

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
TEACHING JOB SEEKING SKILLS  
TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:  
TRADITIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL METHODS COMPARED

BY

JOHN R. WALKER

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## ABSTRACT

Obtaining suitable employment is a serious problem for many young people. In spite of the importance of this issue very little research has been published on teaching the actual skills needed to find employment. The present study compared traditional and behavioral methods of teaching job seeking skills. The traditional approach involved communicating information to students by the use of lectures, discussions, and written and audiovisual materials. The behavioral approach involved most of the features of the traditional approach but in addition, emphasized practice in the use of a variety of job seeking techniques. Specific instructions, modeling, behavioral rehearsal, shaping, and reinforcement were used to teach skills in completing job applications, participating in job interviews, making inquiries with friends and employers, and in using several other job seeking techniques.

Eighty-one students in a parochial high school participated in either the behavioral program, the traditional program, or a control program that did not involve job seeking skills. When the nine small groups completed the seven hour programs students were compared in their performance in standard job applications and job interviews

and in subsequent employment experience. Differences among the groups were found only in job interview performance. Experienced interviewers rated students in the traditional and behavioral programs as being more likely to obtain employment and as being higher in attentiveness and grooming than students in the control condition. Students in the traditional program obtained higher ratings of their statement of qualifications than students in the behavioral program but there was no significant difference between these programs in interviewer's employment rating. Objective measures of interview performance revealed that the largest difference among the groups was on the social behavior dimension with students in the behavioral program more frequently introducing themselves, shaking hands, mentioning the interviewer's name, and finishing the interview with a call back ending. Students in the behavioral program also differed from students in the traditional program in having a relatively longer duration of gaze.

At least a modest relationship was found between the objective measures and the interviewer's employment rating and it was suggested that in future both types of measures should be used. Students at the parochial school involved in this study were quite strong academically and quite successful in obtaining employment and it would be of interest in future to evaluate these programs with a more disadvantaged population. In addition, more time should be

devoted to the job seeking skills program than the approximately seven hours in this study and a more comprehensive component on completing job application forms is needed.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Finding suitable employment is an important task for almost every young person whether he or she is leaving the educational system to seek permanent employment or seeking employment to finance further education. Statistics indicate that this task is a formidable one. The Canada Labour Force Survey for the month of October, 1977 reported that the unemployment rate was 16.5% for individuals from 15 to 19 years of age and 5.1% for those 25 years and over (Statistics Canada, 1977). In general, the unemployment rate for persons 19 years and under has been found to be two and a half to three times higher than that for persons 25 years and over. This has been a consistent finding in recent years (1960, 1965, and 1970) both in times of high and of low unemployment (Statistics Canada, 1971). Unemployment rates have been found to be higher still for those young people who have completed fewer years of education (Statistics Canada, 1971).

In spite of the importance of employment for the young person, most of the work published in the field of vocational guidance has been restricted to career decision making and to informing students about preparation required

for various careers. Very little research has been published on teaching the actual skills needed to find employment. Teaching job seeking skills before the student leaves the educational system would seem to offer a number of potential advantages. At present, most of the services offered to help those with problems in obtaining employment require the individual to approach a public agency such as the local Canada Employment Centre. Many of those for whom the problem is most severe are likely to make little use of formal helping agencies. Programs offered within the educational system would have the advantage of reaching many more people. Special efforts could also be directed to those most in need of assistance. Programs which are provided before students enter the labour force can be more preventative in emphasis whereas many of the programs presently available deal with people after they have encountered employment problems.

In considering interventions to increase the job seeking skills and the employment prospects of young people a number of issues will be examined. First, research on the employee selection process will be reviewed briefly. This research has clear implications for the person who is seeking employment. Then, interventions designed to improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged individuals will be described. Particular emphasis will be placed on methods of evaluating such programs. Although most of the programs

that appear in the literature have been developed with populations other than high school students, it should not be difficult to adapt these approaches to this group. Following this, evidence on the success of various job seeking techniques will be examined. Finally, the present study will be described.

### The Selection Process

In spite of questions about the validity of the selection interview in predicting future job performance (Mayfield, 1964, Schmitt, 1976, Wagner, 1949, Wright, 1969, and Ulrich and Trumbo, 1965) the employment interview remains the most widely used selection device in business and industry (Ulrich and Trumbo, 1965). Although most of the research on the selection interview has focused on biases in the decision making process and on increasing the reliability of the selection process (from the employer's point of view), there have been a number of studies which have important implications for the preparation of individuals to seek employment. Webster (1964) reported a series of studies carried out at McGill University on decision making in the employment interview. One of the most interesting studies in this series was carried out by Springbett (and was described in a briefer form in Springbett, 1958). Springbett was particularly interested in the effects of

three types of information considered by the interviewer: a completed application form, the appearance of the physically present applicant, and the interview itself. In the first study, Springbett varied the order of presentation of these materials in genuine employment interviews in industrial settings. Six pairs of interviewers from four companies (representing manufacturing, public utilities, transport, and retail sales) each interviewed eight applicants who were being seriously considered for specific jobs. The interviewers alternated between active interviewer and passive observer over the eight interviews. Each interviewer rated the application form and appearance and then made a final assessment upon completion of the interview. The interviewers made their ratings completely independently and the order in which the application form and appearance were rated was varied systematically with one interviewer rating appearance first and then the application and the other interviewer rating in the other order. Because this study involved real job interviews and real decisions it was not possible to control the amount or type of information made available in the interview itself. Results of this study will be considered after the description of another study in this series. In a second study, Springbett studied the decision making process in a more controlled situation in which it was possible to vary systematically the information given in a simulated selection situation. Twenty-seven

personnel officers from the Canadian Army were each asked to assess three candidates for an officer training program. The three candidates had previously been judged to be very good, average, or dubious in appearance. Three application forms and three personal histories were also prepared which could reasonably apply to each. These were previously judged by a chief army personnel officer to be typical of very good, average, or dubious applicants. A personal history read by the applicant was used instead of an interview in order to control the information presented. The personal history was designed to cover information normally sought in the interview. The "interviews" were carried out in such a way that all possible orders of information and degrees of favorableness of information were covered.

Springbett found that the results of the industrial study and the laboratory study were very consistent with each other. The first ratings (when reduced to accept/reject decisions) were significantly related to the final decision, whether the first rating was based on the application form, appearance, or personal history. Agreement between the first rating and the final rating occurred in 73% of the 177 cases. An initial rating of rejection (given in 29% of the cases) was more likely to be upheld than one of acceptance. It was also found that even one rating in the rejection range greatly increased the