

Helping learners think more hopefully about life after school: The usefulness of participatory visual strategies to make career education more contextually relevant

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Learners living in challenging socio-economic circumstances face limited opportunities for further education and employment. In this context, formal career guidance which merely provides information about specific jobs and how to access them may be of little use. This article explores the usefulness of participatory visual strategies as a pedagogical tool for teachers to help learners think more critically, realistically and hopefully about their future life opportunities. Analysed through a resilience lens, findings indicated that the strategies inspired hope in learners; helped them identify assets and barriers in their social ecologies; develop a sense of agency and responsibility for deciding on their futures; and care more for other people, all of which will help them make more constructive choices for life after school. The findings might help teachers make their career education more relevant for children who live in contexts of adversity.

Keywords: career guidance; Life Orientation; mind maps; photo voice; resilience theory; socio-economic challenges

Introduction

Learners in under-resourced rural and township schools in South Africa often receive inferior schooling. The racially based inequities that existed during apartheid

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(Kallaway, 2002) have not been eradicated in post-apartheid South Africa (Ndimande, 2012) due to a complex interplay of structural, financial, social, cultural and political reasons. According to the Minister of Education (Motshekga, 2010:1), the education of the “African child ... is in crisis.” Even if learners in contexts of poverty do manage to finish school and matriculate, high unemployment rates lessen their chances of procuring a job, while the prohibitive costs of further education preclude them from pursuing further studies (Van Aardt, 2012). This can lead to school leavers’ losing hope and motivation for their future (Yu, 2013), which heightens the risk of turning to negative life choices and coping strategies (Duke, Borowsky, Pettingell & McMorris, 2011). Although education should do more than just prepare learners to become economically productive (Vally & Motala, 2013), it is clear that children in less-resourced schools are at a disadvantage with regard to being prepared for study or work after school.

The life context of youth shapes their future aspirations, degree of optimism and hopefulness concerning education and occupation possibilities. Consequently, disadvantaged youth tend to be less optimistic about their future than their more economically advantaged counterparts (Purtell & McLoyd, 2013). This might lead to a lack of hope and purpose in their lives (Burrow, O’Dell & Hill, 2010), perpetuating despair, reinforcing the negative cycle of poverty, and ultimately leading to more barriers to effective life choices (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2012).

However, in the subject Life Orientation, life skills education can help learners become more resilient in the face of adverse socio-economic contexts. Life Orientation teachers can, in the learning area Careers and career choices, help learners imagine a different future and see their lives through different eyes (Polanyi, 1958) rather than focus on the barriers and problems related to their contexts of poverty.

As Life Orientation teacher educators we wondered how we could achieve the above in the Career and career choices section of Life Orientation, as outlined in the National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011). We wanted to explore how specific participatory, visual strategies could enable learners to think more hopefully about their future through the identification of personal and environmental assets and barriers. We reasoned that the creation of concrete visual artefacts would facilitate critical discussion about how they could respond in a resilient way to structural adversities that limit their life opportunities. This article reports on a study that we conducted as a community engagement project with learners from rural high schools to explore how we could use such strategies to help learners recognise and maximise personal, family and community assets to stimulate hope for the future, enthusiasm to plan and to take action (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006). By adopting an asset-based approach rather than focusing on the problems that are a part of their daily lives, we hoped to raise awareness of how they might buffer the multiple adversities in their social ecologies through using both personal and environmental assets. We explain in depth the theoretical underpinnings of our practice, before outlining our methodological

approach. We then discuss the themes that emerged in relation to current literature on resilience and coping. We claim that engaging in these pedagogical exercises helped the participants to identify protective and risk factors, both in themselves and in the environment, to help them think more critically and realistically about how they could use contextually relevant resources to assist them in making constructive choices for life after school. We conclude by highlighting the significance of our findings for making the teaching of career-related objectives of Life Orientation more contextually relevant for learners from under-resourced schools and communities.

The problems and potential of Life Orientation to prepare learners for life after school

Life Orientation as a subject proposes a holistic approach to promoting personal, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, motor and physical growth and development to create learners who are well-adjusted, self-confident, hopeful and can contribute to “a democratic society, productive economy and improved quality of life” (DBE, 2011:8). The six topics covered in Life Orientation are: The development of the self in society; Social and environmental responsibility; Democracy and human rights; Careers and career choices; Study skills and physical education (DBE, 2011). Given that Life Orientation is only allocated two hours per week on the school timetable, one of which should be dedicated to physical education, it is a tall order for teachers to cover all the topics in a meaningful way. The challenge is even greater for schools that are struggling to provide quality education owing to historical and material disadvantage (Mahlangu, 2011), where youth are likely to be faced with socio-economic challenges which tend to limit their life chances. Teachers tend to stick strictly to curriculum content and might not always recognise and consider the barriers that arise from the context in which teaching and learning take place (Mahlangu, 2011). While the content and outcomes of the Careers and career choices section of the curriculum stress the need to contextualise the learning, the problem lies in the fact that many teachers are struggling to do this due to time limitations and/or a lack of understanding of how a more interactive pedagogical process could help achieve this. Although there are many arguments as to why Life Orientation is not effectively taught in schools (see, for example, Rooth, 2005; Christiaans, 2006; Van Deventer & Van Niekerk, 2008), it remains the only opportunity at the moment for learners to specifically receive career education.

Most schools follow a one-size-fits-all approach where career guidance consists of merely providing information on the many careers available. In under-resourced schools, in particular, the learner receives little opportunity to explore critical and creative thinking about overcoming the financial and social barriers that might limit their career choices (Maree, Ebersöhn & Molepo, 2006). It is not enough for teachers to merely provide information about different careers and/or how to apply for access to higher education when learners do not have the finances or social capital (Krishna,

2013) to follow up on these career choices (Stead, Els & Fouad, 2004). In such contexts, there is a need to focus less on knowledge about specific courses and how to apply for them and more on developing resilient attitudes and problem-solving capacities of learners to help them find creative solutions to reaching their goals.

We thus argue that there is a need for teachers to think of alternative ways of presenting career guidance to help learners who live in socio-economic challenging circumstances to flourish in spite of adversity (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011). A different career guidance approach is needed to supplement general information and to serve as a strategy to incite critical thinking and hope for the future, because “hope, purpose, and a meaningful life” enhance well-being, positive goal orientation and good life choices (Duke et al., 2011: 87).

Developing resilient coping through an asset-based approach to life planning

Given the socio-economic adversity that is a daily part of the lives of youth living in contexts of poverty, it is important to increase their positive coping strategies through the development of resilient coping skills (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011) with regard to planning for a successful future. The asset-based approach acknowledges the social context from which problems arise (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001) and focuses on abilities and strengths, thus opening up opportunity for different and empowering interventions by teachers.

Assets are intrapersonal resources (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001) which learners have at their disposal, yet they mostly do not use them “purposefully or mindfully” (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2011: 1) or realise the positive and strengthening effect they could have on their choices if used effectively (King & Madsen, 2007). Identification of barriers remains an essential part of the asset-based process (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001), but if problems are the main focus, it can lead to despair and hopelessness, rather than enabling learners to find ways to overcome barriers (King & Madsen, 2007). Because the asset-based approach contrasts the deficiency-based approach and highlights the importance of considering the influences of the social context (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001) on both the barriers and assets, this approach enables the learner to identify protective factors which can be used as resources that strengthen their coping abilities. This, in turn, fosters resilience (Jackson, Firtko & Edenborough, 2007) as learners are able to better access and use existing assets within environmental systems (Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong & Van de Vijver, 2013). Ungar et al.’s (2013: 151) socio-ecological view of resilience is culturally and contextually based and views it as a product of the interactions among external risk factors, protective factors, a person’s internal resources and their capacity to “navigate their way to the resources they need during crises, and their ability to negotiate for these resources to be provided in meaningful ways”. Although we

acknowledge that being aware of assets and risk factors is not enough to ensure resilience, it is a first step in helping learners think critically about how they could develop personal resilience and negotiate access to and use of helping ecologies. We also agree with Ungar (2008) that resilience develops from a partnership between the individual and their social ecologies, and that the latter should take the major responsibility for provision of resources. In this case, the teacher should provide an enabling environment for learners to think critically about their life after school in the context of their social ecologies.

Teachers are perfectly able to influence resilient coping in learners, given professional guidance (Wood, Theron & Mayaba, 2012a, 2012b). Consequently, we wanted to explore how we could use participatory visual strategies to help learners understand the influence of their personal and structural risk and protective factors (King & Madsen, 2007) on making constructive life choices, both now and in the future. We also wanted to incite hope, as an important indicator of personal resilience (Larson, 2013; Ungar & Liebenburg, 2011). When learners realise there is hope, life becomes more meaningful, which increases wellness and buffers against negative coping strategies (Duke et al., 2011). The following section describes the methodology and process we employed in this endeavour.

Methodology

We were guided by a constructivist paradigm, because we wanted participants to construct and represent their own knowledge, following a qualitative approach (Clark, Vicki & Creswell 2010). We used availability sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) due to logistical factors. Participants were four male and nine female Grade 12 learners aged 18 to 22 who were attending additional classes in a course on life skills presented by us as part of a community engagement process.

Data generation involved qualitative data from: participatory visual methods (Clark, 2010); mind mapping (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010); photo voice (Wang, 1999); and a group discussion which we recorded (Niewenhuis, 2010). The process of visual representation of assets and barriers enhances the potential for critical reflection and the possibility of change (Cleland & Wyborn, 2010). Visual methods are helpful in promoting the construction of culturally and contextually relevant knowledge (Wang & Burris, 1997). Having something concrete to discuss also encourages collaborative learning among participants (Eison, 2010). The group discussion created a space where participants could talk about their respective visual representations in order to enhance deeper understanding of their life circumstances and the discussion of complex, personal issues (Mkandawire-Valhmu & Stevens, 2009). See table 1 for the data generation strategies and process.

| <i>Data generation strategies</i> | <i>Process</i> | <i>Purpose</i> |
|--|---|---|
| Mind mapping | Learners plotted their perceived barriers and assets concerning their future career on a mind map (Wheeldon, 2011). | To help learners to visualize barriers and assets to increase their self-knowledge about influences on their future careers and life chances. |
| Photo voice | <p>Concept of photo-voice (Wang, 1999) explained to learners.</p> <p>Disposable cameras were issued to 13 participants. Instructions for use and ethics of taking photographs were explained (Wang, 1999).</p> <p>A prompt was given to each participant to take at least 12 photographs representing their barriers and/or assets with regard to their future career (Palibroda, Krieg, Murdoch & Havelock, 2009; Wang, 1999).</p> <p>Photographs printed and handed back to learners.</p> <p>Each participant had to choose at least 2 photographs to discuss in group. Each photograph was numbered and they had to write a narrative to explain it according to the SHOWED method (see Wang, 1999):</p> <p>What do you See?</p> <p>What is really Happening?</p> <p>How does this relate to Our life?</p> <p>Why does this problem/issue or strength exist?</p> <p>How can we be Empowered by our understanding?</p> <p>What can we Do to address this problem/ issue? (Adapted from Wang, 1999).</p> <p>Learners had to write a short narrative on their experience of taking the photographs.</p> | To produce a visual representation to facilitate discussion and deeper learning |
| Group discussion | An unstructured group discussion (Nieuwenhuis, 2010) where participants were facilitated to discuss their mind maps, and photographs and narratives with each other. | <p>For learners to share ideas, elaborate on own experiences and engage in dialogue to promote deep learning (Palibroda, Krieg, Murdoch & Havelock, 2009).</p> <p>To deepen their understanding of their own choices in terms of career and life planning</p> <p>To raise awareness of positive coping strategies to serve as a buffer against the barriers they envisaged.</p> |

Table 1: Interventions as data generation strategies

We conducted a thematic analysis of the qualitative data (Mouton, 2001) to identify emergent themes, guided by our knowledge of indices, which indicate resilience-enhancing factors (Lee, Kwong, Cheung, Ungar & Cheung, 2010). Trustworthiness of the data was ensured by verification and triangulation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) of verbatim quotations of participants from the mind maps, narratives and discussion (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The three researchers independently coded the data and then compared these to reach consensus in order to ensure that themes were consistent and reliable (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Findings were also compared against relevant literature (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The research was granted ethical clearance by the Ethics Committee of the university where we work (NWU-00022-13-S2), indicating that it adhered to the strict ethical requirements of the institution. Participants gave permission for their photographs to be used for research purposes. Each participant signed a consent form which contained full information about the study. Participants were made aware of the ethics of taking photographs, namely to not intrude on other people's privacy and to obtain written consent if they photographed others (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Discussion of findings

Four main themes emerged from the data analysis: Hope for the future; Relationships as assets and barriers to effective life planning; Sense of responsibility and agency to plan own future; and Increase in empathic awareness and willingness to help others. The findings will be discussed by elaborating on each theme supported by relevant literature, verbatim quotations from the mind maps (MM), photo narratives (PN) and verbatim quotations from the group discussion (GD), as well as visual evidence.

Theme 1: Hope for the future

Hope is paramount in the development of resilience (Masten & Wright, 1998). We understand hope in similar terms to Havel (1990:181): "Hope ... is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out". Our aim was not to instil in learners a false sense of hope that they could easily achieve their career aspirations, but to assist them in understanding that, in spite of facing many barriers, they also have many assets they can draw on to help them make useful future life choices and explore alternative choices.

Hope was expressed in feelings of optimism, expectation and determination, specifically in the data pertaining to the photo voice exercise and the group discussion. Although some photographs portrayed an image of a barrier, and narratives often started with explaining the barrier, the SHOWED method (see table 1) (Wang, 1999) enabled participants to create positive meaning about that barrier. Figure 1 illustrates this point:



- (a) This photo tells my story. It show the money my parents do not have and how hard I will work towards breaking that barrier
- (b) I see a lot of money. Though they say money is the devil, but we all need it. It is what keeps life going. Yes I wish to grow with money all around, but since that is impossible, it is in my best interest to see to it that my children do not say the same thing.
- (c) Sometimes a barrier may act as a breakthrough. This is how much and triple that much that I will make in an hour in the near future.
- (d) It relates to my life in the sense that, I grew up without something (money), but intend on turning the table around. In fact, strive towards achieving my goals and becoming a rich, successful Geologist.
- (e) Money problems exist due to different family incomes as well as expenditure. Sometimes we need more than we have and can afford.
- (f) We can accept our situations and learn to live with them[sic] .
- (g) We can work hard to achieve more and make a lot of money PN2.

Figure 1: Creating positive meaning about barriers

The taking of the photographs seemed to help the participants think more critically and hopefully about their future choices as indicated by the following extracts from the photo voice narratives:

I did not only imagine my future, I pictured it, and this helped me to think more (PN6).

Taking this photographs [sic] helped me to think about what I want and how it will be possible for me to achieve my dreams ... my future is waiting for me (PN11).

The mind map exercise enabled participants to identify the barriers inherent in their career choices:

My future is dim considering financing my studies (MM8).

Worried if I'll get a bursary (MM2).

But, at the same time, the visualising of their assets helped them develop a more resilient attitude:

I am able to overcome all my challenges and always have a little more hope for the future (MM8) (fig. 2).

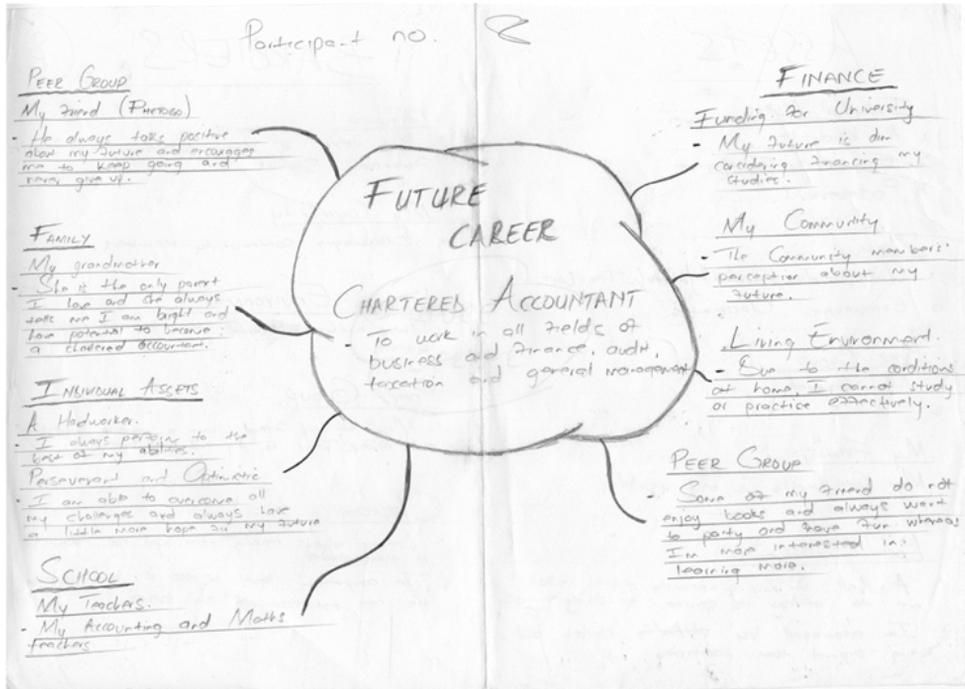


Figure 2: Example of a mind map (P8)

These activities seemed to help learners become more hopeful about their futures and thus able to see possibilities for success. Hope is not only reflected in people's personal agency to reach their goals, but also in the way they invent to seek alternative possibilities and plan to reach these goals and dreams in the face of often severe adversity (Herbert, 2011). The youth who participated in these exercises identified many barriers to their proposed career choices, but were able to remain hopeful, and indicated a belief in their agency to minimise those barriers through mobilising assets:

I see it as a barrier because alcohol is mostly sold in local bars over the counter to teenagers. It is a very difficult scene in life to get out of because we are exposed to alcohol and other substances, but in my mind map I chose to specifically concentrate on alcohol because it can be a barrier in my progression in achieving my dream because it distracts me and it makes me become ill disciplined. But I believe that highlighting this can also help other people, because it's a lot of us actually who are really affected by this. So I believe that if we can strive to becoming very disciplined and avoiding this, this barrier can actually help us in other factors, which can be our assets to attain our dreams (GD:9).

A good example of showing resilience through expressing hope is portrayed in figure 3. Coins were used as a symbol to express the barrier of a lack of tuition fees. The participant took a photograph of coins, bronze coins, symbolising the barrier, with silver coins on the top which symbolises hope in the face of adversity:



Figure 3: Resilience expressed through hope

These are simple coins to represent lack of tuition fee. They act as barrier, because my parents do not have a lot of money. This image best presents my life as a whole, even though I have dark elements that hamper my dream to the best of my ability I will shine as bright as I am to make something out of myself. It is your choice to sit and mope around or take action (PN1).

Hope is goal-oriented thinking, it incites a sense of purpose that guides human life and drives an individual to accomplish and achieve, which positively contributes to all the dimensions of development and well-being (Burrow et al., 2010). Purpose serves as a stimulator for realising hope in times of difficulties (Burrow et al., 2010; Snyder, 2002). Our knowledge about the importance of hope in building resilience in the face of adversity guided us in the design of these pedagogical interventions. We argue that, through this process, not only personal, but also environmental protective factors could be explored. If learners are made aware of internal and external protective resources, they can be empowered to strengthen them and so build resilience (Henderson, 2013).

Theme 2: Relationships as assets and barriers to effective life planning

Participant relationships with immediate and extended family, friends, teachers and their religion indicated a strong sense of kinship, affinity, connection and bonding.

FAMILY
Assets.
• family support.
→ Everyone in my family wants to help me make my life a success.
• family guidance.
→ My family assess my performance and guide me which path to take.

MM1

Family
* My parents are my biggest support frame and

MM14

FAMILY
A: My mother is always supportive and works hard to make sure that our lives are a success. My little sister always makes me smile. She often tricks my mind when I am moody and never gives up until I smile.

MM6

Family
* Motivate and encourage me
* Grandmother
* Mother
* Father
* Younger brother

MM7

Figure 4: Extracts from participants' mind maps

Healthy relationships are a key factor in the successful transitions to adulthood and careers (The Youth Development Institute, 2002) and is an important protective factor in resilience (Ungar, 2011). The mind map and photo voice exercises helped participants to visualise this important source of support.

Although families provided emotional support, their economic status was perceived as a barrier, since the issue of poverty is interlinked with the family. Participants indicated a lack of finances and limited access to material resources as barriers, factors that negatively influence resilience (Lee et al., 2010). Yet, the narratives indicate that this very poverty was able to be reframed as a motivation and did not stop their dreaming about their future opportunities. They seem to accept poverty as part and parcel of their lives, yet also realise that they can sidestep it and find their own pathways to solve the problem:

... we will get past it (PN3).

I have a picture of a, of an empty wallet, which also signifies or represents lack of tuition funds. Well in my case, I took it as a broad ... problem, not only for myself, but for other people as well. So I believe that lack of funds also discourages people to actually take their school work seriously, or to actually dream out of the box. So this can greatly become a problem, but I am actually working hard ... to attaining a bursary. So this is ... a barrier and quite an asset as well, because it helps me attain better academy performances (GD9).

Access to material resources is an important factor in enhancing resilience in youth (Lee et al., 2010; Ungar, 2008). Poverty has far-reaching effects on youth in South Africa because, despite living in a democratic country, inadequate and unequal access to education is a reality (Donald et al., 2012). It was therefore important for us to stimulate thinking about how such barriers can be reduced.

Supportive relationships with friends were also identified by participants:

They, they always give me positive advices (GD4).

I have an asset of a best friend who always supports me no matter what is happening (GD1).

Even the visualisation of negative friendships as barriers had a positive effect, as it helped participants to realise how undesirable relationships can influence them to adopt unconstructive coping responses. Having to identify and represent these negative influences as barriers allowed them to reframe these relationships in a more resilience-enhancing way, using individual assets to offset the negatives:

Most of my friends have a negative mind set and always want to play and not study. They do not enjoy books and always want to party and have fun where I am more interested in learning more. I am a hard worker and I perform to the best of my abilities (MM8).

It is important that youth establish positive peer relations, because these increase hope about future life opportunities (Nguyen, Cohen & Hines, 2012). Adolescent friendships are particularly important, because the learners begin to rely on friendships for social support and as a resource for self-exploration (Cunningham, Hurley, Foney & Hayes, 2002). This helps them develop a sense of self or personal identity and social cohesion, an important factor in the development of resilient coping (Ungar, 2008).

In line with findings that stress the significance of cultural assets in the development of resilience in South African youth (Ferrari, 2011; Theron & Theron, 2010), spiritual relationships were identified as a strong asset. Faith provided many of the youth with the strength and motivation to hope for a future:

I believe in God. He helps me achieve in life. I stay grounded and discipline (PN7).

My church encourages me to do my best and stay away from fraudulent activities (PN14).

Everything happens for a reason and we should not question God's ways (GD2).



- (a) In this photograph I show a religious community. This will help me to balance my academic life with my spiritual well-being.
- (b) I see a Holy Bible of God.
- (c) What is really happening in this photograph is that with this Bible, God's image is created in a person's mind together with all the blessings that God can provide for each and every person.
- (d) This relates to my life because I need spiritual intelligence in order for me to increase my faith and trust in God.
- (e) I come from a religious community and without God I cannot do anything. God is one of the important assets in my life.
- (f) I believe that with the trust and faith I have in God, God will so help me to reach my career, regardless of what obstacles am I facing in life or what challenges or what barriers am I having in life.
- (g) I believe that God will help me to reach my career [sic](PN4).

Figure 5: The importance of religion as protective factor

Spiritual well-being and resilience are interrelated and favourably influence positive youth development (Smith, Webber & DeFrain, 2013). Taking the photographs and writing about them helped the learners clarify the significance of this important cultural asset.

Theme 3: Sense of responsibility and agency to plan their future

The sense of agency to affect change positively is a factor that contributes to resilience (Ungar, 2008). The data revealed a strong sense of ambition and purpose in the participants. Creating the mind maps and photo narratives allowed the participants to think about their role in shaping their own future. They became aware that their attitudes and actions determine their life chances. They articulated a sense of willpower and determination that accentuate a strong sense of purpose, prominent in the photo narratives and discussion.

Our understanding can empower us by showing us the real world, what happens in the real world. Our understanding can empower us by making us face reality and find ways in which we can change them (PN11).

In figure 6 the participants show personal agency and acceptance of own responsibility:

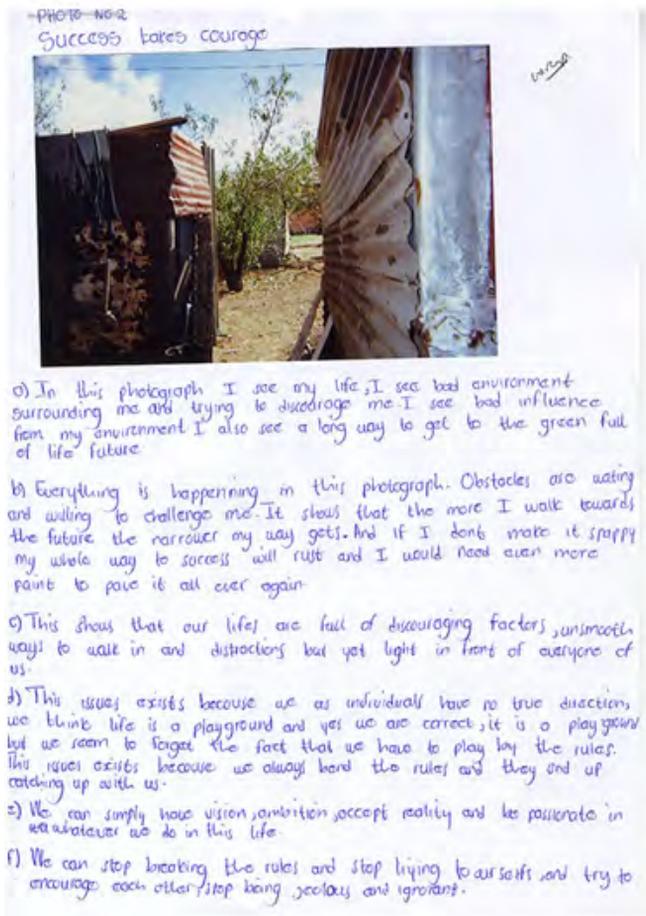


Figure 6: Example of acceptance of personal responsibility (PN11)

The visual pedagogical exercises allowed participants to identify and explicitly voice their agency, thus reinforcing an internal locus of control, an important factor in the development of resilience (Ungar, 2008). Hope reflects a sense of personal agency needed to reach goals. Agency leads to goal-oriented thinking which, in turn, stimulates a sense of purpose and self-awareness (Burrow et al., 2010). Goal directedness enhances self-efficacy and motivation (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2010); hope is motivational thinking, goal-oriented thinking is linked to hope, and hope, in turn, strengthens personal agency (Burrow et al., 2010). The resilience-enhancing factors are therefore interlinked (Duke et al., 2011) and can only really be discussed separately, as we have done here, for theoretical purposes.

Theme 4: Increase in empathic awareness and willingness to help others

Empathy is an indication of strength and, as such, a necessary asset for surviving and thriving in any environment (Anghel, Amas & Hicks, 2010). For many of the participants, these exercises enabled them to develop insight into the lives of others, resulting in feelings of compassion and warmth towards them, as well as inciting a feeling of belonging. Participants voiced understanding of others with the same problems and situations as themselves:

So this is really an emotional session for me, but it is also encouraging. And I think I'll have to find space on my mind map to put that as an asset also (GD9).

This extract makes it clear that the participant was starting to realise that the mind map is a useful and dynamic tool that he could use to continually remind himself of his assets. The following comments indicate how the exercises made participants aware of their desire to help and support:

So, uh, we are here for you and we are all here to share this with you (GD3).

This photo made me remember how much I love to help people (PN5).

Youth have such a strong urge to satisfy the need for unity and acceptance that it can outweigh ties to church, school, family or the community (Cunningham et al., 2002). It is important that they understand the self and the consequences their actions might have on others (Burrow et al., 2010). Empathy also promotes emotional resilience, which strengthens supportive relationships and cohesion, both resilience-enhancing factors (Ungar, 2008).

The implications of using visual strategies to orient learners for life

Despite the adversities that participants faced, using visual mapping and photo voice helped them unlock latent resilience. Guided by an asset-based approach and resilience theory, we designed our interventions to facilitate learners to identify the risk and protective factors that could have a positive or negative impact on their

choices for life after school. We presented evidence to support our claim that the visualisation of these assets and barriers would encourage learners to think how they could not only maximise internal and external protective factors, but also use these to minimise risk factors. On an individual level, the findings suggest that the strategies did indeed help to make learners more aware of their own agency and to think more hopefully about their future. Visualising assets helped them realise that they can exercise agency to build on these to improve their life opportunities, despite the adversities they face (Ungar, 2008). Furthermore, visualising assets helped them to articulate their strengths and thus build a more positive self-concept, which is fundamental for being able to respond resiliently (Ungar, 2008) to life's challenges. The sharing of their visual artefacts with other learners also enabled them to develop a sense of empathy and cohesion with others. The visual artefacts and narratives can provide teachers with valuable information to help them make their teaching more relevant to circumstances within the lives of the learners.

The mind map and photo voice exercises revealed rich information about the lives of the participants, and presented an opportunity for educators to gain knowledge and insight into learners' lives, their problems and their contextual circumstances. If done at the beginning of the academic year, the teacher could plan the career guidance lessons to "ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives" (DBE, 2011: 4). The participants enjoyed doing the exercises and sharing their artefacts with others, which could deepen their engagement in a subject which they currently perceive to have little value for their lives (Jacobs, 2011).

Conclusion

We argue that the use of mind maps and photo voice, followed by a discussion of the artefacts, allowed us to attain our aim of exploring how we could influence learners to not only think more critically, realistically and hopefully about their future life opportunities, but also incite enthusiasm to take responsibility to maximise personal, family and community assets. While we are cognisant of the fact that the life success of youth depends to a large extent on having adequate social structures in place (Ungar, 2008), in cases where such support is lacking, the development of personal resilience (Jackson et al., 2007) becomes increasingly important.

We suggest that the inclusion of such participatory visual strategies in Life Orientation methodology tuition at both pre- and in-service teacher education programmes will help make instruction in career guidance, and Life Orientation in general, more applicable to the lives of learners. This will, in turn, promote active engagement in thinking critically and realistically about their future. These findings are not only relevant for the South African context, but are equally applicable on a global scale wherever youth have to overcome significant adversity with regard to their future life choices.

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