

PRE-ADOLESCENT'S PERCEIVED CAREER GUIDANCE NEEDS AND CO-DESIGNING INPUT

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A proposal to use action research to uncover "What do pre-adolescents who have faced adversity perceive as their career guidance needs, and how can they be involved in co-designing input to meet those needs?"

Introduction

Experiencing adversity in childhood has been linked to negative outcomes in later life, including being less likely to reach a positive destination after leaving school (Public Health Scotland, 2017). Experiencing adversity could include being care experienced, a young carer or experiencing bereavement, mental health difficulties or parental incarceration (Allen MD, A, 2015). Care experienced pupils (Who Cares Scotland, 2016; Furey & Harris Evans, 2021; Harrison, 2020) and young carers (Maloney et al, 2000) have been shown to experience multi-layered challenges as the progress through education and into adulthood. The aim is to provide insights into the needs of this group and provide practical outcomes that can be further explored to develop interventions that best support their needs.

What's missing?

Research around outcomes for vulnerable young people tends to focus on the point of transition (Care Leavers Association, 2010; Harrison, 2020), or employability (Bilson, 2011) and there is very little research on career guidance practice with younger pupils. Research with pre-adolescents more generally has been carried out exploring educational guidance needs (Howieson and Semple, 1996), and in exploring relationships with teaching staff (McHugh et al, 2003) highlighting the "bridges and barriers" to the relationships that pupils need to thrive within school. This research will draw on research from education and career development to expand on these findings in relation to careers guidance practice with pre-adolescent pupils who are facing disadvantage.

Why is it important?

Despite the lack of research in this area, it is an important topic to explore further particularly because of the increasing interest in supporting younger pupils and evidence that career ideas develop early in life (Developing the Young Workforce, 2015). Pre-adolescence is a time where pupils' career ideas are moving from fantasy to becoming more aware of their context and opportunity structures (Heaven, 2001; Roberts, 1977). Despite this, very little research appears to have been conducted in the earlier years of secondary school in direct relation to perceptions of careers guidance needs.

Approach

The participants will be targeted as part of an already established community within the school. The pupils are supported by MCR Pathways, a mentoring charity that supports care experienced and vulnerable young people throughout their school career. This is delivered through weekly group work in S1 and S2 and a mentoring programme from S3 onwards. I will conduct a small-scale focus group with the S1 and S2 pupils. Through partnership with MCR Pathways I will engage with pupils and offer them the opportunity to take part in the research.

Stage 1 - Focus Group

The focus group will incorporate two sections, Section A will focus on gathering information about the participants' perceptions of careers guidance and career related concerns. Semi-structured, open-ended questions will be used to help to guide the session so that the group can stay on task while still providing space to explore their ideas. Due to the nature of the group, professional judgement and experience will be utilised to adapt and explain questions throughout the process, using summarising and clarifying questions to ensure the researcher's understanding of responses. Section B will make use of an adapted form of Nominal Group Technique (Delbeck et al, 1975; O'Neill & Jackson, 1983), to generate, capture and prioritise the group's ideas for the subsequent intervention while limiting influence from dominant voice or from the researcher.

Stage 2 - Intervention

Following the initial focus group session, the group intervention will be designed using a process of triangulation, led by the voice of the participants the design will be complemented by literary resources on developmentally appropriate careers guidance (Harkins, 2001) and critical pedagogy (Simon, Dippo & Schenke, 1991), and further supplemented by my professional experience in delivering a variety of inputs to this age group.

Outputs

The outcome of the research will provide insights into approaches that can be used with this group of pupils and potential catalysts for further exploration. The research will inform career guidance practice more widely with practical applications of a social justice informed approach to working with pre-adolescents who have faced adversity, providing lesson plans or approaches that have been co-designed with the pupils themselves.

RELATED LITERATURE

Delauzun, A. (2020)
<https://doi.org/10.20856/jnicec.4403>.
Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D., & Hackett, G. (1994).
Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45, 79-122.
Thomsen, Sultana & Hooley (2017) *Career Guidance for Social Justice: Contesting Neoliberalism*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2017.