

action), or "diffused" (characterized by ambiguous or conflicting goals and inconsistent efforts to achieve those goals). To delineate the effects of focus on participants' action, the two categories of projects were examined in terms of (a) the dyadic communication styles that emerged, (b) the kinds of project-related activities that parents and adolescents engaged in, and (c) participants' success in achieving their projects.

### **Mattering in family career development projects**

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This investigation is concerned with how mattering, as a form of social inclusion, is an aspect of family career development projects. Career development projects signify the medium- and long-term joint actions that families use as they construct and organize present and future education, work, employment, and other life choices for their adolescents (Young et al., 2001). Mattering refers to the degree of perceived relevance to either specific other people (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Marshall, 2001) or the larger social context (Fromm, 1941). Of interest in this study is mattering to the larger social context given the concern regarding youths' social inclusion as they make the transition from school to work (Keiselbach, 2003). A protocol, developed by Young and colleagues (Young, et al., 1997, 1999), was employed to assess, over a 6 month period, the joint actions of 20 Canadian volunteer parent-adolescent dyads. Findings indicate that the adolescents' relevance to the social context outside the family is directed toward two areas: (a) social skills that enable the establishment of future relationships and (b) education and employment that ensures value to the work force. Efforts to prevent marginalization include employment of external resources and internal family assets. Implications for practice are suggested.

### **The family as a context where individuals construct meanings for work/professional activities**

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In the last thirty years, in the so-called developed western societies, when the myth of full employment arose, several researches focused on a complete change of the meanings given to work. They stated that work lost his central value in the daily life of people (Laville, 1999; Méda, 1999; Schnapper, 1998). Today, in view of the uncertainty and lack of employment and of the constant rising of unemployment, the professional activity is still understood as one of the more important sources of autonomy, citizenship and meaning for human life (Rifkin, 1996). Therefore, we may say that work did not lose importance in people's life, but life is not limited to professional activities. It could and should be enriched by other investments that complement it, such as the family, the household, leisure, cultural activities... (Laville, 1999). Because the meanings about any human reality are constructed on shared social contexts, including the more proximal ones, a research is being made about the meanings that Portuguese adolescents and youngsters give to work and how the nuclear family context (the parents) can stimulate those meanings. A questionnaire of self-report: "Meanings Given to Work" (SAT) was purposely constructed for this study. The data were collected from a sample of 731 adolescents, at the 9th and 12th school grade (EB2,3 and secondary schools in the North Region), 327 fathers and 358 mothers. The findings about the meanings that parents and children attribute to work/professional activity are presented and discussed, focusing on its continuities and discontinuities.