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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intercultural Partnering for the Benefit of South Africa Township High School Students

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Abstract

An intercultural partnership was formed to meet South African township high schools’ need to provide career education and identify barriers and hope in relation to career choice. The objective of this study was to collect data on the students’ perceptions of career choice, barriers prohibiting students from engaging in a career of choice and their general hopefulness. A non-experimental, descriptive study was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis strategies was used. A significant difference was found based on gender in relation to having career options and with regard to how knowledge about careers is gained. Despite barriers to career choice, students are hopeful about the future. Occupational deprivation is a risk factor for South African youth living in disadvantaged communities. Results are from two township high schools in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. English as a second language may have influenced data analysis. Future research must explore the role of occupational therapy in South African township high schools and the issue of career choice among South African youth. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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Introduction

Many occupational therapy students in the United States have opportunities to conduct international service learning. Service learning can induce deep changes in psychosocial development, increasing a student’s appreciation for issues of dignity, justice and equity (Green, 1997; Lattanzi and Pechak, 2011). These opportunities meet a university’s goal of internationalization; an endeavour that promotes a deeper awareness of the equity and justice issues facing other cultures and provides students and faculty members with the tools needed to actively engage in social transformation (Qiang, 2003). This study describes an interprofessional and intercultural collaboration to close skills gaps in township high school students in South Africa. Calls for interprofessional education by the Commission on Education of Health Professionals have been answered by health education programmes that develop such opportunities (Pechak et al., 2013).

An interprofessional team of American university students and faculty members from business, education, healthcare and math and science collaborated with a South African university to deliver teacher training, offer business strategies, develop math and science curriculum and facilitate career development in two public township high schools in the Eastern Cape of South African. The aim of the project was reciprocal intercultural partnering to facilitate global citizenship and increase cultural competence in the American students while meeting the expressed needs of two South African...
township high schools. This paper will focus on the research that came out of the occupational therapy project which focused on career choice in ninth grade township high school students.

Occupational therapy’s contributions in South African township high schools

After close communication and coordination with the community studied (Lattanzi and Pechak, 2011), it was determined that ninth grade teachers in the township high schools wanted the American team to provide a career assessment in Life Orientation courses in order to place ninth graders into specific 10th grade classes. Because work is a major life occupation that can lead to the health and wellness of individuals and societies and occupational therapists are trained in assessing meaningful life occupations for individuals across the lifespan, the occupational therapy team appeared to be a natural fit to fill this need. In addition, occupational therapists may conceptualize a lack of choice as occupational deprivation, thus addressing the role of international service learning in fostering occupational therapy students’ appreciation for these issues (Green, 1997; Lattanzi and Pechak, 2011). Occupational deprivation is described by Wilcock as the “influence of an external circumstance that keeps a person from acquiring, using, or enjoying something” (1998, p. 145).

In an effort to minimize the external circumstances that keep a young person from acquiring a meaningful occupation, it is important to educate high school students to the world of work. Watson et al. (2010) assert that the high school curriculum for the learning area of work and world is not adequately introducing careers to Black South African youth. Black disadvantaged youth have limited views on career education and knowledge of the world of work (Watson et al., 2010). This may be due to a lack of clearly defined learning objectives set by the South Africa Department of Education (Buthelezi et al., 2009). To achieve informed decisions about careers, the South African Department of Education (SADE) added career and vocational guidance to the national Life Orientation (LO) curriculum (Buthelezi et al., 2009).

Life Orientation is one of eight learning areas covered in the national curriculum in South African public schools. The main purpose of the course is to provide students with skills, knowledge, attitudes and values necessary to face challenges as responsible and informed young adults (Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa, 2012). One of the LO course components is orientation to the world of work. The purpose of this learning area in the LO curriculum is to assist students to make informed decisions regarding study and career choices (Department: Basic Education Republic of South Africa, 2012).

History of Career Choice for Blacks in South African

Black South Africans comprise 80% of the South African population, yet less than 8% of South African career development research is focused on this group (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Of those 80%, only 26.8% of Black South Africans, aged 20 years and older, reported completing high school as their highest level of education (Statistics South Africa, 2012). In the past, Black South Africans who were able to successfully complete school were limited to career choices of policing, teaching, nursing and the military (Buthelezi et al., 2009). In addition, South African students are making career choices in an economic climate where there are increasing unemployment and affirmative action policies that aim to readdress past injustices regarding employment (Creed et al., 2003). Although the LO curriculum outlines learning objectives for goal making, there are discrepancies between what is taught and students’ career goals. And career research conducted in South Africa indicates disadvantaged students have unrealistic and non-marketable career goals (Watson, 2010).

Barriers to career choice for South African teenagers

In South Africa, 80% of mothers reside in the homes and 48% of fathers live in the home. Children who live at home with their parents are more likely to be at or above their grade level (Chuong and Operario, 2012). It is estimated that 2,500,000 million South African children are orphaned due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (UNAIDS, 2008). The number is expected to peak in 2015, leaving 3 million South African maternal orphans and 4.7 million South African paternal orphans (Johnson and Dorrington, 2001). Black South African children who are orphaned are vulnerable to educational delays in school, being enrolled in school late and low levels of school attendance (Chuong and Operario, 2012).
Role models can have a significant impact on student’s self-efficacy that can impact the student’s career development. Although role models in the home have a positive effect on students in South Africa (Chuong and Operario, 2012), peers in the community often have a negative effect on student’s self-efficacy (Buthelezi et al., 2009). South African peers often ostracize students who report aspirations to succeed. In addition, unfavourable adult attitudes contributed to children’s low self-efficacy (Buthelezi et al., 2009).

Poverty is a barrier that limits the amount of resources children need to be successful in school, creating occupational deprivation, which may decrease opportunities to further their education. In addition, Black South African students may have difficulty financing the education needed for high status occupations. More than 80% of the Black South African students have reported a high status occupation as their aspired occupation whereas less than 2% of the population was interested in skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled occupations (Watson et al., 2010). The labour market trend in the Eastern Cape indicates that 7.88% of the population was employed in a professional career, whereas the rest of the population was employed in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

Schools in South African townships are significantly underfunded compared with White schools (Bonner and Segal, 1998). This lack of funding has led to overcrowding, ill-resourced classrooms and a shortage of qualified teachers (Bonner and Segal, 1998). The high school curriculum for the learning areas of work and world is not adequately introducing careers to Black South African youth (Watson et al., 2010). In order to ensure occupational choice in South Africa, it is important to understand the perspectives of students themselves and the barriers they face in relation to career choice in their communities. Therefore, the objectives of this research focused on finding information about South African township high school students’ perspectives on career choice, barriers to career choice and their hope for the future.

Method

A non-experimental, descriptive study design, using quantitative methods to explore frequencies and qualitative methods to explore the meaning of constructs, was used to understand career choice, barriers to career choice and hope for the future in teenagers in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS for Window, Version 16.0) was used to explore quantitative data and thematic content analysis was used to understand the meaning of these constructs to participants. Prior to implementation, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the university involved in the project.

Participants

Male and female high school students from two South African township high schools were recruited to the study with parental consent. All participants were students in the ninth grade and all were taking the Life Orientation class. There were no exclusion criteria thus all ninth graders were queried. Typical ninth graders in the high schools were 15 years of age and female students slightly outnumber the male students. The school was mandated by the South African government to use English in the classroom whereas other languages were forbidden to be used for education purposes or socially on school grounds. The majority of the students spoke English as a second language with isiXhosa being the predominant language spoken at home.

Instruments

Career development questionnaire

A career development questionnaire was developed by the researchers in order to better understand the concepts being studied. Demographic information, multiple choice, open-ended and dichotomous questions were used to elicit information on career choice. Questions such as “Do you believe you have a choice of careers?” and “How important is career education to you?” were followed by space for comments and prompts. For the question “When thinking of a career, which of the following do you do?”, participants could choose from options such as “I get ideas from television and media”, “I talk to my parents” and “I have conversations with adults in my community”. These types of questions reveal the words of the participants and therefore have face validity and credibility (Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness was established by ensuring credibility. Credibility, similar to internal validity, answered the questions of congruency of findings with reality (Shenton, 2004). Credibility was further established in the pre-experience planning/preparation stage by holding seminars where
experts and cultural representatives taught American students about the culture under study (Lattanzi and Pechak, 2011). Triangulation was sought by involving two high schools with a wide range of informants who were able to provide a rich overview of attitudes and experiences (Shenton, 2004). This instrument generated both objective and subjective data.

The State Hope Scale

The State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996) is a dispositional self-report measure of hope using an eight-item Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Definitely false) to 4 (Definitely true). Scores are summed for the Hope Scale with a range of 8–32. Hope is defined as the process of thinking about personal goals, the motivation to move forward towards goals and ways of achieving goals. The scale measures these two dimensions of hope, which are described as belief in one’s capacity to initiate and sustain actions (agency) and belief in one’s capacity to generate routes (pathways). The State Hope Scale meets psychometric standards for a self-report scale and has high internal consistency and construct and discriminate validity with the subscales being factorially identifiable as subcomponents of the measure (Snyder et al., 1996). When measured by the State Hope Scale, people with higher hope report having more routes to their goals and more mental agency to apply to these routes (Snyder et al., 2002). Items for agency and pathways are aggregated based on the theory that both factors are necessary components of hope (Snyder et al., 1998). Snyder et al. (1991) demonstrated good reliability for the scale and reported Cronbach alphas of 0.74 to 0.84 for overall hope, 0.71 to 0.76 for agency items and 0.63 to 0.80 for pathway items when sampling student and clinical populations. Test–retest statistics were at 0.80 for up to 10 weeks, providing further evidence of the reliability of the scale. This instrument generated objective data on hope in the participants.

Procedures

All materials were presented to the students throughout school hours, during the Life Orientation class. Students signed assent forms while parents signed consent forms sent home by school administrators. A ninth grade Life Orientation curriculum dedicates 11 hours over the course of 40 weeks on the learning area of world of work. Occupational therapy students and a faculty member were given 4 hours, 4 days a week for 3 weeks to address career choice with the ninth graders. Quantitative data were analysed and frequencies of data were obtained by using SPSS. For the qualitative data, several readings of the raw data were undertaken in order to generate themes. The themes were then coded and categorized. The qualitative data provided the researchers with participant’s perspectives on factors that influence career choice, what participants perceive as barriers and their state of hope.

Quantitative results

A total of 353 participants, 165 male and 192 female students, participated in the study. When students were asked how important education about careers was to them, 95.4% of the participants indicated that their career education is very important to them. Students were also asked if they feel as though they have a choice of careers. Fifty-four percent of the participants indicated that they definitely have a choice of careers (see Figure 1). There was a significant difference found when male (M = 1.69, SD 0.927, n = 156) and female participants

![Figure 1 Do you feel you have a choice of careers?](image-url)
(M = 1.51, SD = 0.661, n = 195), t (270.874) = -2.097, p < 0.05, were asked if they have career options. Female participants reported that they feel as though they have more choice than their male counterparts.

On the career development questionnaire, there was a series of nine yes and no questions regarding influences on choosing a career (see Figure 2). A significant difference was found between male (M = 0.46, SD = 0.500, n = 164) and female participants (M = 0.35, SD = 0.477, n = 191), t (339.3) = -2.622, p < 0.05, when asked if they talk to adults about career choices with male participants reporting they talk to adults more. There was also a significant difference between the genders when asked if doing paid work influenced their career choice, with male participants (M = 0.74, SD = 0.441, n = 160) more often than female participants (M = 0.56, SD = 0.498, n = 189), t (346.231) = -3.514, p < 0.05.

When asked about barriers preventing youth from finding a meaningful career, data analysis of the participant’s responses from the career development questionnaire revealed five distinct themes. When the students were asked “Today, in 2012, do you believe there are barriers that could stop you from finding a meaningful career for yourself?”, the results were almost evenly split with 51.18% of the participants responding “yes” and 48.82% responding “no”. For those participants who responded yes, the categories that emerged were social factors (35.26%), lack of resources (41.62%) and poor quality of education (13.29%) (see Figure 3). Of the participants who responded “Yes there are barriers”, the common themes that emerged were social factors, lack of resources and poor quality of education.

**Qualitative results**

When participants were asked on the career assessment, “What is the meaning of work to your family?” responses revolved around five principle themes. The five themes that emerged were (a) importance, (b) happiness, (c) making money, (d) having basic needs of food and housing, and (e) helping/providing services for family and others.

Twenty percent (n = 200) of the students reported work as important. Students replied by stating, “Work is a big thing”, “It’s something that is important to me” and “Work is something you need in your life”. Overall, the students value work and believe it is significant.

Forty-one percent of the participants (n = 200) stated work is to make one happy. A participant stated, “Work means more than just money and food, work is about doing what I like and from my own opinion, work has to make me happy”. A participant reported, “My career makes me happy because I love it and I’m interested to it so that is why I’m happy for it and my family supports me to it”. Another participant stated, “Definitely I will be happy because I will be working where I want”. Participant’s responses indicate that participants believe a meaningful career is one that makes them happy.

Money was another ongoing theme of the responses. Twenty-one percent (n = 200) of the participants mentioned money when defining the meaning of work to their family. Participants mentioned money for various reasons such as food, housing and to support their family. A participant stated, “Meaning to me making money for food and housing because some of us are poor”. In addition, “Doing what you love and making money for food and housing in order to support your family”.

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Figure 2 Factors that influence career career decisions
Fifteen and a half percent (n = 200) of the participants mentioned food and housing when asked about the meaning of work to their family. A participant stated, “Work is more important in my family some people they are not working so they don’t have enough food, clothing etc.” Another participant stated, “Means just making money for food and housing”.

The last theme that emerged was that the meaning of work is to help/provide services for family/community. Thirty and a half percent (n = 200) reported helping/serving family and community is the meaning work. A participant reported, “I want to help people in our country and I want my parents and community to be proud and happy about my career”. Another participant stated, “In my own perspective, work means the responsibility to feel proud of yourself after changing other peoples lives”. These responses indicate that the participants are concerned about the welfare of those around them as well as themselves.

Social factors

Social factors were categorized by peer pressure, corruption, lack of parental support and jealousy. Fifty-three percent of the social factors were reported as peer pressure. Some of the students explained that their friends do not think school is worth it. “Some of my friends don’t want me to go to school and they said ‘what are you going to gain at school’ and I said I want to follow my career”. Other students stated that their friends push them towards drinking and drug use. “Friends you have will make you lose what you were wishing for. Like pushing you to drink or do drugs and you will maybe lose what you were wishing for”. Results indicate that students identified their friends/peers as barriers when finding a meaningful career.

Corruption accounted for 9% of the social factors identified as barriers to finding a meaningful career. Some of the students simply stated that they thought their school was corrupt. While other students discussed corruption in the macro-system, “In hospitals people are not getting medicine and that make me feel bad and it’s like the minister of health doesn’t care about that”, one student said, “Because in 2012 there’s a lot of corruption”. Crime, theft and strikes were also categories as corruption. Participants in the study identified corruption in their school and community as barriers when finding a meaningful career.

Another category under social factors was lack of parental support, which accounted for 20% of the social factors. Several students’ stated that their parents did not support them in their career choice. “My parents they say what I want to be it doesn’t pay enough money and I do it for passion not for the money”. Another student said, “Yes they are barriers and my father is one of them, he does not support my dream or career”. There were also students who stated that the lack of support was absence of parental presence in the home. “I wish I can have someone who can help me because my mom is always working”. Results indicate that the lack of parental support, emotionally and physically, is a barrier when finding a meaningful career.

The last category under social factors is jealousy. Jealousy accounted for 18% of the social factor responses. Several responses included that there were “people” or “they” who were jealous. “People become so jealous about what you want because they don’t have the opportunities I have”. Some students explained that they did not think that other individuals wanted to see them succeed. “Because they will stop you, they don’t want to see you be succeed they are jealous. They don’t want to see you work”. Another student said, “There are people who have jealousy of what I do, always looking at me they are ready to talk bad stuff”. “Because some people in the communities don’t want other people to be successful in life”. Participants in the study indicated that feelings of jealousy from other members in their community are a barrier to them finding a meaningful career.

Lack of resources

When students responded yes and listed their barriers, a lack of resources student would need to attend college accounted for 41.6% of the yes responses. The
researchers categorized lack of money and lack of transportation as resources. Money accounted for 75% of the resource responses. Several students simply stated that “money was a barrier while other students explained further. “At home we don’t have enough money to make my dream or career come through”. Another student stated, “My parents don’t have money for me to succeed in my dream and my choice”. The lack of money affect the children ability to attain school supplies, “I don’t have money for school fees. When you don’t have money for school here in school they don’t give you textbook. And the teachers tells you go out of the classroom because you don’t have textbook to read or learn”. Students also see money as a barrier to further their education. “Shortage of money for me to study further” and “My parent can’t afford to pay me the fees of university”. Results indicate that the lack of money is a barrier for students because they are not able to have supplies for school or to further their education in order to find a meaningful career.

Another resource that students identified as a barrier to finding a meaningful career was transportation (19%) to school. Several students stated that not having a car made it difficult to arrive at school. Some students discussed that they lived far away and it was challenging for them to get to school. “Because I live far away and at home we don’t have car”. Other transportation in the community such as buses are also difficult to reach. “The transportation is very scarce”. Results indicate that students find it difficult to find transportation in order to attend school. Transportation inhibits their attendance thus negatively influence their education and future careers.

Poor-quality education

The last theme that emerged as an identified barrier was poor-quality education in the high school, which accounted for 13% of the yes responses. Comments regarding schooling and the student’s education were a common thread across the participants in the study. Some students identified their own struggles in school. “I can’t write”, “I cannot do Xhosa because I was in an English schools [sic] doing home language”, “Not being able to read my books” and “Failing exams”. Some students discussed not have sufficient education for careers. “Not getting enough information about what I want to do, and not doing practiced courses” and “I might be considered too young to find my dream job/career, also the lack of education might result to rejection by many companies”. Other students talked about school structure. “Not choosing right subjects”, “It depends on how you passed grade 9, because you choose the subjects” and “My school has the course I want, but the problem is that I don’t have the full resources I need to fit in my meaningful career”. Other students said their teachers were barrier for them to find a meaningful career. “Teachers says [sic] you no good to the subject but you want that subject”. Results indicate that the participants feel as though their quality of education is a barrier for them when thinking about a meaningful career.

Resilience and positive social factors

Forty-nine percent of the participants stated that they did not believe there were barriers preventing them from finding a meaningful career. Two common themes that emerged from the students, who responded no, were resilience and social factors. A theme of resilience was found when participants were asked about barriers that could stop them from finding a meaningful career. Of the 48.82% students that reported no barriers, 13.33% of student’s responses were categorized as resilient. Participant’s responses were focused on not giving up. Many of the students’ responses emphasized “No one” being able to stop them from attaining a career. One student stated, “No there’s no one can stop me from finding my career if someone like that you must stop him/she because it will effect you to think”. Another student reported, “No one or nothing can stop me from finding my career for myself because I believe in myself”. Other participants reported not letting barriers interfere with accomplishing their dreams. “Sometimes it can be money problems, people but it cannot stop me from what I want because dreams do come true so I will not give no matter which barriers face me” and “I am more willing to sacrifice or do anything to do my dream into reality”. Students also focused their responses on making a difference in world/community. Students explained, “No there are no barriers in my life because helping a community and being a hero it’s everyone’s dream” and “I believe that one day I can do something in the world that I can change”. Other students were direct in their response when stating there are no barriers. Students
stated, “No! I am gonna fight those barriers [sic] could stop me”, “Nothing can stop me” and “No there are no barriers that could stop me from doing my career”.

Social factors

Social factors also accounted for 3% of the 48.82% of students who reported no barriers. Social factors were categorized as parental support when students reported no barriers. Having parental support was a continuous theme when students reported no barriers. One student attributed having no barriers due to support from both their parents and teachers. “My parents told me everyday you will be what you want to. Also teachers told me everyday at school”. Another student stated, “No barriers because my parents support me in what I want to do”. There were also students that recognized barriers but then stated barriers are not able to “stop” them from reaching their career. One student explained, “There are but with the support of my family and god in the other side nothing can stop me from doing what I want to do”. There were also responses where students stated their parents wanted them to do better. “No, because my parents wants to see me as better person”.

On the reflection questionnaire, one of the items states, “here are some ideas I think would help me to find a meaningful career”. From the participant’s responses, five themes emerged, observation, research, guest speaker, education/perseverance and role models. Several of the students stated that they would like to learn about careers by observing other individuals performing the duties necessary to complete a certain occupation. A few of the responses were, “Travel of visit people”, “Visit the work that I want to do and question them”, “If someone could show his/her work in practical and see how it is done” and “See how it’s done”. Results indicate that students would like to learn about their careers by observing an individual who is current in that occupation.

Other students would like to find more information about careers by researching their careers. Some students indicated using resources such as the Internet and books, “For me to read newspapers, magazines, ask people’s opinion and check the Internet”, “By searching Google and libraries” and “I will research about information about a [sic] successful business women”. Results indicate that some of the participants wanted to take it upon themselves to learn more about their meaningful career by researching the information themselves.

The third theme that emerged was that students wanted experienced workers to come into school and talk with them about different careers. Several students responded with “A motivational speaker”. Other students reported that they would like a professional to come in and speak with them about their field. “People to tell me more about my career”, “I would like to have a person to teach me more about music and pilots” and “I would like people from the fields to come and speak to us”. Results indicate that students are requesting advice to learn more about occupations in order to choose a meaningful career.

The fourth theme that emerged was education and perseverance. Participants reported an interest in improving themselves through hard work. “Is to work hard and get what I want” and “By studying harder and have good successful career”. Indicating participants want to take an active role in their education in order to become successful in their future. In addition to persevering in their studies, participants felt responsible for their education and successes. “Work hard on my books and believe in myself and face every disadvantage that I go through” and “I think I should ask other people to teach me more about this career I want to know how to do it”. Overall, participants have an understanding that they must take an active role in their education by taking responsibility for their learning.

The fifth theme that emerged was a request for role models. Many of the participants stated benefits of having someone who have experience in the field that they are interested in. “I would like to find someone who’s going to help me about my career” and “Get to see a professional or doctor to tell me more about my meaningful career”. This indicates that participants want to hear firsthand what it is like to pursue a particular career, indicating that participants are seeking first-hand information. Participants are also seeking guidance, “Having a role model that guides me for what I want to do” and “To have a mentor of what career I want to do in my life”. In addition, participants had an interest in talking to someone to assist them in finding a career path. “Someone would like come with me and talk to me”, “I want some advice” and “I would like someone like Martha who understands”. Overall, participants believe that they would benefit from having a role model who can guide them when selecting a career.
Hope

Although, participants were split when reporting barriers, the majority of the participants reported that they were hopeful for the future. Hope was measured with questions that evaluated agency and pathway components of hope. Agency is characterized by drive and energy to meet goals (Babyak et al., 1993). Pathway is described as the individual’s perceived accessibility of ways to achieve a goal (Babyak et al., 1993). According to Knapp (1990), it is acceptable to report the mean with ordinal data. The mean scores for the male and female participants were similar ($M = 25.48$ and $25.83$, respectively). Both genders shared the same median score of 26 out of a possible 32 on the Hope Scale. These findings are consistent with what Snyder et al. (1996) found with male and female youth in the United States. This finding indicates that the participants in this study chose “mostly true” for agency and pathway items, indicating they are hopeful about the future.

Discussion

Youth in South African townships today may feel they have a choice of careers, although it is troubling that male students feel they have less than their female counterparts. The good news is these youth report that career education is important, they use available resources to find careers and they are aware of barriers that may be able to stop them from finding a meaningful career. In addition, Black South African high school students are hopeful about the future. The bad news is these youth feel they are getting poor-quality education. Also, our findings support the work of Buthelezi et al. (2009) who found that peers and unfavourable attitudes from adults can have a negative effect on students’ self-efficacy which impacts their career development. This is critical since Zunker (2006) hypothesized that low self-efficacy may lead to avoidance of career decisions. And Creed et al. (2003) reported that self-efficacy has been related to perceived career barrier, career exploratory behaviour and career indecision. Although previous research indicated that HIV/AIDS has had a significant impact on parental presence for children of South Africa, youth in this study reported that HIV/AIDS had no influence on their career choice. This may be because this generation of children is aware of HIV/AIDS and has faith that they can prevent it from becoming a barrier in their life.

It is not clear if students with a more positive outlook on overcoming barriers are inherently more resilient, have learned optimism or are modelling empowered adults. And it appears that youth believe that a higher quality of education, including role models, observations and guest speakers, would help them find the right career. It is not clear if youth who have a negative outlook on career choice lack these characteristics. The concept of money was stated as a major barrier in students furthering their career development. Surprisingly, other research did not address money as a barrier to student’s success. This is particularly an interesting finding, considering 25% of the populations in the Eastern Cape are unemployed and three quarters are living in poverty (Eastern Cape Development Corporation, 2008).

Limitations

A limitation of the present study was that for most of these students, English was their second language. This has the potential to reduce the quality of the findings if students were unsure of the meaning of the questions. One way to overcome this factor in the future would be to translate the questionnaires into the students’ first language. Validity of findings may also be compromised by the researchers’ biases. One way that future research on this topic could avoid this is by using a content expert auditor to assess the quality of the analysis. Finally, it may be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other South African Black high school students.

Conclusion

It appears that occupational therapy may be able to make positive contributions in township high schools in South Africa to address occupational choice, barriers to choice and hope. Clearly, more research is needed to look at gender issues in career choice, resilience and learned helplessness in this population. This would contribute to the body of knowledge on occupational deprivation, equity and justice issues in South Africa and situate occupational therapists as a key team member facilitating changes in societies where injustice prevails.
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