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Exploring the Anticipated Career Aspirations of Youth in a Rural Secondary School: A Visual Participatory Approach¹

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Abstract

Within the South African context, a great deal has been written regarding the anticipated career aspirations of youth, with special reference to the non-marginalised. Consequently, there appears to be a paucity of information related to the aspirations of marginalised secondary school youths, especially rural youth. Furthermore, it seems that the majority of aspiration-related research has been quantitative. This qualitative and exploratory study, underpinned by a critical paradigm, is aimed at filling this gap using photovoice, participant-designed PowerPoint text, video presentation, as well as a focus group interview as data generation tools. The findings are presented in two themes, namely, “Hoped for Future That Transcends Current Lived Experiences of the Self, Family, School, and Community” and “Serving as Agents of Hope to Enable Social Change.” This paper contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding the aspirations of secondary school rural youths from a qualitative perspective and is an attempt to sensitise schools, the Department of Basic Education, and greater South African society to the importance of providing a platform for learners to share their aspirations.

Keywords: aspirations, career, hope, rural, secondary school, youth

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Background and Problem Statement

Black South Africans have experienced structural disadvantage and discrimination for decades, and parents of marginalised youth perceive tertiary education as a means of realising economic advancement (Theron, 2016). The first democratic elections in 1994 brought about political change; however, Theron (2016) posited that black youths are still exposed to inferior schooling in many instances. Despite this, it appears that parents have hope for their children's future and that this hope seems to be an important shaper of their aspirations (Theron, 2016). Notwithstanding all the structural adversities experienced by these learners, they are encouraged by parents to transcend the difficulties and to show courage by imagining a brighter future because "imagination makes it possible . . . to see alternative possibilities and to generate opportunities for action in spaces that are structurally limiting" (Joorst, 2015, p. 63). The aspirations of youth are influenced not only by parents but also by their schooling (Watson et al., 2011), culture (Albien & Naidoo, 2016), social relationships, and economic circumstances (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011) highlighted that the South African curriculum has, at its core, the promotion of social justice and social transformation. Career development is an important aspect of the promotion of social justice in the unequal South African society (Watson, 2010). Learners' career aspirations are catered for in life orientation as a subject in the South African curriculum that is compulsory for Grades 10 to 12 (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Ansell et al. (2018) highlighted that career development and aspirations in the rural context require interventions because it appears that these learners have a limited perspective related to their career possibilities. The need for exploring career aspirations became evident in deliberations with the educators and the school governing body members of a rural secondary school during a community-based university engagement when one of the concerns raised was that rural youths seemed to have lost hope for the future. Consequently, the authors were asked to engage with Grade 10 and 11 learners regarding their career aspirations in order to ascertain whether they had aspirations that transcend their status quo, categorised by inequality. From a research perspective, it appears that career-related research in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa has been mostly quantitative (Watson, 2010) and that there is indeed a need for qualitative research in this area. The purpose of the qualitative visual participatory research presented in this article was thus to explore the career aspirations of youth in a rural secondary school in order to ascertain whether they aspired to overcome their current social inequality conditions.

Rurality

The concept, *rurality*, refers to sparsely populated areas situated away from urban areas, and associated with poverty and lack of infrastructure (Mohangi et al., 2016). Balfour et al. (2008) viewed rurality as a construct, rather than a context, consisting of three interrelated variables, namely, forces, agency, and resources. Within the variable of forces, three aspects were highlighted: space, place, and time. The space dimension refers to the living or inhabited space in which individuals reside (Balfour et al., 2008). The rural space is characterised by connectivity and interdependence with their context, "interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology and politics, and activism and engagement" (Balfour et al., 2008, p. 104, citing Budge, 2004, p. 5). The second variable, agency, refers to "compliance and disruption, activism and entropy" (Balfour et al., 2008, p. 101). Rurality thus has a positive dimension given that agents (the individual and community) in the rural context are regarded as having the ability to transform current practices and beliefs (Balfour et al., 2008). Resources, as the third variable, refers to external material resources—situated resources that reside within the rural community and to psychosocial resources (Balfour et al., 2008). During difficult times people can choose to "fight or flight" (2012, p. 29), however, South Africans seem to flock (pool resources) instead (Ebersöhn, 2012, 2019).

Unpacking Career Aspirations

The term “aspirations” lacks a universal definition (see Harrison & Waller, 2018; Quaglia & Cobb, 1996; Sirin et al., 2004). With reference to marginalised learners, “aspirations offer an explanation and understanding of the complex ways through which people in poor circumstances construct viable lives, and in the process accumulate agency” (Joorst, 2015, p. 61). Careers thus have a hope dimension or, as Yosso (2005) posited, assist to keep personal dreams and hope alive, despite challenges. Hope is a positive motivational state, that is, sensing potential to be successful by goal setting, which provides anchoring or direction (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder’s (2002) hope theory consists of goal setting, pathways (directional thinking) linked to realising one’s goals, agency as action, and constraints or barriers that one has to circumnavigate in order to realise one’s goals.

This study is underpinned by Gottfredson’s (2002, 2004) career theory based on the four main elements of cognitive growth, self-creation, circumscription, and compromise. Cognitive growth is age-related, implying that abstraction develops with age. Each individual creates his or her own individualised self-concept; however, individuals could construct similar cognitive maps of occupations (Gottfredson, 2002, 2004). Circumscription (restriction or containment) denotes a process during which certain career choices are eliminated or rejected due to factors such as social prestige and gender (Gottfredson, 2002, 2004). Gottfredson (2002, 2004) posited that the adolescent has the ability to obviate career options that are deemed to be socially unacceptable or incompatible, in some instances without even being aware that these decisions are being made. Equally important, she stated that the adolescent also eliminates incompatible careers due to interests and abilities. The adolescent thus thinks more consciously whether a career is compatible with the personal and psychological self (Gottfredson, 2002, 2004). The individual also has an ideal or like-to-be career in mind, however, this ideal might not be available, which then results in contemplating a realistic alternative that is still acceptable because it forms part of the cognitive map of acceptable career options (Gottfredson, 1996, 2002).

Compromise refers to adjustment and accommodation of choice due to reality checking (Gottfredson, 2002, 2004). This implies recognition of the role that external constraints could have on a career choice and hence, preferred alternatives are abandoned in order to pursue more accessible yet less compatible options (Gottfredson, 1996, 2002, 2004). The conundrum related to aspirations and career choices is that the social system reproduces social class in several ways (Gottfredson, 2004), for example, gender stereotyping of careers and a possible tendency that adolescents from a lower class aspire to lower-level jobs or careers in comparison to higher-level social class adolescents (Gottfredson, 2004). In addition, the different social systems in which the individual resides result in many youths not being aware of what career options are available (Gottfredson, 2004). They have “limited horizons for action” (Hodkinson, 2008, p. 5), especially in marginalised contexts. Furthermore, many youths are not aware of what a specific career really entails and, often, they are forced into a career that they did not choose due to contextual circumstances or parental influence (Gottfredson, 2004). From an African perspective, Nsamenang’s (2015) socio-ontogenesis theory posited that the individual’s surroundings, that is, the lived social context and culture, play a pivotal role in human development, which by implication concurs with Gottfredson’s position above. Nsamenang (2015) cautioned that culture is context-bound and that Western theories of human development are not able to convey the African perspective. He indicated certain differences between the Western and African perspectives, for example, whereas the Western perspective seems to have an individualistic nature of the development of the individual, the African perspective is collectivist because the community is central to development of the individual; hence the possibility that family and community could have an influence on the adolescent’s decision making (Nsamenang, 2015). He also posited that children and youth have enduring lifespan responsibilities to family and consequently, children in the African context have to undertake assigned roles and responsibilities from a young age

(Nsamenang, 2006). From this perspective, the collectivist roles and responsibilities required from the young from an early age could have a dispositional nature to career choice. With reference to Gottfredson (2002, 2004) and Nsamenang (2006, 2015), the authors of this paper argue that the aspirations of adolescents are related to achieving certain future-related goals or needs of society or community (Nsamenang, 2016; also see Markus & Nurius, 1986), and are needs that can be linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We posit that these Maslow needs (McLeod, 2017) are indeed aspects that the adolescent could take into cognisance when making aspirational choices (see Figure 1).

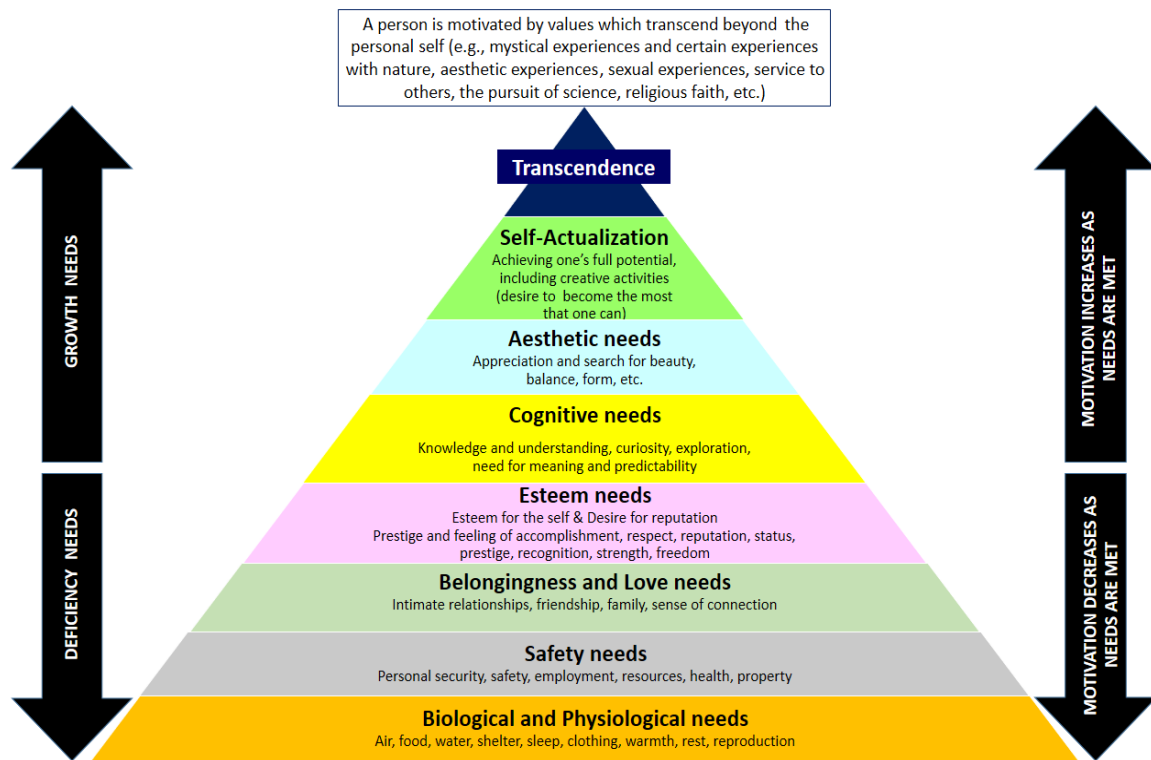


Figure 1: Revised Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Redrawn, Based on the Images of McLeod, 2017)

Methodology

This qualitative study was guided by a visual participatory methodology (Mitchell et al., 2017) and underpinned by a critical paradigm with a focus on promoting social change for the participants (Cherrington, 2015) by providing opportunities to reflect on, critique, and transform current structures, beliefs, or practices that constrain social justice (Wood, 2012). Mitchell et al. (2017) argued for research located in the critical paradigm because it affords opportunities for mutual participation between the researcher and participants that could result in making a difference in people's lives. The participatory dimension enabled us to explore the issue at hand collaboratively while encouraging deliberate involvement from all participants (Reilly, 2010). The focus was on constructing meaningful relationships in order to assist in addressing and exploring the local, identified issue (Reilly, 2010). Although the initial focus was not that the participants engage directly in action, they presented their aspirational intentions to teachers, learners, and their community based on the data generated by means of photovoice, the creation of PowerPoint personalised videos, and focus group discussions. It is important to note that the findings discussed in this paper stem from data generated in Phases 1, 2, and 6—with special reference to the research question: "What are the career aspirations of youths in a rural secondary school?"

To recruit the participants, the principal researcher informed all the Grade 10 and 11 learners about the aspirations project and provided those who showed interest with a one-page information sheet explaining the project in more detail and consent forms to take home to their parents or guardians for signature. Nine learners came forward to participate (five females and four males) ranging from 17 to 19 years in age, all residing in a context of poverty. The dates for the various planned visits to engage with the learners (see Table 1) were negotiated with the school principal and participants, utilising WhatsApp.

Table 1: Phases and Interactions of the Aspirations Project

PHASE	INTERACTIONS
Phase 1	Introduction and Photovoice [July 2016 to August 2016]
Phase 2	<p>ICT sessions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using PowerPoint to make a presentation story with voice recording in movie format [September 2016 to October 2016] <p>Visiting the university over a weekend: Friday and Saturday [September 2016]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with PowerPoint story and video making Exploring the campus <p>Discussions pertaining to aspirations [September 2016]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options and possibilities Subjects required at school to study towards an occupation Online university application process Searching for requirements for career choices Importance of having different options Timing: Options or aspirations are not always realised immediately – they can be realised later in life too Aspirations <u>have to be realistic</u>, but it is not wrong to dream <p>Finalisation of PowerPoint story and video making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adding background music and tweaking Focus group interview based on what they have learned and how they experienced the PowerPoint creation [October 2016]
Phase 3	Preparation and dry run as a group for the PowerPoint presentation to the teachers [November 2016]
Phase 4	Presentation to teachers in church hall [November 2016]
Phase 5	Reflecting on one another's PowerPoints created in Phase 2 [January and February 2017]
Phase 6	<p>Coming to the university to explore [August and September 2017]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group while at university in August 2017 Focus group while at university in September, 2017
Phase 7	Presentation to community, parents, learners and teachers in church hall [November 2017]

Photovoice as data collection procedure was selected because it allows for the portrayal of the participants' lived experiences by means of photographs (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018), which in this instance, was what the participants envisioned they could become. As a data generation tool, photovoice affords persons from challenging backgrounds, and residing in difficult circumstances, an opportunity to share their plight and living experiences with others—namely, the public and policy makers—through a display of their visual artefacts (Community Tool Box, 2020). Given that the participants resided in a rural poverty-stricken context, this approach enabled these secondary school

youths to attach visual meaning to their context and aspirations by means of a camera and printed photographs (Mitchell et al., 2017), which could then be presented to their community and teachers who fulfilled the role of the public (Community Tool Box, 2020). In addition, the digital dimension of photovoice was aligned with the node, “Digital Spaces Using ICT Enabling Learning” that formed part of the larger project in which we were working.

The photovoice method produced visual, textual, and oral data sets: photovoice captions (PVPC) and photovoice feedback presentation (PVFP). Prior to the photovoice sessions, participants were provided with 9-inch tablets that also had a camera and video recording function. Participants shared ideas about how to take photographs, and a discussion was held regarding the ethical considerations related to taking photos of people. The prompt provided to the participants was: “Take six to eight photos of what you want to be one day.” It was also translated into isiXhosa to the group to ensure the best possible understanding of the task at hand. This prompted further discussion, and the learners decided to rephrase the prompt to: “Take six to eight photographs to respond to the prompt, ‘I want to become a . . . because . . .’”

The participants received 90 minutes to engage in the activity and, upon their return, their photos were printed with a colour inkjet printer. The next step required participants to paste each of their photographs onto separate A4-size papers and to write a caption for each photo. Thereafter, participants were video recorded as they presented their photos, captions, and reasons why they had selected their chosen career to the rest of the group (Image Group 1).

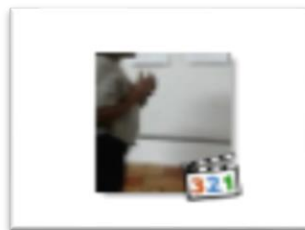


Image Group 1: Presenting Their Photovoice Captions to Their Peers

In the second phase of the engagement—creating the PowerPoint slides text and voice (PPV)—each participant was provided with a laptop with internet connectivity. The session began with some basic PowerPoint training skills. Focus group interviews were also conducted during the project in Phases 2 and 6. Phase 2 questions focused on their ICT skills and ICT experiences (Image Group 2) when they engaged with their PowerPoint creations.



Image Group 2: Designing and Creating Their PowerPoint Slides and Voice Movie (PPSVM)

In Phase 6, two focus group interviews were conducted when the participants visited the university. Because the researcher and participants had not met for some time, it was decided to orientate the

participants' thinking by providing them with poster paper, magazines, and scissors. Participants were requested to cut out and paste any picture that related to their aspirations. This set the scene for the focus group with these questions: "What are you thinking about while you are busy here?" "We've worked on your aspirations, what are aspirations again?" "What are we working about [on] in this group or this project?" The questions posed resulted in participants providing answers, and the researcher probed further with questions such as "Anything else that you want to add?" The second part of the focus group interview required that participants write down any questions that they would like to pose to their peers. The questions posed when we met in September included "What did this project mean to you?" and "What did you gain from this project?"

The data generated from all the phases were analysed according to the suggestions of Creswell (2009, with reference to Tesch, 1990), Wang and Burris (1997), and Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield (2018). The focus of the data analysis was on identifying concerns—to identify key critical aspects presented by the participants during their sharing and presentations of their photos with a view to letting the community become aware of these pleas (Wang & Burris, 1997). Therefore, "the analysis was concerned with trying to understand what their world is like, from their point of view" (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018, p. 4). Each participant's presentation of photos and captions was read individually and coded individually and compared afterwards to ascertain whether similar codes were present (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018). Wang and Burris' (1997) process was adapted as follows: participants selected which photos to present; they then shared their stories based on these photos, which the researcher then transcribed to enable deeper engagement from the researcher's side. This deeper engagement entailed the following, based on Creswell (2009) with reference to Tesch (1990). Analysis started by reading each typed paragraph line by line several times while making pencil notes in the margins per transcript. The question constantly asked was "What does this line or paragraph try to convey?" This was done for each transcript and after all transcripts were read, they were reread twice. The main ideas were then transferred from the transcripts to a notebook for each participant. Similar ideas were coded and re-coded until there was redundancy. Similar codes were grouped together, as well as groups of codes that appeared to link. The various groups of codes were categorised while, lastly, categories that seemed to link were grouped under an overall theme (Creswell, 2009, with reference to Tesch, 1990). In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were used.

Permission to engage with the school was obtained from both the district office of the Department of Basic Education and the Nelson Mandela University's ethics committee. The ethical clearance number for the aforementioned project was H15-EDU-ERE-014.

Presentation of Findings

The findings related to the research question are presented as two themes, each consisting of categories. The two main themes and the categories associated with each are summarised in Table 2 and then discussed below. The specific aspirations of the participants are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Summary of the Findings

Themes	Categories
What are the career aspirations of the youth in a rural secondary school?	
Theme 1: Hoped for future that transcends current lived experiences of the self, family, school and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising above my current circumstances to realise dreams, hope and vision • Transforming my own current lifestyle and ensuring financial stability • Improving my family's living conditions • Aiding the community to transcend their current circumstances to promote hope • Assisting our school with infrastructure
Theme 2: Serving as agents of hope to enable social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating hope within the community • Change is possible through my own role modelling as action

Table 3: Aspirations of Rural Youth

Aspirations of the youth in a rural secondary school in Grades 10 and 11	
Careers to which participating female youths aspired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical doctors (3) [Zodwa, Nomsa, Kwantu] • Accountant (1) [Asanda] • South African Police Services [Liyema]
Careers to which participating male youths aspired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paramedic [John] • South African Police Services [Mandla] • Information & Communication Sector [Mandla] • Music Industry [Elihle]

An example of a female's photovoice is presented as Image Group 3, and excerpts from the male's photovoice are presented in Image Group 4.



Liyema:
Police force

Image Group 3: Aspirations of Female Participants From Photovoice



Image Group 4: Aspirations of Male Participants From Photovoice

Theme 1: Hoped for Future That Transcends Current Lived Experiences of the Self, Family, School, and Community

It became evident from the findings that the participants' future career aspirations surpassed their present lived experiences with special reference to the self (individual), the family, community, and school.

Rising Above My Current Circumstances to Realise Dreams, Hope, and Vision

Transcending their current contextual rural circumstances was a priority for the learners given that they shared that they had dreams, hope, and vision. For example, John stated, "I know what my dreams are, and I have plans for myself. And I have been motivated by my background" (FGI). The participants believed therefore that it is necessary to start with yourself in order to surmount your circumstances. Individuals who are able to empower themselves could then play a role in assisting others to bring about change. This was evident in John's comment, "I want to bring change to myself first and also to my family and then to my community" (FGI).

Mandla, however, indicated that a person should be humble and not show off his or her progress. It appeared that he wanted to blend in, not offend anyone who was struggling. He wrote: "When I have a money, I will not show everyone I am a rich man or successful man, the things I will do I will not act the same as I don't have money am struggling like them" (PVPC). He was expressing that becoming rich might be a challenge in his community and that he would have to deal with this. However, he did not elaborate on what it would mean to be rich or successful. It was also interesting to note that whereas Mandla was quite reserved about not showing his possible wealth, Elihle was adamant that he intended to leave a mark in his community as a rapper if he became financially well off:

I want to drive fancy cars . . . that will leave a mark in every place I go. I want to be well-known here in my community as a successful. . . . I want to have a lot of money so I can afford everything that I want for myself, e.g., buying fancy clothes. . . . I want to do parties whenever I feel like doing a party. (PVPC)

Elihle's intention of establishing his mark in the community by hosting parties can probably be understood in the context of his aspiration and hope linked to bolstering needs associated with belonging and esteem (see Figure 1).

Transforming My Own Current Lifestyle and Ensuring Financial Stability

Ensuring financial stability was at the core of the participants' aspirations because they indicated that they needed to overcome their current poverty-stricken conditions. Mivuyo believed that the

information technology (IT) sector would afford such an opportunity to become financially sound: “Ok my dream is to become an IT guy . . . that’s where the money is” (PVFP). Similarly, Asanda alluded to the financial opportunities of accountancy as a career: “I want to become an accountant because I like looking forward to the future . . . and for me I wanted a good career option for those who only want to earn money” (PVPC). It seems that for the learners, being well-established financially could bring about social transformation to their current social conditions because it could offer them a lifestyle including owning a large house and new car, as Elihle indicated: “I want to have money so that I can buy a very big house for me and my family because I just want to leave [live] a very nice life” (PVPC). Elihle was suggesting that changing his family’s current social conditions could also positively influence his own, which also implies that transforming his own conditions could directly benefit his family.

Two participants highlighted that they had made alternative plans should their initial plans not materialise. This was apparent when Nomsa mentioned that her option was to become a chef if she could not become a doctor: “If I want to become a doctor and I don’t get selected . . . my dream is to become a doctor but I can cook so I can use my talent to become; so that I can be a chef” (FGI). John concurred, mentioning that he too, had another possibility: “Also have a Plan B and C to look at different angles, use different angles, use different strategies and be creative, chase after my dream” (FGI).

Improving My Family’s Living Conditions

Participants were not only concerned about themselves; they also wanted to assist family members by transmuting their existing living conditions. They indicated that financial security could enable them to make an impact on alleviating poverty in their families. Elihle expressed that financial support to his family was important to him because he would like to assist them to transcend their current financial dilemmas: “I also want to help even at home wherever there is a financial problem. Also extending my home and making sure that they are having a very nice life before I can even do anything for myself” (PVPC). It was evident that his family was more important to him than himself, hence, the family before the self.

Similarly, Mandla reported that he wanted to improve his family’s current housing and provide them with a car as a means of transportation and wrote: “I want to have a lot of money to support my family, buy for them a big house and cars” (PVPC). During a report-back session after the captions were written, he reiterated this dream, stating: “I want a lot of money to support my family, because my family is proud of me and they are very proud of me because I’m the one who still at school and what is this, a high school yah” (PVFP). As in the previous category, Mandla was suggesting that if the individual’s well-being is improved, it could indirectly also improve the living conditions of family members. Mivuyo highlighted the importance of assisting his family by providing a safe haven to live in when he wrote, “This house, it’s not for me, it’s not for me. I would like to buy this house for my parents, because the house they are living in now is very small and they have also a dream” (PVFP). John also emphasised the social change that he envisaged family-wise, but the self was before the family given that he intended to first bring about personal self-transformation and that the next step would be family and community assistance.

Aiding the Community to Transcend Their Current Circumstances

The community was perceived as being part and parcel of the road to social transformation given that the participants disclosed great concern for their community with a view to “pay it forward” in order to ensure a brighter future. It was evident from the participants that they intended to assist with eradicating the challenges their community faced daily. Nomsa indicated that she desired to pay it forward by becoming a doctor (Image Group 5): “I want to become a doctor, because I want a better

future for myself, not only myself, but also my community” (FGI). This was affirmed by Kwantu and Zodwa who remarked that they would like to contribute to the community in which they resided by providing the necessary healthcare that was currently lacking. Kwantu stated: “I want to work in [my rural town] for my home town, because you can visit [the] clinic, [the clinic] does not replace [the] need for [a] local doctor” (FGI).



Image Group 5: Screen Capture Images Of Examples of Their PowerPoint Slides and Voice Movie (PPSVM)

Similarly, Zodwa wrote about the health resource issue:

This clinic is too small for all [in my rural town] people and there is no doctor and there are two nurses but there must be more of them. I want to become a doctor so people they can get more help so that everyone can get help the way he/she must be helped (PVPC).

She further highlighted that there was a lack of medical resources, which according to her, played a role in her mother’s passing away and consequently influenced her aspiration towards the health sector (Image Group 5):

I want to be a doctor. . . . I have this dream because of in [my rural town] my mother died in 2012 and then there was no doctor and then you can come maybe Monday and then they will say you must come Friday . . . and then the days you are coming and then the disease will be too much. You see that’s why I want to be a doctor so that I can be a doctor in [my rural town]. (PVPC, Zodwa)

Furthermore, the participants were concerned about numerous challenges in their environment. For example, Zodwa was concerned about the lack of safe and clean open spaces in which children of the community could play:

And then we need to have community work programme because you see there are those kids that play in the dirty place so while they are playing in the dirty place they cannot play another place because all of the place is dirty so they can get. (PVFP, Zodwa)

Liyema was concerned about children's exposure to alcohol at the local tavern and as a prospective police officer, she highlighted her concern related to underage alcohol consumption: "We should go to the tavern, maybe every weekend to stay there so that we guide the children under age of 18 so that they cannot go there, because they are not allowed there" (PVFB). She wanted to play an active role to end this.

The participants described how they would like to combat crime in the community by addressing corruption and other crime issues: "There is a lot of crime in my community and there's no police" (PVFB, Liyema) and "End the criminal and corruption" (FGI, Liyema). Liyema was disappointed with the security service provided by the police and articulated it as follows: "When there is an accident or a fight or something like that and you call the police . . . they won't come immediately when you call them, they will come at their time" (PVFP). She was adamant that she could make a difference (Image Group 6):

This is a police station . . . I want to stop crime, rape and murder etc. Because if I am not be a cop the crime will not stop from my community. . . . I will be doing my work right.
(PVFP, Liyema)

She was suggesting that all was not well within the police service in her community. Mandla concurred that ensuring a safe environment was paramount, because place was of great importance to him, and that he would like to win back the trust of the community as a police officer by attending to crimes and making arrests so "that everyone see Mandla as a police or constable police and drive the car to look after them" (PVFP). He added "the reason I want to be a police service is to save our community . . . to have no gangsters and doing my job to arrest them so that they can see how life is for them" (PVFP).

The above portrays the caring nature of the participants while at the same time it shows that the community expected their action. They showed a willingness to become part of the solution in the community by playing a pivotal role. It is evident that they wanted to remain part of their community, and would, once they had reached their aspirations related to their intended occupation, return to their community.

Assisting Our School With Infrastructure

The secondary school in the rural community, like many rural schools, lacks basic infrastructure such as ablution facilities. In addition, a boarding hostel located on the school premises burned down several years ago and was never rebuilt. These problems were highlighted by the learners who explained that they wanted to become agents of change by assisting the school with resources. Mivuyo presented his concern related to the poor sanitation at the school (Image Group 6):

This is a picture of the problem [toilets] my school is in seeing the school in this matter its is in I'll really want to help it so it will be the first thing in my mind if I achieve my dream.
(PPV)

And he highlighted that his reason for wanting to assist was "to give back to my school who give so much to me, they give everything to me, the school" (PVFP). He added to this, the need for a school hostel:

This is the hostel on the school, as you can see this condition is very bad condition of this hostel. Way back it was, way in nineteen-something it was a great hostel. . . . So I would

like to rebuild this hostel when I achieve my dream. To rebuild it to give back to the school yet again and provide for the children from far places who really want to come to this school but they don't have the place to stay. (PVFP)



Image Group 6: Screen Capture Images Of Examples of Their PowerPoint Slides and Voice Movie (PPSVM)

Theme 2: Serving as Agents of Hope to Enable Social Change

This theme presents the participants' purpose and action related to why and how they intended to make a difference in their community once they had achieved their intended aspirations. While Theme 1 focused on the physical dimension or direct needs, Theme 2 is focused on the emotional or psychosocial dimension.

Creating Hope Within the Community

It is evident from the presented data in Theme 2 that the participants were adamant that they wanted to enable themselves, but also intended to make a difference beyond themselves. The participants shared their aspirations to create hope where hope had been lost. For example, John mentioned:

The thing that I want to change the most is to revive and restore the lost dreams is to take back the dreamers, the young dreamers out there, is to make them believe again, is to put the hope in their hearts again and to put the spirit of willingness into their minds. (PVFP)

For John it was imperative to restore hope because there were community members who were without hope and he wanted to become a shining light, a beacon of hope, to the community. He added:

I've seen so many people, sick people actually, helpless people, young people who are dreamless, young people who have lost hope . . . some people who actually lost their dreams right. . . . So my dream or my aim actually is to become someone that other people may look up to them. It is to become someone that will make a huge different in my hometown. (PVFP)

John's feedback was emotional and highlighted his concern for his community. He elaborated that change can begin with the individual doing small things to become an agent of change:

I believe that change can actually start at where you are and you can make change. You don't have to make a huge difference at the start but to make change with what you have and what you want to achieve. (PVFP, John)

For John, it was apparent that the creation of social change and the promotion of hope in the community could be an outcome that emanated from an individual's actions; this resonated with him because he wanted to be such a person.

Nomsa affirmed the importance of being a beacon of hope for other people with her comment: "It doesn't mean that if you are poor you have to be poor forever" (PVFP), indicating that if she was successful in realising her aspirations, her example could serve as an inspiration to others. Similarly, Zodwa commented that being beacons or agents of hope meant not only paying forward but also that one could stand up and be counted:

I always want to give other people the hope, and to me to give to others is more important than to get from others. In the hospitals, that's where I want people to know that they can rely on us. (PPV)

Change Is Possible Through Role Modelling as Action

The learners' ideas about becoming role models for others link to their aspirations of being agents of hope. They shared that serving as role models could bring about change in their communities and among their peers. Nomsa stated:

I want to be a role model of the youngsters so that . . . I have to work hard, I have to follow my dreams . . . I want to be a doctor and I will work for [in my rural town] for my community, so I'm going to be role model like that. (FGI)

For John, being a role model in his community was close to his heart because he wanted to show that a person's background or context should not be a restriction to success:

I can actually achieve what I want no matter where I'm from. I can be a role model rise from where there is no[t] actually much or where there is no hope, you know, to make it to be the person that I want to become. (FGI)

Likewise, Nomsa highlighted that her vision was to transcend her current poverty-stricken context and provide hope by attending a university in the near future: "It doesn't mean that if you are poor you have to be poor forever, you must be the one in a family to go to university" (PVFP). Being an active role model was also important for Mivuyo because he highlighted that he should serve as an example among his peers and provide them with hope when he realised his dream:

This picture show some of my friends like my friends they don't have a life goal planned for their future and if I can show them there are more than sitting at some shop doing nothing with their lifes. I will give them hope. (PVPC)

Nomsa affirmed that by attending university, she would be a role model for her peers and community: "You must be the one in the family to go to university. So I think I will be the first person to go to university in my family and I want to make them proud" (PVPC). Her vision was to play an active role

to ensure that young adolescents could deal with peer pressure: “So I want to tell young people to not try to fit in the group” (PVFP).

The findings portray enthusiasm to be positive citizens who are keen to promote social change through role modelling.

Discussion

The participants aspired to a wide range of careers ranging from the police force, entertainment industry, and information technology to the health sector, and did not portray narrow career aspirations related to governmental positions as presented by Ansell et al. (2018). In spite of indicating various career options, it is possible that their aspirational horizons (Hodkinson, 2008) were still limited due to a structural context that did not provide them with a wide range of alternatives (Gottfredson, 1996, 2002, 2004). Two of the participants had already started to compromise their career aspirations because of possible barriers (Gottfredson, 1996). This change in aspirational thinking can be explained by Snyder’s (2002) theory when he discussed how the pathways to goal achievement are influenced by structural or systemic barriers; the individual then cognitively adjusts the hope (goal) expectation. This is supported by Yosso (2005) who contended that such discrepancies could be attributed to the harsh realities that marginalised youth experience, and which they perceive will derail their intended pathways to reaching their goal-directed aspirations (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). Or, put differently, they struggle to realise their potential in a field because of a lack of different forms of capital to survive outside their communities in those unknown areas or fields. While the remaining participants did not allude to compromise, it is possible that they have done so without stating it, as often occurs (Gottfredson, 1996, 2002).

It is evident from the data that their current rural space is not offering certain resources associated with personal and family well-being in addition to school-related aspects; thus, their reference to safety emanates from a needs perspective (McLeod, 2017, citing Maslow). The school’s ablution facilities and dilapidated hostel were concerns, as well as health issues in the community. Alcohol abuse and safety were additional concerns for them. It appears from the data that all the participants intended to make a difference, that is, they wanted to become agents of future change (Balfour et al., 2008) given that the careers they envisaged would imply prestige (Gottfredson, 2002) for them if they were able to assist their community. This prestige might enable them to be regarded as persons to whom the community were willing to listen and work together with to solve issues in a collaborative manner. It is clear that the participants’ intentions were not to leave the rural space permanently, but to study and then return to their rural community in order to address structural issues of inequality, thereby resonating with the promotion of social justice—career choice is a social justice issue (Watson, 2010). They did not want to flight but, rather, to flock back (Ebersöhn, 2012), which suggests that they had a strong connection with the land, their community, and their context (Balfour et al., 2008). The references to assisting their families, the school, and community also resonates well with esteem needs and belongingness needs (McLeod, 2017, citing Maslow) given that the participants wanted to pay it forward. The strong yearning to return also resonates with Nsamenang’s (2006, 2015) view that collectivism plays an important role in the African context. Also, their return probably points to roles and responsibilities instilled in them that their family, community, and school are important (Nsamenang, 2006, 2015).

Their desire to instil hope in the community highlights that they were clinging to their hopes and dreams despite possible barriers they might encounter (Yosso, 2005) because their aspirations “offer an explanation and understanding of the complex ways through which people in poor circumstances construct viable lives, and in the process, accumulate agency” (Joorst, 2015, p. 61). Aspiring in

conjunction with imagination assists youths to recreate the future while making their current experiences enduring, in spite of the challenges and limitations in the current context (Joorst, 2015). It appears that the perception of educators during deliberations with them prior to the commencement of the project—that the learners seemed not to aspire and had lost hope—was not the case. On the contrary, the participating youths had aspirations and hopes for a better future.

Conclusion

The participants' rationale for their career choices seemed to be profoundly influenced by personal, school, community, and family experiences. It is evident that the current space as a place in which they are entangled deprives them of basic needs to support their aspirations. The participants' strong emphasis on needs to transcend their current personal space in which they are deprived of health care facilities, financial and safety capital to sustain a life of well-being for themselves and their parents, highlights the fact that the societal structuring of their space is constraining rather than emancipatory. Consequently, the participants seemed to indicate that their current conditions were limiting their future aspirations. It appears that the rural space is not offering opportunity for economic prosperity to their community.

Our study regarding the future career aspirations of secondary school rural youth has shown that utilising a visual participatory methodology approach afforded the participants the opportunity to express their inner feelings and hopes. We believe that the participants became the voice of honest appeals, not only for themselves, but also for those close to them and for the greater community. We base our position on the fact that the categories associated with the themes refer to their concerns about self, family, community, and school.

It appears that the participants intended to become active agents and not merely passively accept the status quo (Balfour et al., 2008) because they desired to engage in future activities to promote social transformation. The findings suggest that a key aspiration for the youth who participated in this study was to bring about personal growth, social change, and equality in their community.

In spite of the unjust social structure, the participants indicated that they had positive aspirations career-wise, and were not deterred by the rural space as structure or field in which they resided. It appears that all the participants had high anticipations related to the future. The importance of hope, a form of capital (Yosso, 2005) to which they held, seemed to be a key stepping-stone to realising their dreams. We contend that the sharing of the participants' aspirations through photovoice and PowerPoint Slides and Voice Movie (PPSVM) provided an opportunity for them to share their aspirations related to their personal, family, and community needs, thereby highlighting to those concerned about these learners that they do have career aspirations. We conclude that what these learners need is assistance, guidance, and conversations about their needs and future.

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