difficult for an individual to obtain an advanced education. Barriers such as lack of family support, financial difficulties, learning difficulties, and physical or mental impairments would fall into both situational and predispositional barriers.

Another situational barrier is conflicting responsibilities and may differ between mature and younger learners. For example, mature learners may already have responsibilities involving career, family, debt, and tight schedules that make it difficult to pay for education, juggle education with other responsibilities, and be mobile to pursue advanced educational opportunities. Situational factors for the younger learner may include being unsure of what career path to choose as they have lacked life experience and career guidance, a feeling of being alone while away at a post-secondary institution, and a lack of confidence in their academic or social ability to succeed in advanced education.

For the purposes of this paper, mature learners are defined as a diverse group of adults, typically age 25 or older, who have a wide array of abilities, educational and cultural backgrounds, responsibilities, and workforce experience (Southern Regional Education Board, 2005). Younger learners will be defined as those who have graduated secondary education on-

time and are under the age of 25. The younger learner may decide to transition into post-secondary studies directly out of secondary school. The following sections describe the situational barriers mature and younger learners face.

Mature learners. Many mature learners have vast experience outside of education as many have established careers, families, homes, and are living on a fixed budget. Integrating education into these responsibilities is not an easy task. For example, leaving a fixed income to go without an income while paying for your studies is not only a strain on yourself but on your family as a whole (Frost, 2013).

Student loans may offer financial assistance to those families who are single parents or whose partners have an income that student loans do not deem to be sufficient to support a family (Government of Canada, 2014). However, for students who are common-law or married and their partner earns an income that is above what Canada Student Loans deem necessary, the opportunities for student loans are not positive (Government of Canada, 2014). Student loans do not take into account how blended families may not share their income. Through my observation, many blended families keep their finances separate and pay for their own set of children. Furthermore, when applying for a mortgage, both incomes are calculated into the mortgage and if a person decides or needs to further their education in order to pay their share of the mortgage and the family income remains above what student loans deem as necessary due to their partner's income, student loans will deny the application, leaving all bills and financial strain on the student's mate.

As already mentioned, it may be difficult to live on only one income. It is also difficult to live on a student loan as an only income. Based on an assessment of a student who is a single parent with two children, with no income before or during school, minus tuition and books,

Canadian student loans would allow this family \$7,746.05 for the eight-month duration of school, equalling \$968 per month (CanLearn, 2015b).

The unfortunate fact is that this amount does not even cover the student and family's rental accommodations. For example, if the single mother was attending Saskatchewan Polytechnic and living in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, while renting an average 3-bedroom apartment for her family, they would be paying \$1,139 per month (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2014). This makes the post-secondary option next to impossible for a lone parent unless they have other financial supports in play.

The Saskatchewan Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) also makes it difficult for individuals to further, or even gain, an education. PTA is a large funder for Saskatchewan Polytechnic secondary students. I have observed how PTA affects students, particularly single people, or single parents whose children decide to live with the other parent during their course of study. The PTA (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.) offers \$744 for a single person living away from home. This amount only covers rent in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, as the 2014 average one-bedroom rental price was \$740 per month (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2014). However, if a student has a child living with them they will have an additional \$145 through PTA (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.) and an additional \$190 (Canada Revenue Agency, 2015) for child tax totalling \$1,075 for monthly spending. It is not uncommon for a student's children to move between parents' homes leaving the student with a two-bedroom rental costing an average of \$853 per month (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2014). As the child moves to their other parent's home, the student's income changes instantly from \$1,075 to \$744 per month, which makes it impossible for the parent to

maintain the two-bedroom apartment in the chance their child will return to them. Often they will need to leave the apartment suddenly, which also leaves them with a poor rental reference.

Having children often adds stressors beyond finances into the academic world of post-secondary education. Children require time, energy, and child care. This dynamic is extremely hard for single parents, as single mother Courtney Webb states, "It's a lot being a single parent and a full-time college student. You are completely exhausted from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed" (as cited in Taylor, 2012). Webb further explained that a typical day starts around 6:30 a.m. as she gets ready for school and takes her son to daycare. She picks him up at 5 p.m., then cooks, washes dishes, does laundry, puts her son to sleep and finally begins her studies until the wee hours of the night (as cited in Taylor, 2012).

Although Courtney was able to find adequate child care, this is not always the case. If a parent was able to secure child care in Saskatoon for the \$800 per child (Friendly & MacDonald, 2014), a single parent of two applying for a student loan would need to add \$1,600 to their monthly child care bill plus the \$1,139 per month for their rental, now equalling \$2,739 per month. This parent would need to supplement their \$968 per month student loan with another \$1,771 per month, not including bills, food, and activities.

Aside from family and financial barriers, a mature learner may be less mobile than a younger learner as they may have commitments and responsibilities that they have to consider in their educational decision. Examples of this may include split families where their child's other parent may have a legal binding court order for the child to remain in the same city (Family Law Education for Women, n.d.). Other examples are: a growing number of families are utilizing their grandparents for child care (Sinha, 2014), a spouse may have a career and cannot move, or

the resources needed for their family may not be available in another community. Therefore, being part of a family, and having several commitments, may hinder a mature learner's mobility.

Another barrier a mature learner may face is anxiety about entering a culture that is unfamiliar to them. As a mature learner has been away from the academic world for a period, they may fear they do not have the abilities needed to be a successful student. This fear may cause heightened anxiety levels when contemplating furthering their education, or they stay in their familiar, safe zone and avoid the idea entirely. Johnson and Robson (1999) suggest that being prepared and having a realistic view of what is expected from post-secondary education will reduce this anxiety. If they speak to a post-secondary counsellor, the counsellor can utilize counselling theories such as solution focussed therapy to work through the anxiety and focus on the positive changes that advanced education can bring to their life.

Younger learners. A younger learner may enter the post-secondary world with more ease than a mature learner; however, there remain barriers which they may face. Some of these include uncertainty of career choice, work readiness upon completion of post-secondary schooling, loneliness, immaturity and lack of readiness for post-secondary studies, in addition to financial struggles.

This transition from secondary education can be both rewarding and terrifying for a young learner. Fear may override the possible future rewards if there is a rough transition into post-secondary school. Levin (2009) suggests that the fear of school could be reduced by secondary school counsellors if they are used properly. However, Levin suggests that although there may be guidance counsellors, they are often not used appropriately. The decisions are often made mainly between themselves and their friends or family. Therefore, if a youth's family and friends have limited knowledge of advanced education, the youth is less likely to consider this as

an option. The Conference Board of Canada (2013) further states, "A pressing need is to strengthen the links between high school and the post-secondary system."(p. 1).

Being alone or away from friends to attend a post-secondary facility is also difficult for young adults. Cheung (2007) found that those whose friends decided not to attend post-secondary education upon leaving secondary school were less likely to enter into post-secondary studies themselves. Bazirgan (2012) further proposes that loneliness, being without family and friends, can become a debilitating cycle for post-secondary students. She states that when students feel alone and isolated they socially withdraw, resulting in increased loneliness and isolation. Bazirgan (2012) suggests that calling a friend, making new friends, talking to a counsellor, and remembering that it takes some sacrifices to achieve your goals while experiencing new things will help ease the lonely feelings.

As post-secondary education is expensive, it is important to recognize the state of readiness and maturity of the younger learner. Pickhardt (2013) believes that if a parent feels their child is not psychologically ready to attend post-secondary education, delaying it a year or more may not be a bad thing. He suggests some indicators that demonstrate lack of readiness for advanced education are poor money management, procrastination with schoolwork, lacking future goals, escaping excessively to online or video entertainment, and lack of healthy sleeping patterns (Pickhardt, 2013). If a student is not ready or interested in post-secondary education, they may choose to drop out and become part of the Canadian university dropout statistics. Berger, Motte, and Parkin (2009) found that 14% of those between the ages of 26-28 had dropped out of post-secondary studies. As I entered my practicum in April, which is late in the school year, I did not witness many withdrawals in post-secondary education; however, there

were several in secondary education. Many were lonely and moved back to their home communities.

Financial barriers seem to belong to all groups when discussing post-secondary education. For younger learners, it is a barrier if parents are not able to place money aside for their child's higher education. Student loans consider parents' income when assessing student's needs. Again, if a parent lives above what student loans deem to be necessary, they are expected to pay their child's education while supporting the child's living expenses as well (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). However, if the young learner's parents live below the necessary amount or the student has lived away from home for more than one year, the student may be eligible for a loan, nevertheless, not likely enough to live on. As some (if not many) parents are unable to assist in their child's education as they are spending their earnings on pure survival or bills and mortgages; it is a challenge to put forth yet another expense.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are described as barriers caused by the institution's organizational structure. Institutional barriers include, but are not limited to, a lack of financial opportunities to support living allowances and to offset the cost of supplies and tuition, complex and uncompromising admission procedures, inadequate student support and academic advising for learning opportunities, lack of child care services or financial assistance to support these services, and negative attitudes from administrative staff and instructors towards adult learners, part-time learners, and learners from marginal groups such as First Nations, immigrants, refugees, low income, and hearing or visually impaired students (McKerracher et al., 2006).

Financial barriers appear to be a concern in all three categories: predispositional, situational, and institutional. Tuition fees are a concern for many, climbing at twice the rate of

inflation. Ogilvie and Eggleton (2011) found that between 1999 and 2009, tuition increased an average of 4.4% annually, whereas inflation rose on average 2.3% annually.

Even though tuition rates and inflation are increasing, the student loan allotment has not increased. The maximum allowable Canada student loan is \$210 per week for a single individual and has remained the same from 2005 to 2013 (Employment and Social Development, 2014). According to the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), unmet student needs vary greatly between jurisdictions as each province may offer a supplementary loan above the Canadian student loan (Martin, 2011). Some provinces offer more assistance than others. In Ontario, unmet annual student needs may be as low as \$1,191, whereas in Nova Scotia it may be as high as \$5,214 (Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2011).

A student must have access to supplementary financial support, making it difficult for those students who do not have wealthy connections. CASA suggests evaluating the cost of post-secondary education and student needs and adapting the loan allotment accordingly (Junor & Usher, 2004). Junor and Usher (2004) found student aid programs, such as bursaries, which are designed for lower-income students, are skewed in favour of the modern-day students who are from higher economic backgrounds. Furthermore, through my observation at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, many under-privileged individuals did not want to rely on the possibility of receiving assistance; they wanted a certainty. Therefore, they did not apply for bursaries or grants.

Student groups consistently state that tuition increases have an influence on a potential student's decision whether to attend post-secondary education or not (Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2011). However, some researchers believe it is not an influential factor. Research experts such as Levin (2009) suggest that lower tuition rates may not interfere with post-secondary attendance. Levin

backs this up to say there is no empirical evidence that a decrease in tuition would increase the participation rate for post-secondary studies.

Admission into a post-secondary education is not only costly; it is a competitive and comprehensive process. The process generally requires high grades, high literacy levels, with little room for error while completing an application for admissions. The admissions process further differs amongst educational institutions. For example, some professional schools will not accept grades from part-time studies (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). If this is the case, then those who have accommodations made to lessen their course load due to disabilities will not be considered. Further to this, the application process is competitive. Those who are unable to complete the application forms up to par may be rejected, regardless of the reasoning behind their errors, which may be made due to language barriers, literacy barriers, or disabilities (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2011). Part of the role of a Saskatchewan Polytechnic post-secondary counsellor is to review applications with clients and suggest changes in order for those applications to pass approval by the institution.

Another institutional barrier is, as already mentioned, limited child care spaces for those parents who are attending, or wishing to attend, post-secondary education. Although some institutions offer child care, there are wait lists. Jenny Barsi-Muntain, assistant director of the Awasis Childcare Cooperative on the University of Regina campus, states, "Its [child care wait list] very long and that never changes." (Thomsen, n.d.). Thomsen, the author of INKonline, says this is a concern for the University of Regina campus: "Over 150 children are on the waitlist to get into the Awasis Childcare Co-operative alone on the U of R campus" (n.d.). This is a common phenomenon across Canada as Minniti (2012), of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, also reports a large shortage of childcare spaces.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic offers child care; however, there too is a wait list. Further to this, the campus's child care does not care for children under the age of eighteen months and she strongly suggests placing a child's name on the list directly after their birth to ensure the child receives a child care spot (D. Dinney, personal communication, June 2, 2015).

The final topic mentioned is the negative attitudes Aboriginal students face from some post-secondary staff. Yuzicapi and Pickerell (2009) state, "Negative attitudes towards Aboriginal students were prevalent in some SIAST faculty and staff at both post-secondary and basic education levels. Others indicated that Aboriginal students often experience racism outside the SIAST environment, particularly when trying to find suitable housing and setting up bank accounts"(p. 15).

Discussion

My MSW practicum placement at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Prince Albert Campus, was an educational growing experience. I learned about the complex nature of the campus's structure and programs, and I gained a greater understanding of graduate-level social work practice and skills. In addition, I obtained graduate-level knowledge of social work theories utilizing feminist social work theory and social constructivist theory. I acknowledged education to be advantageous, however, unobtainable for many. There remains several divides: between those who have children and those without, those with financial supports and those without, those who are First Nations and those who are not, and finally those who are women and those who are men.

It is my view, as a Master's-level social work student, that more effort needs to be taken to make education less discriminatory and more accessible for those students who do not fit into the mold which post-secondary educational institutions accommodate.

As a post-secondary counsellor, it is important to become aware of all the post-secondary funding options. The information I researched for my public presentation to staff and students on other funding opportunities was relayed to all post-secondary counsellors. I offered this information to students and together we found funding options that would work for their situation and programming. Finding available funding for students who would otherwise not be able to access higher education offers post-secondary counsellors moments where they feel they are indeed making a difference. Although, most importantly, the difference is not only for the clients themselves, but also extends to their family, community, society, and to our nation as a whole. Offering opportunities for individuals to escape poverty is life-changing.

Ethics and Field Practicum

Much of social work practice and theory is to bring equality into a healthy society while advocating for oppressive groups to be less marginalized. While practicing with academic counsellors at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, I recognized several ways in which their counselling ethics were in accordance with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) code of ethics, regardless of their graduate discipline. For example, the top priority of Saskatchewan Polytechnic counsellors was their clients, which is equivalent to CASW's top priority as the Ethical Responsibility to Clients: "Social workers maintain the best interest of clients as a priority, with due regard to the respective interests of others" (CASW, 2005).

When working with individuals at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, social workers must always keep in mind their social work ethics for the betterment of the client, profession, agency, and society as a whole. When considering the activities I participated in throughout my practicum placement, I noted numerous social work ethical principles that applied to the experiences I faced. Referring to the CASW's Standards for Ethical Practice, the key ethical principles that apply include: Section 1.0 Ethical Responsibilities to the Clients: Priority of Clients' Interests, Demonstrate Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity, Promote Client Self-Determination and Informed Consent, Protect Privacy and Confidentiality, Protection of Vulnerable Members of Society, and Maintenance and Handling of Client Records; Section 2.0: Ethical Responsibilities in Professional Relationships: Appropriate Professional Boundaries, No Exploitation for Personal or Professional Gain; Section 3.0 Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues: Respect, Collaboration and Consultation; Section 4.0 Ethical Responsibilities to the Workplace; and Section 7.0 Ethical Responsibilities to the Profession: Maintain and Enhance Reputation of Profession, Support Regulatory Practices (CASW, 2005).

Although many ethical principles were applied, the most essential one utilized was section 8.0 The Ethical Responsibility to Society, which states

“Social workers advocate for change in the best interest of the clients and for the overall benefit of society, the environment and the global community. In performing their responsibilities to society, social workers frequently must balance individual rights to self-determination with protection of vulnerable members of society from harm. These dual ethical responsibilities are the hallmark of the social profession and require well-developed and complex professional skills” (CASW, 2005; p. 24).

It is these professional skills I wanted to focus most on as addressing and advocating for what the client wants and/or needs is an empowering way to create justice for all.

Limitations in Practice

Although my practicum placement had many successful times, particularly with clients and in meeting my goals and objectives, it did not come without limitations. Even though I was very excited to learn about post-secondary counselling at Saskatchewan Polytechnic, my placement was very broad and complex and encompassed many specifics. Every day introduced another story and a new learning experience. In order to become more of an expert in one area, I would have needed to remain in that area.

Another limitation to my practicum was the time of year. Due to post-secondary's annual schedule of beginning most classes in the fall and closing down classes in the spring, I feel as though I missed an integral part of how students are feeling at the earlier stages of their education year.

Areas for Growth

Learning the systems and barriers that are in play with post-secondary education at SPPA was advantageous to my educational experience and future practice as an MSW employee. Using this knowledge will allow me to further advocate for change in these areas in addition to expanding my knowledge and experience as a youth social worker. I commit to keeping abreast of the latest literature pertaining to these barriers as well as to advocating for change within the system.

I further commit to policy development where appropriate. When policy dictates that we continue to practice where barriers exist, I will challenge this practice. I will also review and analyze assessment tools as I have learned that not all tools are reliable or valid. When I am told to utilize assessments, I will research these tools and challenge their validity and reliability when appropriate. Working with youth, I will continue to plan, program, and advocate for opportunities that will enhance their future education offering the greatest future possible.

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