HOW CAN I GET THERE? EFFECTS OF A COLLEGE-GOING PROGRAM ON FUTURE

OCCUPATIONAL IDEATION IN AN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITY

A Thesis submitted to the faculty at Stanbridge University in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

by

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read How Can I Get There?: Effects of a College-Going Program on Future

Occupational Ideation in an Underserved Community by Stephanie Flank, Chloe Latz, Ean

Tolentino, and Therese Vesagas, and in my opinion, this work meets the criteria for approving a

thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in

Occupational Therapy at Stanbridge University.

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Dedication

For the students and staff of Urban Compass in Watts, California.

Acknowledgments

Abstract

This thesis project explored occupations of middle school youth in an underserved community and how they viewed their current and future occupations. The objective of our project was to describe student perspectives on their current and future occupations in order to further inform OT in community-based settings.

We conducted a qualitative case study with 80 hours of participant observation and 12 group interviews with 13 youth in the College and Career Pathways Program.

The students interviewed broadened their perspectives on college and career goals and demonstrated learning around three main themes: views of the future, steps to get there, and perceived barriers.

Occupations of youth expanded further than merely school and play, with dimensions that reflect their adult and future goals. OTs can use occupation as a framework from which to consult, develop, or manage similar programs.

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Ideation in an Underserved Community

Childhood and adolescence are a crucial time for developing meaningful occupations which can directly impact one's future path. Unfortunately, youth living in underserved communities are often deprived of participating in these meaningful occupations due to a variety of environmental and contextual constraints. A lack of finances, safety, or stability can make it difficult for children in low-income communities to develop occupations to the same extent as children in middle and upper-class communities. Enrichment programs, such as the Urban Compass program, aim to bridge this gap so that children can begin to develop occupations from a young age, in a safe environment.

For the past 15 years, Urban Compass (UC) has provided after-school enrichment at elementary schools in the city of Watts, California. In 2018, UC piloted a program called "College and Career Pathways" for middle school students (grades 6-8). The College and Career Pathways program expanded the idea of occupation-based enrichment to provide college and career education to students in the community. Through participation, students are provided with the necessary tools to navigate the process of choosing a career and thus toward the ultimate goal of attending higher education. While students are engaging in healthy and meaningful activities, they are simultaneously beginning to plan occupational engagement for their future- a task which many students do not think about until later in life. By beginning this process at a young age, the students are setting themselves up for success in high school, and learning ways to overcome potential barriers before they occur.

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) *Vision 2025* calls for an emphasis on culturally responsive and customized services (AOTA, 2017). It addresses the need to maximize the quality of life for "all people, populations, and communities" (AOTA, 2017, p. 1). In order to do so, occupational therapists must not neglect the pediatric youth in underserved communities, who may experience a diminished quality of life due to occupational injustices. OT practitioners are already working to address barriers to quality of life through interventions which address stigma, safety, low socioeconomic status, and lack of long-term housing (Castaneda, Olson, & Radley, 2013). Furthermore, there is currently a research gap in regards to how occupation-based intervention could assist youth in developing safe and meaningful occupations in underserved communities, such as Watts. In working with the College and Career Pathways program, the enrolled students were able to provide their perspectives on this topic through semi-structured interviews. Their responses focused on their current roles and occupations, and how those occupations may impact their views of the future and steps to get there. We collected responses from the students at the beginning and end of the program, in order to compare qualitative results.

The population for this study consisted of the staff and students involved in the College and Career Pathways program. The intervention was the program itself, which took place on alternating Saturdays across six months. Through qualitative interviews, the research compared youths' perceived views of the future and the steps it takes to get there, at the start of the program versus at the end. The outcome produced qualitative findings on the students' views of the future and the benefits of a college-going program.

Ultimately, the findings contribute to the knowledge base for OT involvement in an occupation-based enrichment program in an underserved community setting.

Statement of the Problem

Since the shift in the philosophy of service delivery, roles for occupational therapists have been growing within community-based settings (Castaneda, Olson, & Radley, 2013). However, little is known about occupation-based intervention for youth in underserved communities addressing occupational injustices which they face. This need is examined through the youth attending the College and Career Pathways program in Watts.

Significance for Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy is well-developed in pediatric settings such as early intervention and school-based therapy and is currently succeeding at defining its role in childhood mental health (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2018). According to AOTA, the goal of mental health intervention is to promote successful participation in an occupation, which sets up a child for success throughout his or her life. In underserved communities like Watts, there are potential barriers for children to participate in occupation, which, therefore, may prevent success throughout his or her life. Occupational therapists' role in childhood mental health consists of intervening with children who are at risk for failure, such as those from families with economic or social disadvantages (AOTA, 2018). With that said, there is little evidence to support the role of OT in enrichment-based programs in underserved communities. OT interventions have the potential to promote social-emotional learning in order to promote healthy occupations and collaborate with families or educational personnel (AOTA, 2018). The

College and Career Pathways program highlights the importance of occupation-based

engagement within this community, and the potential for future roles within OT.

It has been proven that environmental barriers can significantly affect

occupational performance (Braverman & Bass-Haugen, 2009). The Urban Compass

organization serves children and families from the community of Nickerson Gardens, the

second largest subsidized housing development for low-income families in the nation.

The median household income in Watts is $29,600 (Cedar Lake Ventures, 2018), and the

city consists mainly of families who fall below the poverty level. There is a multitude of

active gangs in the community, and children are at risk of becoming involved in gang

activity at a young age. Because of this, children are at risk of being deprived of

participating in their meaningful occupations. It can be difficult for children to experience

occupations such as play, and develop typical childhood roles and routines, due to the

heightened risk for unsafe situations. Inability to participate in meaningful childhood

occupations can lead to "prolonged experiences of disconnectedness, isolation,

emptiness, lack of a sense of identity, or a sense of meaninglessness" (Townsend &

Wilcock, 2004, p. 80). Occupational alienation can yield a lack of motivation or drive to

create goals for the future. Urban Compass aims to bridge this gap through the College

and Career Pathways program.

The College and Career Pathways program provides student engagement in order

to target specific occupational domains. The program targets occupations such as

education through informative seminars such as "Financial Planning" and "Applying to

College." Through group activities, the students experience play and social participation.

Performance patterns, such as roles, are addressed, as the students work with mentors to

determine their future goals and sense of identity. All contexts and barriers are crucial aspects of the program, as the students continue to learn how to overcome environmental barriers in achieving their goals (AOTA, 2014).

Programs, such as the College and Career Pathways program, allow for the opportunity to target poor educational outcomes in an underserved community, which can lead to a heightened risk of health disparities. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Individuals with less education are more likely to experience a number of health risks, such as obesity, substance abuse, and intentional and unintentional injury, compared with individuals with more education" (CDC, 2018, para. 2). On the other hand, those who achieve higher levels of education have a better chance of understanding basic health information to obtain appropriate services and make healthy choices for themselves. Thus, educational outcomes are a public health issue that OTs must address. OTs can intervene in order to prevent behaviors such as emotional dysregulation, poor dietary choices, substance abuse, and gang involvement, to name a few of the health risks which have a significant impact on how well students perform in school (CDC, 2018). This particular occupation-based program for youth who are at risk for poor educational outcomes is a pilot program and requires evidence to determine the immediate impact on the youth involved.

Need for Research

There is a need for pediatric occupation-based research within underserved communities, such as Watts. In working with Urban Compass, this research can potentially benefit the program and yield a continuation of their success. According to the United States Census Bureau (2017), 44.7% of residents in Watts have completed high

school and 3.2% of residents in Watts have attained a Bachelor's degree. While students in Watts may *plan* to attend college, they may be uncertain of the concrete steps to get there. Other than Urban Compass, there is only one other program in the Watts area that is attempting to bridge this gap, and they only can serve a small number of students from the area. If the College and Career Pathways program can produce measurable benefits, the children in the community may have a higher chance of attending college and pursuing a career. According to the centennial vision for AOTA, there is a call for OT in addressing issues of injustice as well as narrowing the gap in health disparities (Braveman & Bass-Haugen, 2009). Enrichment programs such as UC attempt to decrease community disparities regularly and this research highlights how OT can have a significant role in addressing these issues.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to assess youth perspectives on their views of the future, the steps it takes to get there, and how their current roles can affect their future occupations. This study emphasizes how childhood occupations expand further than only school and play, with a dimension that reflects their adult and future goals. This research addresses how OTs can use occupation as a framework from which to consult, develop, or manage similar programs, as well as define how childhood roles and routines can affect their future occupations within this context. Through semi-structured interviews, students involved in the College and Career Pathways program were able to answer the questions:

- How does the Urban Compass community perceive the educational future of their youth?

- What steps are necessary to take, in order to reach the perceived education future for youth?

Through semi-structured interviews, we were able to evaluate the outcomes of the College and Career Pathways program on middle school student's views of the future and perceived steps to achieve their goals.

Priority Population and Anticipated Outcomes

The priority population includes the staff and students involved in the College and Career Pathways program in Watts, California. The students involved have the most accurate outlook on the effectiveness of their learning throughout the program. The staff was able to contribute their perspective on the community's youth and why they chose to implement the College and Career Pathways curriculum.

Researchers were able to gain qualitative information via the children and staff involved in the College and Career Pathways program in order to contribute to the field of occupational therapy. The research provides insights into childhood and adolescent roles and routines in an underserved community. In addition to reflecting on current occupations, the youth were able to reflect on personal goals and ambitions for the future. In doing so, they were able to provide valuable insights as to the potential barriers which may prevent them from achieving occupational engagement. Students were able to offer feedback on the effectiveness of an occupation-based program in order to contribute to future planning for OT research. It is crucial that children have a voice that can be contributed to the research, specifically in the representation of underserved communities. Also, the themes extracted from qualitative interviews provided Urban Compass with feedback in order to best benefit their program for the future.

Literature Review

There is a definite need for occupation-based engagement in underserved communities. Watts, specifically, has physical, temporal, and social contexts which demand a need for a college-going program. There has been an increased amount of research on the effectiveness of engaging children in a setting outside of school (Daud & Caruthers, 2008). Specifically, research has highlighted the effects of after-school college-going programs and how they can benefit children in a community such as Watts. Finally, research in OT has defined occupational injustice and how that promotes the need for intervention in underserved communities. Much of the research in OT focuses on early intervention, school-based OT, and the transition from high school to adulthood, but there have been little findings highlighting the importance of occupation-based intervention for "middle-aged" children (Fraser, Lewis, Kellett, Ding, & Robinson, 2007). There is an evident need to describe and define the role of occupational therapy in support of an occupation-based college-going culture program in underserved communities such as Watts.

Need for College-Going Program in Watts

In order to understand the importance of the College and Career Pathways program, it is necessary to understand the temporal, social, and physical context for middle school students in Watts, California.

Temporal context. Temporally, the middle school takes place during a crucial stage during adolescent development. From the ages of 10-14, children are beginning to develop a sense of identity, developing initial decisions, roles, habits, and routines that eventually lead to life decisions and outcomes (AOTA, 2014). According to the director

of UC, in a community like Watts, middle school-aged children are being forced to decide between associating themselves with gang-culture or beginning their college-bound path (B. Burnett, personal communication, July 2018) - a decision which will significantly impact their occupational future.

      Social context. Socially, youth are experiencing pressure to make decisions about their chosen occupations based on what will allow them to "fit in" with their peers. A recent study showed that among middle school "crowds," those associated with gangs tend to be the students who are considered "popular" (Schwartz, Hopmeyer, Luo, Ross, & Fischer, 2017). The desire for social inclusion makes it more difficult for middle school-aged children to break away from gang affiliations. It was found that gang-affiliated crowds are *not* associated with higher levels of depression (Schwartz et al., 2017), making the association even more tempting to youth. This may be due to the initial feelings of belonging that are associated with being part of a group. Thus, it is imperative for children to have positive mentors in their lives (such as the staff at Urban Compass), to explain to them that these initial feelings of belongingness can be superseded by the violence and trauma associated with gang-related occupations.

      Physical context. Examining the physical context of Watts, it is evident that there is a great deal of crime associated with the community, providing a need for a safe environment for youth to explore occupations. Currently, there are 59 active gangs in the city of Watts, with many long-standing rivalries within the community (United States Census Bureau, 2017). In the past six months, alone, there have been 479 property crimes and 302 violent crimes (Los Angeles Times, 2018). The middle school-aged children in

the community are at a high-risk to become involved in crime or become a victim of a

crime.

In the United States 2017 census, looking at the education levels of the current

residents of Watts, it was found that 44.7% of residents have completed high school,

3.2% have obtained a Bachelor's degree, and 2.1% have a Master's degree. This is

extremely low in comparison to the national average. Eighty-eight percent of American

citizens have obtained a high school diploma, and 33% graduated with a Bachelor's or

more advanced degree (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Among many possible

factors, one reason for this disparity may be due to the high percentage of English-

language learners in Watts (B. Burnett, personal communication, July 2018). Most of the

caregivers of students enrolled in the College and Career Pathways Program are first-

generation Americans. Therefore, their children often speak Spanish at home and English

at school. When the English language is not consistently stressed at home, advanced

skills in speaking and writing are consequently not prioritized (B. Burnett, personal

communication, July 2018). According to Olsen (2014), this language barrier could also

be considered a disadvantage to grade school students. The research notes that "some

long-term English language learners have become discouraged and tuned-out learners,

ready to drop out of high school" (Olsen, 2014, p. 7). If a student has trouble

understanding language, it will be difficult to transfer skills to other subjects, such as

math and science. Ultimately, the children in Watts may be at a disadvantage in regards

to academic success, providing a need for a college-going program.

Due to the temporal, social, and physical contexts impacting the students involved

with UC are at risk for poor life and health outcomes, and there is a need to minimize the

risk for occupational deprivation. The perspectives of middle school students contribute a new understanding of childhood roles in community practice and among youth in underserved communities. In understanding these perspectives, occupational therapists may be further informed on how to intervene in this context effectively.

Benefits of After-School Programs

After-school and weekend programs, such as the College and Career Pathways program at Urban Compass, provide a multitude of benefits for students and families involved.

Positive social environment. After-school programs provide a social environment that promotes social learning from surrounding peers. Time spent with peers, outside of school setting allows youth to learn positive behaviors and values outside of a structured educational model (Daud & Carruthers, 2008). In a study that implemented an afterschool program with youth from a high-risk environment, students developed more positive views of their future just by attending the afterschool program twice a week (Daud & Caruthers, 2008). Students also noted that they were able to experience a beneficial and nurturing environment from the program. The positive findings from Daud & Caruthers (2008) reinforced the current study's focus on views of the future with the Urban Compass students.

Positive feelings and attitudes. Through this outside-of-school social environment, students also report that their programs create a positive effect on overall feelings and attitudes. According to a meta-analysis conducted on afterschool programs focused on social skills, Durlak et al. (2010) found that these programs offer an overall positive effect on youth's feelings and attitudes, which are indicators of behavioral

adjustment and school performance. Students who are enrolled in after-school programs are placed in an environment that nurtures social and intellectual growth.

Improved academic performance. Access to increased learning opportunities creates a positive contribution to youth's academic performance. Jenson et al. (2018) studied the outcomes of participation in an after-school program and its specific effect on academic outcomes. They found that students enrolled in after-school programs received higher scores and demonstrated increased proficiency in math and science compared to their baseline levels (Jenson et al., 2018).

Nurturing staff. Staff plays a vital role in the outcomes of an afterschool program through their implementation of the set curriculum. In a study that examined program predictors in 30 schools across Pennsylvania, researchers found a correlation of higher engagement and program participation when the programs consisted of caring and competent staff (Greene, Lee, Constance, & Hynes, 2013). Students' increased engagement in an afterschool program expands the potential benefits that the program can offer. Having a nurturing staff to implement the program is crucial to meet program expectations and maintain program fidelity.

Middle school is a pivotal time for youth in decision making and creating foundational values for the future, which after-school programs environments can offer. Middle school students in Watts have multiple risk factors, and the surrounding community only has one other existing program that targets middle school youth. Urban Compass' College and Career Pathways program offer an occupation-based out of school program that bridges this gap in the area. The implementation of this program serves the

middle school youth population by offering support and resources that support youth to pursue their future education and careers.

Current literature highlights several benefits of after-school programs; yet, there is limited research in occupational therapy. Existing literature demonstrates significant benefits for programs to be occupation-based (Bazyk & Bazyk, 2009). However, the amount of research implementing occupation-based programs and research on their positive or negative effect is limited. Our understanding of the role of occupational therapy in programs for youth in challenging circumstances remains incomplete due to this gap.

Benefits of College-Going Programs

Title IV of the 1998 Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 aims to specifically target middle school students in high-poverty areas and provide the support for higher education ("National Council," n.d.). Legislation like this show national initiatives prioritizing higher education for low-income children. Aligned with national legislative OT's prioritize a need for occupational justice, which can be translated into the benefits of college-going programs. College-going programs can recognize post-secondary education as a necessity showing higher rates for college attendance, addressing social inequalities, parental support, mentoring, and addressing gaps in occupational literature.

Higher rates of college attendance. Programs like Urban Compass' College and Career Pathways program, a college-going program, have shown to have positive results with a focus on college attendance and academic success. College-going programs can offer exposure, mentorship, and role models outside the family in youth's lives. Early

exposure to college-going programs engages students to begin thinking about attending

college and obtaining careers made possible with collegiate degrees. Scanlon et al. (2008)

found that students recognized that in order to obtain goals for school, work, and

lifestyle, attending post-secondary education was a necessity. College-going programs

offer curriculum like GEAR UP, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for

Undergraduate Programs, which cater program structure for the success of youth in

higher education ("National Council," n.d.). College-going programs provide additional

support and knowledge for students to obtain the education required to become a higher

profession like a doctor or lawyer. Through the use of college-going programs, students

receive aid for the transition from middle school to high school and eventually to college.

In their study, Scanlon et al. (2008) also found that "[students] demonstrated that they

begin their high school career with clear goals and awareness of pathway to achieve those

goals" (p. 171). When students identify future educational goals early in middle school it

prepares them to select the necessary classes to progress through school and achieve their

goals. These programs offer education and knowledge as the next steps to get there and

the necessary path to take.

   Addresses social inequities. Targeting urban students in underserved

communities addresses the inequality and disadvantages these students face when it

comes to becoming successful adults or college graduates. Students from urban areas are

already profiled as being less successful young adults and adults. In comparison to their

peers, this targeted population receives lower wages, lower completion of postsecondary

education, and lower-class living situations (Scanlon, 2008). This is one barrier to

academic success in addition to low-income, low educational attainment, high gang

involvement, and higher crime rates experienced in Watts. Interventions like after-school programs, especially those with the culture of college preparedness, provide the necessary tools to combat these presumptions.

      Parental support. In Mistry (2009), programs aided with parental aspirations pushed for student success. A positive postsecondary education mindset and expectations from parents and educators influenced students with positive academic results. Parent's view of their children's futures aligned with what college-going programs had to offer. Parents know that academic success contributes significantly to getting into college and graduating. In terms of grade point average (GPA), having the support and encouragement from college-going programs ensures student success academically achieving postsecondary attainment.

      Provides mentoring. McQuillin and his colleagues (2011) completed a study that engaged middle school students in mentoring and connectedness to school and future outcomes. This study paired middle students with college students in a mentoring program that provided one on one support. To ease transitions, it is assumed that this unique experience would impart knowledge from college students to middle school 'protégés.' This study produced clinical significance though statistical significant outcomes differed, further research is needed in the impact of mentoring in middle school programs like the one Urban Compass provides. College-going awareness is a highlighted trait that can benefit middle school students at a young age in their academic development.

      The gap. Currently, it is known that after-school programs contribute to higher rates of college attendance, address social inequalities, and provide mentorship. There is

little OT literature on the evaluation of occupation-based interventions for middle school students. Studies available focus more on the high-school population with its connectedness to college and higher education as it is the next step after receiving a high school diploma. We have identified this gap within the middle school population that early intervention in this occupation can play a potential role with continued success. Current literature has found value in addressing views of the future, steps to get there, and barriers. Our study builds on these initial findings addressing these important themes. More OT literature is needed to address the occupation-based aspect of after-school programs and college-bound culture in the urban middle-school population to fill the gap in this barrier.

College-going programs provide numerous advantages in early exposure, mentoring, and assistance in support for urban and underserved populations. This study, coupled with existing research examined views of the future, steps to get there, and barriers middle schoolers encounter in efforts for further literature in middle school college-bound culture.

Relevance to Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy and its domains have significant precedent for being involved in this type of setting. The three areas of an occupation-based curriculum, community practice, and occupational justice converge to create a definitive area of practice for clinicians.

Community-based settings: With regards to OT, this study contributes to the evidence base for OT in community-based settings. Previous research shows that occupation-based after-school programs result in positive effects on social skills, as well

as addresses similar questions to this study, including views of the future, steps to achieve this, and possible barriers (Atherton, Cymbir, Roberts, Page, & Remedios, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). However, further research is needed in relation to occupations. It is within the domain of OT to address the development of social skills in the pediatric community, especially in places that may experience occupational barriers (AOTA, 2014). Clinicians work with pediatric clients to build competence, confidence, and social skills (Daud & Carruthers, 2008). Within high-risk communities, OTs can play a role in education and community programs to keep youth out of gang-affiliated groups (Schwartz, Hopmeyer, Luo, Ross, & Fischer, 2017).

Occupation-based programs. The College and Career Pathways program aim to be activity or occupation-based. Rather than simply lecturing to students, there are significant time blocks dedicated to interactive, skill-building activities. These occupation-based interventions and activities are effective in promoting social interactions among students (Arbesman, Bazyk, & Nochajski, 2013). While participating in these activities, students can build vital communication skills, social relationships, and career goals. OTs can also educate children, after-school staff, and parents about the benefits of engagement in meaningful activities (Bazyk & Bazyk, 2009). In conjunction with the relatively small body of current evidence, there is a definite niche for OTs to expand upon within college-going programs by implementing occupation-based activities that are appropriate for the given population, as well as expanding evidence on the role of OT in these programs.

College-going programs are an example of an intervention that also provides environmental support. However, research shows there is a significant gap between

program curriculum and effective, sustainable implementation (Durlak, Weissberg,

Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Schools need help with curriculum choice,

implementation, and evaluation to assess progress towards goals, information about

available health and wellness programs, dissemination of information available, and staff

and parent education.

It is crucial to challenge the population attending the after-school program

appropriately. Since it is a significant period in a child's life, the clinician must take into

consideration the cultural, educational, geographical, and social contexts in the

population. According to Bazyk and Bazyk (2009), there is a clear role for OTs to

provide occupational enrichment or the "just-right" environment to this particular

population. The person-environment occupation (PEO) is a relevant model that will be

addressed in detail in theoretical frameworks.

Occupational justice. Occupational justice is a framework that is increasingly

being used to understand disparities in occupational access. Occupational justice is

defined as "the right of every individual to be able to meet basic needs and to have equal

opportunities and life chances to reach toward her or his potential but specific to the

individual's engagement in diverse and meaningful occupation" (Wilcock & Townsend,

2009, p. 194). It is a frame through which current data can be analyzed to organize the

opportunities and barriers expressed in student interviews. The students within Watts

experience occupational injustice, deprivation, and apartheid due to societal factors

beyond their control and therefore lack access to meaningful occupations which

contribute to their quality of life and futures. Occupational apartheid is "the segregation

of groups of people through the restriction of denial of access to dignified and meaningful

participation in occupations of daily life on the basis of race, color, disability, national

origin, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, political beliefs, status in society, or other

characteristics" (Kronenberg, Algado, & Pollard, 2005). Although it may not be

purposeful, the students of Watts have experienced occupational apartheid.

A simplified example of this is that a student may be interested in reading and

writing, but there is limited access to libraries and workshops in her neighborhood due to

factors out of her control. This could be direct, like a lack of libraries, or indirect, like the

lack of neighborhood safety surrounding her residence. If there were libraries available in

the area, the student could still be limited in being able to access the library due to lack of

safety in the neighborhood. In summary, these societal-level inequalities significantly

contribute to the access that some are privileged enough to have, as well as barriers others

face.

The Centennial Vision for AOTA includes increased focus and concern for

becoming globally connected and addressing issues of injustice as well as narrowing the

gap in health status caused by health disparities (AOTA, 2017; Braveman & Bass-

Haugen, 2009). Within underserved communities, there is a clear need for OT to

implement specialized, skilled interventions. OTs can enhance the students' occupational

rights, known as the "rights of all people to engage in meaningful occupations that

contribute positively to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities"

(Whalley-Hammel, 2008, p. 62). OTs can help develop state and local capacity to

encourage evidence-based programs. They can utilize connections between the school,

health, and government systems to invite policy change to assist these health and

wellness programs. There is a need for training after-school staff to model supportive and

encouraging behaviors, have meaningful interactions, and on leadership and collaboration with students (Daud & Carruthers, 2008). Occupational therapists can educate staff to appropriately address the students according to their dynamic health, educational, cognitive, and sensory needs. Urban Compass will promote the occupational rights of the students in Watts by giving them access to new occupations, skills, activities, and tools they previously faced barriers. Urban Compass attempts to decrease the barriers students face, thus decreasing occupational injustices and more substantial health disparities by mitigating risk-factors. Using occupational justice as a framework to define and describe OT practice among marginalized communities, OTs can then implement the best, evidence-based interventions for marginalized communities, ones that parallel client-centered perspectives of the students themselves.

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to understand youth perspective on the occupation-based program in order for youth in underserved communities to address the occupational injustices which they face through Urban Compass's College and Career Pathways program. By identifying the enrolled students' perceptions of the youth's educational futures, we were able to provide feedback to the program directors for future planning, and better understand the occupations of middle school students and their ideation development through this college and career pathways program.

P: Staff and students in Urban Compass College and Career Pathways program.

I: Urban Compass College and Career Pathways program.

C: Perceptions on youth's future and the steps to get there described in the beginning and end of the program

O: Comparative and descriptive findings regarding views of the future and steps

to get there for middle school youth.

Because the program is focused on a college-bound culture, there are expected shifts of

perceptions on the students' perceived goals for the future and the steps it takes to

achieve the goals. Interview questions asked about views of the future, steps to get there,

and perceived barriers. Using evidence gathered from the literature review coupled with

current data of the Watts community (United States Census Bureau, 2017), there is an

identified gap for the need of OT literature on occupation-based interventions for middle

school students. More specifically, there is a need to understand the perceptions of the

youth involved in Urban Compass in order to describe the learning and perspectives of

the students involved. This gap is addressed in the research questions, which focuses on

how middle school students saw their future and what steps they thought were needed to

achieve their goals. The two research questions are;

1. How do middle schoolers and staff from Urban Compass middle school

program perceive the educational future of the youth?

2. What steps do middle schoolers and staff from Urban Compass program find

necessary in order to reach the perceived educational future?

Addressing these research questions will lead to knowledge that can be used to inform

future program planning efforts at Urban Compass as well as describing occupational

ideation of middle school youth and roles for OT in community-based health promotion.

Theoretical Framework

The person-environment-occupation (PEO) model and Albert Bandura's social

learning theory guided the approach for this study while creating the interview

questions, methodology, and analysis of the effects of the College and Career Pathways

program on students' views of the future.

PEO Model

        According to the PEO model, the person is a unique being who assumes a variety

of roles simultaneously, the environment is the surrounding cultural, socio-economic,

institutional, physical, and social contexts, and the occupation is a self-directed,

functional activity engaged in over the lifespan (Law et al., 1996). The integration of

these three concepts describes the individual's occupational performance. When there is

better environmental fit, there is a higher congruence between person and environment,

leading to increased occupational performance (Law et al., 1996). The College and

Career Pathways program aim to give the students of Watts an improved environmental

fit, which will lead to dynamic experiences necessary for foundational building towards

the goal of higher education. From a therapeutic perspective, the clinician is presented

with a unique opportunity to provide the "just right" environment to challenge the

students and facilitate their development appropriately. The PEO model is appropriate

from a developmental perspective as well, since aspects of the person, environment, and

occupation shift throughout the lifespan. This program aims to change the environment

in order to increase personal engagement in meaningful occupations for the youth

involved while the students are in middle-school, giving them appropriate support to

continue the educational trajectory onward.

        Environmental barriers. Students of Watts experience environmental barriers

that prevent them from engaging in meaningful occupations. This is occupational

apartheid since every student has the right to engage in occupations that are important to

them. Currently, the most impactful risk factors are the surrounding environment because Watts has high violent crime rates, dozens of active gangs, poverty, lack of funding for school programs, and English-language barriers (Los Angeles Times, 2018). According to Daud and Carruthers (2008), occupational therapists (OTs) can elicit positive change by focusing on the environment, enriching the environment around youth, and creating the just-right challenge to enhance competence and skill-building.

Urban Compass is a positive environment that provides the opportunity for engagement in occupations that are typically inaccessible to this population. This includes a college-going curriculum, field trips to local universities, and opportunities to develop problem-solving skills with similar students. The program is a positive influence in their environment that attempts to provide support in areas that otherwise might be lacking. There is a need for this program to be successful, and OT can contribute it meaningful ways due to our expertise in creating program curriculum and intervention strategies to include families and communities, providing an additional environmental resource. Another goal of Urban Compass is to encourage students to develop personal occupations. This can be any meaningful activity, from students filling out college applications to participating in hobbies they are passionate about. Bazyk and Bazyk (2009) found that participation in meaningful activities and autonomy helps students experience flow, long-term mental health benefits [and] academic success. Since Urban Compass is occupation-based, students can engage in self-directed tasks, practice autonomy, and develop personal interests and career aspirations.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is a specific model within the scope of behavioral therapy. The theory has congruences with previously established theories of classical and operant

conditioning, but with two added essential ideas; mediating processes occur between stimuli and responses, and behavior is learned through the environment via observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Children will observe the behavior of those around them and will encode this behavior to imitate either immediately or later in life. According to this theory, the child is more likely to imitate behavior from those they perceive to be similar to themselves—thus, gender, race and socioeconomic status may play a role in social learning (Bandura, 1977). Similarly, the child will be further motivated to display specific behaviors if they see others being reinforced for those same behaviors. For example, if a child sees that their classmate is verbally rewarded by the teacher for making a positive comment about graduating and attending college, the child may decide to emulate that same notion on a later date, whether it may be consciously or subconsciously.

Community and societal perspectives. Middle school is a crucial time for students to begin to develop their sense of self, and they promote this by emulating models like teachers, counselors, and peers. In American society, graduating high school and attending college has been deemed as a necessary stepping stone for successful independence (Palladino-Shulteiss, 2008). This demonstrates the social learning theory in a broader, societal perspective. As a society, teenagers and young adults continuously see their peers and mentors gaining success and financial stability after receiving a college degree. However, there is a divide between society as a whole and smaller societies in cities like Watts. Low-income, at-risk student communities need positive mentors who can help students observe rewards from achieving academic goals, which they may not often see in their everyday lives. This will facilitate collective efficacy or the combined

beliefs that they can work together to produce desired effects (Smith, Osgood, Caldwell, Hynes, & Perkins, 2013). This way, the middle-schoolers collectively support positive behavior and goals. Through Urban Compass, students can use social learning theory to observe the behavior of volunteers, as well as peers receiving positive reinforcement, to model their behaviors appropriately.

Methodology

The current study is a qualitative phenomenological examination of the perspectives of middle school students enrolled in Urban Compass' College and Career Pathways program (refer to Appendix A for the timeline of the methods). The approach focused on using semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation. Utilizing a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews allowed us to gain insight directly from the students. Interview questions also created opportunities for new themes to emerge from the participants rather than restricting answers to pre-set options. In the months leading up to the start of the program, we met with the director of the Urban Compass Watts site to discuss the nature of the program and relevant questions that would be important to add in the proposed research project. Once we received institutional consent from Urban Compass, and the proposal received Institutional Review Board approval, we began to obtain assent from students and consent from their caregivers.

Consent Process

We took an exhaustive approach to obtain consent from students, caregivers, and staff throughout the interview process. Signed consent forms indicated that caregivers approved for their enrolled student to be interviewed for the research project, have their pictures taken, and have them video recorded during interviews for data transcription. We collaborated with program staff to send electronic consent forms to caregivers to increase

the likelihood of returned consent forms to us and the staff. We also discussed physical

consent forms with students' guardians when available before and after sessions. After

consent was obtained, either physically or electronically, we also gathered assent from the

students with physical forms. Once both consent and assent were obtained, we conducted

semi-structured interviews with the students in pairs or small groups. As consent was

received on a rolling basis, interviews continued throughout the program's duration.

Participant Observations

Throughout the process of obtaining interviews, we continued to attend the

college and career pathways program as volunteers to assist the Urban Compass staff in

implementing their program curriculum and note observations on student responses. We

participated in curriculum topics when requested by staff, occasionally led group

activities and icebreakers, and engaged with the students during their scheduled breaks.

Additionally, we completed notes following the sessions they were actively engaged in,

which included details on how the sessions were conducted and how individual students

responded in those given sessions.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Using semi-structured interviews to gather information from participants

promotes a conversation, allowing them also to ask questions and facilitate storytelling,

rather than restricting them to specific answers (Greene & Hogan, 2005). Interviews

allow open-ended questions while targeting a common specific goal which was utilized in

the research. Interview questions targeted information regarding the youth's current views

of their future and what are the necessary steps to attain that future. The questions were

simply worded, as to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding during the interview; for

example, "What do you want to be when you grow up? What steps must you take in applying to college?" In addition to interviewing the students, we also interviewed the Urban Compass staff with similar questions regarding their current views of the youth's future and the necessary steps to get there. A total of twelve interviews were conducted with students, with each interview lasting around ten minutes on average due to student attention span and in order to fit naturally within the structure of the program. Students were interviewed in groups of 2-6 participants. Most participants completed at least two interviews, identifying their initial views early into the program and clarifying their plans for the future later in the program. In the last month of the program, researchers gathered the students' final impressions on the program and revisited similar questions to identify any shifts in views of the future through secondary interviews.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis for this study included textual analysis for common themes and patterns. Dedoose software was used to collect transcriptions, develop and apply coding schemes, and analyze connections made across the interviews. As previously stated, the target population is the middle school youth in Watts, California, enrolled in the Urban Compass College and Career Pathways program. The research sample consisted of 13 students with both consent and assent between sixth and eighth grade, each of whom were assigned a pseudonym when interviewed. Pseudonyms were used to code participants as interviews were electronically transcribed within a week after they were conducted. Each interview was electronically transcribed (verbatim) by reviewing the video recordings of the interviews conducted. All data was password protected within the electronic files and

stored in password-protected electronic devices. Dedoose software was used as a tool for us to collect and organize their qualitative data so that they could complete their data analysis.

Dedoose. We entered each transcribed interview onto Dedoose. Each researcher first read through each interview independently to identify common themes. Once each researcher reviewed every interview separately, they collaborated to determine the coding scheme based on the common themes found. The agreed-upon coding scheme was entered into Dedoose. We then coded interviews independently, while continuing to clarify any confusion about selected codes together, to assure that definitions of codes were consistent across each of us. After all, codes were assigned, we utilized Dedoose to finalize themes that emerged. We further conducted a conceptual analysis of occupations for youth by utilizing the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (AOTA, 2014).

Ethical and Legal Considerations

Working with Vulnerable Populations

Middle school youth is a population that "has been relatively neglected by researchers outside of the field of developmental psychology" (Fraser et al., 2007, p. 161). While there has been a great deal of research consisting of elementary-aged children, and young adults transitioning from high school to college, there is a gap in the research, including "middle-aged" children. This is a very crucial point in development, as children are beginning to experience more independence and make important decisions about their educational future. For the children in Watts, they are experiencing all of these developmental milestones while simultaneously navigating

the hardships of growing up in an underserved community. Therefore, this population is considered vulnerable, and researchers must take the proper steps to develop informed consent and confidentiality.

During the qualitative interviews, students answered questions in small groups of two to six students. The purpose of conducting the interviews in groups was so that children would feel comfortable to be open and honest. A one-to-one ratio of child to adult can feel anxiety-provoking or forced, but children tend to feel more expressive around their peers. The moderator of the group had several functions, including developing rapport (making the group feel comfortable and at ease), listening to stories and experiences, trying to understand their feelings, and keeping the group discussion focused on the topic of interest, ensuring all children had the opportunity to contribute (Greene & Hogan, 2005). Moderators also filmed the student interviews, in order to keep track of the responses (which is indicated in consent forms). The videos were only used in order to transcribe conversations confidentially, and will not be used in any form of publication.

The children involved with the research had a "'set of rights' to self-determination, privacy, dignity, anonymity, confidentiality, fair treatment, and protection from discomfort or harm" (Greene & Hogan, 2005, p. 65). In order to protect the rights of the children, we took the following steps: all children were treated equally, and were clearly explained their rights from the beginning of the research and process involved during the research. They were informed that they had the right to opt out of research at any time and that all of their responses and identifying information were to be confidential. The students were informed that if they chose not to participate in

research, it would not impact their ability to attend Urban Compass programs in any way. We provided confidentiality by assigning a pseudonym (three-digit number) to each student and excluding names from the transcription and evaluation process. Overall, this research grants children their right to have a voice in research and contribute their perspectives on occupational engagement. "Children are social actors and informants in their own right and childhood is a structural feature of all societies" (Christensen & James, 2008, p. 38). By contributing their voices, the children involved in Urban Compass can represent their societal demographic within the future of OT implications.

Adhering to Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics

We adhered to the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics by maintaining principles and standards of conduct. We displayed beneficence by continuously acting for the good of the staff, children, and families (AOTA, 2015). The goal of the research is to better the College and Career Pathways program, in hopes that the children may develop meaningful and constructive occupations, as well as educational goals. We adhered to non-maleficence by refraining from harm in any situation (AOTA, 2015). All moderators avoided situations that would make any child uncomfortable and agreed to report any issue or misconduct. Autonomy was a crucial element throughout the process, as students were informed that their identity would not be associated with their responses to interviews (AOTA, 2015). Justice was displayed, throughout, like all children, families, and staff, were treated fairly and equally (AOTA, 2015). Interviews were transcribed by members who did not conduct them in order to ensure fairness and prevent bias. All participants were clear during all parts of

the research process and encouraged to ask questions throughout, demonstrating

veracity (AOTA). We assured to treat one another with respect and dignity, and carried

themselves with professionalism, demonstrating fidelity (AOTA, 2015).

Informed Consent

Since we were working with a vulnerable population, it was crucial that

participants were able to receive adequate information in order to provide consent. In

order to participate in the interview process, every parent was required to fill out a

consent form which allowed their enrolled student to be interviewed for the research

project, have their pictures taken, and have them video recorded during interviews for

data transcription (provided in English or Spanish) (see Appendix A). Children were

asked to bring physical forms home for their parents to sign, or parents could provide

electronic consent. The Urban Compass staff sent the consent forms to families for

caregivers to sign and return electronically. Also, each child participant was required

to sign an assent form before participating in an interview, which explained in clear

verbiage what they were going to participate in, and how their voice would be used in

research (see Appendix B). All staff members also signed a consent form to participate,

which included a description of the research, their time involvement, risks, and benefits

of participating, and their participant rights (see Appendix C). The research team was

available to answer any questions, with a Spanish translator to assist in communication

with parents. Parents and children were able to choose to opt out of the process at any

time. The research team was always available in person during the program to verbally

explain the consent forms and answer questions. It was our goal to make sure to be

available throughout the process so that students and families felt comfortable in

providing consent to participate in OT research.

Copyrighted Tools

There were no copyrighted tools, assessments, or audiovisuals used during this

research project.

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Results

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The results of the study demonstrate common themes across participants'

interviews. We utilized tools within Dedoose to organize our qualitative data (refer to

Appendix D for packed code cloud generated by Dedoose). After analyzing the data, we

collectively collaborated on identifying a defined coding scheme to draw out common

themes. Common themes that emerged were: views of the future, steps to get there, and

perceived barriers (refer to Appendix B for the coding scheme used).

Participants

Of the 30 enrolled students in the program, we received consent and assent for 13

students, two of whom were male and 11 of whom were female. Three participants were

in sixth grade (both females), eight participants were in seventh grade (one male and

seven females), and three participants were in eighth grade (one male and two females).

All participants live in the Watts neighborhood, and most live in the adjacent Nickerson

Gardens community. Most students attend nearby charter schools. A total of 12 group

interviews were conducted and lasted on average, around ten minutes each.

Themes

Based on the interviews conducted, the following three themes emerged: views of

the future, steps to get there, and perceived barriers (refer to Appendix C for

representative quotes for each theme).

Views of the future. "Views of the future" was an overarching theme used to describe the ways in which students envisioned their future roles, routines, and occupations. The parent code "views of the future" was further broken down into the following child codes: "careers," "high school," "future family goals," "college," and "idealized goals." Of these child codes, "college" was the most commonly coded scheme from the transcribed interviews with the students. Many of the students spoke about the necessity to attend a university in order to begin a career. In fact, students noted a direct correlation between college and careers, implying that you could not earn a substantial salary *without* attending college. For example, one student stated simply, "I'm excited because when I go to college I'll get money" (Student 011, personal communication, July 2018). She went on to explain that to become a teacher (or a dance teacher), one does not *have* to attend college, but it is necessary in order to "make more money" or have more advanced opportunities (Student 011, personal communication, July 2018). Another student agreed, "if you wanna be a professional [dancer], you do [have to attend college]" (Student 003, personal communication, July 2018). When asked about college in general, many students were able to name specific schools, both within their home state and outside of their home state, in which they hoped to attend. Whether or not they were able to name a school, *every* student who was interviewed expressed a need or desire to attend a four-year college.

Following "college", the next most commonly attached child code was "careers". Similarly to their ideas about college, almost every interviewed student had a specific career in mind, including, but not limited to, becoming a nurse, veterinarian, doctor, FBI agent, actress, dancer, and lawyer. When asked to elaborate on why they chose these

careers, many students spoke about their current meaningful occupations and how they

pertain to their future career choice. One student explained "I like playing with my dog…

I want to be a vet" (Student 009, personal communication, July 2018). Another student,

who was interested in engineering, claimed, "right now I'm really into like robots and

stuff and I'm interested in robots cause like Terminator and stuff like how it's made"

(Student 025, personal communication, July 2018). Other students' career choices

reflected professions which they saw on television or through older peers and family

members.

"High school" was another common theme which many students reflected upon

during interviews. They spoke about private and charter schools which they felt could

better lead to their academic success than the nearby public school. Student 002 claimed,

"well you have to get into a *good* high school, good college, and go to medical school"

(Student 002, personal communication, July 2018). Student 009 elaborated on the

importance of high school in order to become a veterinarian- "I went to St. Mary's, you

know like the high school, the all girls, I visited. They said that they had a medical class

and I said, 'Does this have animal class?' and she said yes, and I said, 'I wanna come'"

(Student 002, personal communication, July 2018). In some ways, the students were

better able to elaborate on their personal high school goals rather than college goals. This

is most likely due to the fact that, as middle-schoolers, high school is a more relevant and

emergent topic in their lives.

There were also several themes which emerged in regards to "idealized goals" and

"future family goals". "Idealized goals" were coded any time a student mentioned (what

they believed to be) the *best* university or plan of action in order to practice their chosen

career. Students mentioned attending top universities such as Harvard, Yale, and Julliard for a degree in music. While it was refreshing to hear such extensive dreams, these idealized goals did not always coincide with the occupational barriers which the students, themselves, had spoken about. "Future family goals" were coded any time a student mentioned goals regarding marriage or starting a family. All participants who spoke about "future family goals" were female. One claimed, "I wanna have a family of my own that worry about no problems. They like probably go around the world to [travel]... I want my kids to be happy" (Student 020, personal communication, July 2018). It was clear that for this student, as well as several others, perceived future success could be measured by their family and childrens' happiness.

Steps to get there. Questions from the pre-interviews were also focused on discovering students' current ideas on the necessary steps to reach their future goals. The child codes used under this category included "baseline knowledge," "lack of baseline knowledge," "grades," "extra curriculars," "sports," and "Urban Compass" (the program, itself). Students described their baseline knowledge of what they believed was essential to reach their goals. While some students shared idealized career goals, many noted appropriate immediate steps that would help achieve those goals. For example, one participant shared she loved animals and wanted to be a marine biologist and that this would require her to enter a high school that includes a well-rounded science program. There were also some students who expressed they would enjoy a specific career but were not familiar with the necessary steps or baseline knowledge. For example, one participant noted she wanted to become a dancer because she enjoyed dancing, though she had not previously enrolled in any dance lessons. Several students shared that their

grades, currently and in the future, will play a significant role in being able to reach their

proposed careers, which connected to their goals of future schooling. Many students

included college as a beneficial step to reaching their career goals as well. In order to

reach college, students described some steps to get there included not only grades, but

also extracurricular activities. One student described through the program they "learned

about classes to take that will help get into college and [to] try new things, [like]

volunteer (Student 002, personal communication, July 2018). Students were aware of

scholarships for sports and athletes, but did not know about scholarships for other

activities, such as the arts, socioeconomic status, or other after-school activities. One

student described how she learned through this college-going program about cultural

scholarships, like a Hispanic scholarship or first-generation scholarship, that would be

relevant to her (Student 009, personal communication, July 2018). Another student

described steps towards achieving her goal of becoming a marine biologist and described

her knowledge of steps towards achieving that specialized career. She said she knew that

she had to take relevant classes, such as biology, to become more specialized and work

towards the goal of becoming a marine biologist (Student 009, personal communication,

July 2018). She even knew of certain schools that offered good biology classes, and she

knew that this school would help her achieve her final goal (Student 009, personal

communication, July 2018). Another student described liking robots, and said that in

order to pursue this as a career, he knew that "you need to understand technology"

(Student 025, personal communication, July 2018). Although the students did not

demonstrate knowledge of every individual step towards achieving college-level

education, these students knew basic breakdowns of their chosen career or interests, and

credited the College and Career Pathways program as a major tool which provided this

information. Urban Compass introduced many new concepts to the students, in regards to

the proper steps to reach their education goals, which subsequently added to their

foundational knowledge.

      Perceived barriers. While many of the students discussed their unique personal

characteristics, such as hobbies and passions, the majority of the students noted that they

perceived significant barriers that would influence the possibility of them reaching their

eventual goals. The parent code of "perceived barriers" was further broken down into the

following child codes: "lack of scholarships," "leaving Watts/family," "potential for

dropping out," and "money." About half of the students interviewed identified some kind

of perceived barrier to reaching their future goals. The most agreed upon barrier stated by

students was money. One student told us about how her future goal was to attend Julliard

to pursue an acting career, and identified that it would be difficult to be accepted and

attend because it was "a lot of money you know" (Student 011, personal communication,

July 2018). Other students believed it would be easier to get into college if they had

money (Students 001 and 002, personal communication, July 2018). While many of the

students understood that money was a vital factor that played into higher education, few

of them were aware of the available scholarships. One student stated that one of the main

takeaways from the College and Career Pathways program was learning about different

scholarships for financial aid, including "[getting] scholarships for being Hispanic and

[being a] first generation college [student]" (Student 009, personal communication, July

2018).

Additionally, some students also perceived that being in the physical location of Watts was also a barrier. Another student noted that she wanted to go to "UCLA just because [her] mom and family doesn't want [her] to go far" (Student 009, personal communication, July 2018). Some students reported having strict parents who enforced household rules, which included prohibiting them from being outside; however, these same students also relayed an understanding of why these rules were set in place. In our time volunteering at the program and talking with the students, several of them reported that they are unable to leave their house for safety reasons. As a result, they expressed that they enjoyed attending the program because they were able to see their friends on the weekend.

In addition to perceived barriers, several students highlighted their roles in their families as a significant personal factor. This included: being one of several children, helping caregivers look after other siblings, and responsibilities and rules in their homes due to family dynamics. One student told us, "I was the first-born child in my family. I was born somewhere else but brought here when I was a couple of months. My mom had me when she was a teen, and I try to work hard to help them out" (Student 010, personal communication, July 2018). Some students perceived their familial role as a perceived barrier since they felt a deep sense of responsibility to their families, which would affect their likelihood of choosing whether or not to leave Watts in the future.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to assess youth perspectives on their views of the future, the steps it takes to get there, and how their current roles can affect their future occupations, in order to inform OT practice. With the use of qualitative measures, the

interviews demonstrated their learning through the program and perspectives and their confidence with school and moving forward towards future scholastic achievements. Students were aware, overall, that their current endeavors could impact their future occupations, and that there are specific barriers which could prevent them from succeeding. Students were also found to have the ability to identify occupations, roles, and how these occupations lend themselves to future aspirations and goals.

Implication of Findings

      College. We aimed to gain a qualitative perspective of the students' perspectives in the program and how these students perceive higher education. The codes for "views of the future" and "college" co-occurred fifteen times throughout the results, which aligns with the goals of the College and Career Pathways program. As stated in the literature review, early exposure to college-going programs encourages students to begin thinking about attending college and achieving careers made possible with collegiate degrees. This study further supports that students are cognizant that in order to obtain goals for school, work, and lifestyle, attending post-secondary education was a necessity (Scanlon et al., 2008). Regardless of whether or not the students spoke about a chosen career path, they all agreed that they wanted to attend college. With that said, many of the students also articulated their knowledge of the expenses which come with higher education. One response, "Because if you have money, you can get in and you don't have to - you have to pay but if you don't have that much money you could get financial aid and get a scholarship," demonstrates that the students perceive college as only attainable to individuals with access to financial resources (Student 001, personal communication, July 2018). Scanlon et al. (2008) conducted a study which found that students who attended

college-going programs left with specific goals and awareness of their pathways to

achieve those goals. Similarly, the children of Urban Compass were also found to have

increased awareness and increased motivation to achieve their goals of higher education

as they are aware this may lead to better job opportunities and higher pay.

Overcoming perceived barriers. Through the use of the interviews, it was found

that middle schoolers had the skills to identify their current occupational interests, which

often related to their future goals, despite awareness of their environmental barriers such

as "[needing] money" (Student 011, personal communication, July 2018). Some students

felt pressure within their households, especially taking on new roles within the family

structure, as one student stated, "my mom had me when she was a teen, and I try to work

hard to help [her and the baby] out" (Student 010, personal communication, July 2018),

demonstrating awareness that balancing school achievement and family can be difficult.

These interviews demonstrate that these children have some insight into their

environmental barriers as well as insight into their occupations and higher education

goals. Through understanding the potential barriers to success, specifically in an

underserved community, the students have an opportunity for this insight to facilitate

future occupational success or pursue higher education outside their community.

Occupations of Children

AOTA defines childhood occupations as "playing, learning, and socializing"

(AOTA, 2019). This study emphasizes how childhood occupations expand much further,

with a dimension that reflects their adult and future goals. Specifically, within

underserved communities, many children are obligated to adopt more "adult" occupations

and responsibilities at a younger age. Several students in the College and Career

Pathways program communicated that they had multiple siblings, including young ones that require care. Others described being part of the first-generation immigrant family or having parents with little formal education. This provides context to the roles the students assume as they transition from elementary age to middle-school age. It is also relevant from an OT perspective because it provides information useful to addressing this population's needs with regards to familial roles as they shift throughout the lifespan, as well as how roles differ between demographics and cultural perspectives.

Also, middle schoolers were able to identify their current occupational interests, which were often related to their future aspirational goals. Existing literature demonstrates significant benefits for programs to be occupation-based (Bazyk & Bazyk, 2009), and with students able to identify their occupations, support of occupation-based programs can be easily advocated for in the community. Going to good high schools, colleges, and into their desired careers are future dimensions of occupation that were universally agreed upon by the youth in the program. Their success in these adult and future occupations is vital to overcome the environmental and social barriers they face, such as violence, crime, and poverty. In order for the youth to obtain ongoing educational participation, role competence, and occupational justice, we require an expanded view of children's occupations.

Roles for OT in Community Setting

Occupational therapists are uniquely positioned to use an occupational framework among youth who face barriers to achieving their future occupational goals. OTs can use cultural, psychosocial, and developmental knowledge to facilitate occupation-based programming among underserved populations. In doing so, the therapist's role consists of

promoting, establishing, and preventing (AOTA, 2014). Practitioners can promote

motivation and resiliency among disadvantaged youth and create an accessible

educational atmosphere. They may establish trust in the growth process and current

supports, as well as assist in developing potential meaningful occupations which youth

can access in their communities. Finally, through intervention, OTs can work to prevent

occupational deprivation, alienation, and poor educational outcomes, which can lead to

health disparities. Practitioners may work as consultants, collaborators, program

developers, or program managers within this setting, in order to promote quality of life

and occupational success for children and families. By emphasizing occupations and

environment when creating curriculums and interventions, OTs can help students to

generalize what they learn at Urban Compass to other areas of their lives, supporting the

call for occupation-based programs to enhance competence and skills.

Limitations

　　We encountered several limitations that open up the discussion of the current project's results and the usefulness of the results outside of the project.

　　Generalizability. The data gathered and analyzed is not inclusive to represent the entire middle school population. The research was conducted on a small sample size of 35 students, which is a small representation of the Watts community. The data collected was furthermore challenging to generalize to overall middle school urban youth. Students of the program were also referred by their counselors of the surrounding middle school in the district. Representation of the Watts community may not be inclusive, and this sample may only represent the elite students of the respective classes.

　　Short time frame. From a time perspective, data collected was calculated from October 2018 to February 2019, which is a short period of time. Since the College and Career Pathways program is a pilot program for Urban Compass, qualitative data offered information that future programs can utilize and collect more data over a longer time frame.

　　Response bias. While we attempted to simulate a casual interview environment with the students, there remained a possibility of response bias. Interviews were completed in small groups to offer a more natural and comfortable environment. Many of the students were not accustomed to conducting interviews with adults. Thus they may have felt the need to answer in a way that they believed to be "correct" rather than answering based on their honest thoughts or opinions. Attending the program and interacting with the students, rapport was an idealized goal to get the students to provide more honest and accurate responses. Students still viewed us, the researchers, as teachers

or additional staff responding with answers they thought they wanted us to hear. To address and mitigate these issues, we participated as volunteers, assisting the staff and mentoring the students in the activities. In order to mitigate for response bias, a minimum of three members of the research team independently coded and collaboratively reached consensus on meanings for each interview transcript.

Researcher bias. Urban Compass' College and Career Pathways program is a pilot program looking which is relying on its success for continuation of the program. As we identified a gap in the need for this underserved community and population, research bias may potentially favor positive results. Attending the program every other Saturday, building rapport, and interacting with the program and its students invested our hopes in seeing positive results. In order to mitigate for researcher bias, we used multiple coders and met frequently to reach consensus. We also discussed our assumptions to increase awareness of our expectations in order to consciously lay them aside while interpreting the data. As data for continued research, positive results would lead to more evidence-based research filling the gap and limited research studies on middle-school culture for college-going culture. Addressing and mitigating these potential researcher bias, we organized our data through Dedoose, included multiple researchers, and focused on the youth's responses.

Conclusion

College-going youth programs in communities where students face a myriad of social and environmental inequalities that limit educational attainment are necessary to inform OT and future practice areas. As children in marginalized communities develop, they face a multitude of barriers that other students in America do not face, including

exposure to violence, crime, and poverty. These environmental barriers contribute to the occupational choices of the children of this population and influence the pathways of their lives in a different way than the general population of children. In order for the youth to obtain ongoing educational participation, role competence, and occupational justice, this body of evidence requires an expanded view of children's occupations.

Previous evidence on this population focuses on students as subjects, rather than focusing on qualitative information from the students themselves as participants in the research. It is crucial to have additional evidence from the vantage of the students, especially those who are underserved or underrepresented. The themes found in this study will additionally provide feedback to Urban Compass to best implement the college-going program in the future. For future research, it would be beneficial to further study the effects of these programs from the vantage point of the families, staff, and program directors. By gauging the views of the different people and roles involved in such a program, the world of OT can further assess the dynamic aspects of establishing an effective college-going program.

This research will contribute to the body of evidence of OT, demonstrating a need for OT in community-based settings and a need for occupation-based programs to enhance competence and skills to environmentally support high-risk children. OTs can assist with the implementation of programs, using cultural, psychosocial, and developmental interventions. The dynamic integration of OT and education within a college-going career-pathways program will help produce short-term effects such as increased college-going education that may, in turn, help reduce occupational barriers in this community. It is a central mission of the AOTA centennial vision to focus on

addressing issues of injustice as well as narrowing the gap in health status caused by

health disparities (AOTA, 2017). By contributing to the current body of evidence, and

trialing college-going programs in underserved communities, researchers aim to continue

the advocacy of OT and OT research within this population where necessary.

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Appendix A

Table 1.

Timeline of Methods

Date	Step in Methods
June 2018	Initial meeting with the director of Urban Compass
September 2018	Follow up meeting with the director of Urban Compass; beginning of College and Career Pathways program
October 2018	Researchers begin volunteering at a program
October 2018 - December 2018	Researchers gather consent and assent; conduct initial interviews (10-15 minutes) after consent and assent were given; volunteer and complete informal participant observations
January 2019	Researchers gather final impressions regarding the program from participants through interviews

Appendix B

Table 2.

Coding Scheme

Parent Code	Child Codes
Views of the future	Future Family/Children Goals High School Careers College Idealized Goals
Steps to Reach Goals	Lack of Baseline Knowledge Baseline Knowledge Extra-Curriculars Grades Sports Urban Compass
Perceived Barriers	Potential for Dropping Out Leaving Watts/Family Lack of Scholarships Money
Models	Parents/Family Members Lack of Models Educators Role Models
Personal Characteristics	Family Hobbies and Occupations

Appendix C

Table 3.

Quotes Representing Themes

Theme	Student Quote
Views of the future	"[To be a vet] you have to take biology, you have to learn medical skills, you have to learn how to practice on something. I went to St. Mary's, you know like the high school, the all girls, I visited. They said that they had a medical class and I said, 'Does this have animal class?' and she said yes, and I said, 'I wanna come'." (009) "I want to be the first graduate of my household." (001) "Well you have to get into a good high school, good college and go to medical school. Oh, and have a lot of money to pay for it all. We learned about the classes to take that will help get into college and try new things extra. Volunteer… our counselor is going to give us our volunteer sometime soon." (002)
Steps to get there	"You gotta get good grades 'cause you gotta get into a good high school and then you gotta get in that high school. [It] gives you recommendations to get into a good college, and then from college you gotta get good grades if you're on a scholarship. If not they'll take it away." (001) "[To get into engineering school, you need] good grades? You need to like understand technology. Right now I'm really into, like, robots and stuff. I'm interested in robots 'cause, like, Terminator and stuff like that's how it's made." (025) "Well, scholarships to get more money since it's a lot of money to go to college. Like what the guy said today we can get scholarships for being Hispanic. And the first generation college thing." (009)

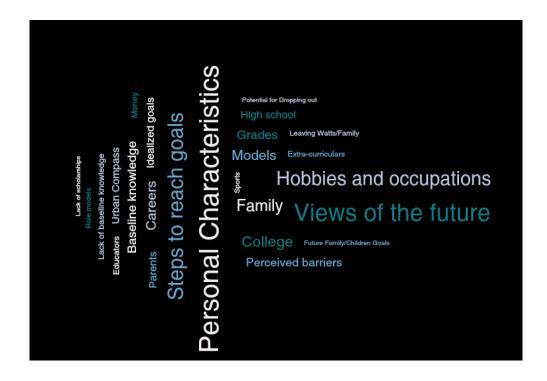| Perceived Barriers	"I was the first-born child in my family. I was born somewhere else but brought here when I was a couple of months. My mom had me when she was a teen, and I try to work hard to help them out." (010)
	"We probably don't have like enough time to do it. Because at home so much chores. Our parents are yelling at us all day trying to do it." (011).
	"My mom just wants to put me in there. She put me in a lot of stuff. She put me in modeling. She put me in book club too. Like if she dies early and like if we need money. I took guitar lessons too. Like we could just do it in the street to get money." (011)
	"Yeah like am I gonna be able to overcome it or am I just gonna leave it? And then if let's say there's a point where you could leave it like that and you could do what you do and it comes back and you still don't know, like that will affect you." (003)

Numbers at the end of quotes indicate pseudonym coding assignment to students during the data analysis process.

Appendix D

Figure 1.

Packed Code Cloud

This Dedoose tool offered us a visual representation of the most attributed codes in our qualitative data. Based on this tool, "Personal characteristics," "Hobbies and occupations," and "Views of the future" were some of the most coded for themes from our interviews.

Appendix E

Parent Consent Form (English)

STANBRIDGE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CONSENT FORM (Parent - English)

Description: You are invited to give permission for your child to contribute to research that will help Urban Compass build the College and Career Pathways program.

Time Involvement: Once you provide consent by signing this form, your child will complete 2 short group interviews. Each interview will last 15-20 minutes and will take place during the College and Career Pathways program at Verbum Dei High School.

Risks and Benefits: We do not expect any negative effects for your child. Your child will be asked questions about what they want to do after high school, and what they think the steps and barriers are to achieving those goals. All of your child's responses will be kept confidential. Their name will not be used in connection with anything they said. We will store our notes and recordings in a locked office on our university campus.

By allowing your child to participate in this study you will be helping Urban Compass and the success of the College and Career Pathways program.

Payment: There will be no payment for participation in this study.

Participant Rights: If you have read and signed this form you are allowing your child to participate in this project. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Your alternative is to not participate in this study.

Even if you consent to your child's participation, he/she will still be allowed to refrain from answering questions, or to stop entirely at any time, for any reason. Your child's specific interview responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be presented at professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about this research you may contact the Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sheryl Ryan; Master of Science in Occupational Therapy Faculty, (949) 794-9090 x 5156.

Independent Contact: If you dissatisfied or unhappy with how this research is conducted, you may contact the Stanbridge University Vice President of Instruction, Dr. Christine Mallon at cmallon@stanbridge.edu, 949-794-9090 x5112.

(If applicable, complete the following)

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent for my child to participate in this study.

_____Yes _____No

I give consent for my child to be audio and videotaped during this study. I understand the recordings will never be shown publicly or used in any materials (poster, presentation) resulting from this study.
_____Yes _____No

I give consent to be photographed for this study and for my child's photograph to be used in any materials (poster, presentation) resulting from this study.
_____Yes _____No

Please keep a copy of this signed and dated consent form for yourself.

Signature_____ **Printed Name**_____

Date_____

Appendix F

Parent Consent Form (Spanish)

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN DE LA
UNIVERSIDAD DE STANBRIDGE (Padres - Español)

Descripción: Usted está invitado a dar permiso para que su hijo contribuya a la investigación que ayudará a Urban Compass a construir el programa College and Career Pathways.

Participación en el tiempo: Una vez que brinde su consentimiento al firmar este formulario, su hijo completará 2 breves entrevistas grupales. Cada entrevista durará de 15 a 20 minutos y se llevará a cabo durante el programa College and Career Pathways en Verbum Dei High School.

Riesgos y beneficios: No esperamos ningún efecto negativo para su hijo. A su hijo se le harán preguntas sobre lo que quiere hacer después de la escuela secundaria y sobre cuáles creen que son los pasos y las barreras para lograr esos objetivos. Todas las respuestas de su hijo se mantendrán confidenciales. Su nombre no será utilizado en relación con nada de lo que dijeron. Almacenaremos nuestras notas y grabaciones en una oficina cerrada en nuestro campus universitario.

Al permitir que su hijo participe en este estudio, usted estará ayudando a Urban Compass y al éxito del programa College and Career Pathways.

Pago: No habrá ningún pago por la participación en este estudio.

Derechos del participante: Si ha leído y firmado este formulario, está dando su consentimiento para permitir que su hijo participe en este proyecto. La participación es voluntaria y usted tiene derecho a retirarse en cualquier momento sin penalidad. Su alternativa es no participar en este estudio.

Incluso si acepta la participación de su hijo, se le permitirá abstenerse de contestar preguntas, o detenerse completamente en cualquier momento, por cualquier motivo. Las respuestas específicas de la entrevista de su hijo se mantendrán confidenciales. Los resultados de este estudio pueden presentarse en reuniones profesionales o publicarse en revistas científicas.

Información de contacto: Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre esta investigación, puede comunicarse con el consejero docente: Dr. Sheryl Ryan; Maestría en Ciencias en la Facultad de Terapia Ocupacional, (949) 794-9090 x 5156.

Contacto independiente: Si no está satisfecho o no está contento con la forma en que se realiza esta investigación, puede comunicarse con la Vicepresidenta de Instrucción de la

Universidad de Stanbridge, la Dra. Christine Mallon en cmallon@stanbridge.edu, 949-794-9090 x5112.

(Si corresponde, complete lo siguiente)

Indique Sí o No:

Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo participe en este estudio.
_____Si _____No

Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo sea audio y grabado en video durante este estudio. Entiendo que las grabaciones nunca se mostrarán públicamente ni se usarán en ningún material (póster, presentación) resultante de este estudio.
_____Si _____No

Doy mi consentimiento para que me fotografíen para este estudio y para que la fotografía de mi hijo sea utilizada en cualquier material (póster, presentación) resultante de este estudio.
_____Si _____No

Guarde una copia de este formulario de consentimiento firmado y fechado para usted.

Firma_____ **Nombre impreso**_____

Fecha_____

Appendix G

Child Assent Form

STANBRIDGE UNIVERSITY – STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECT

HOW DO I GET THERE?

Who are we?

We are from Stanbridge University & we are asking you to be in a study that will help Urban Compass develop the middle school program.

What will we do?

We want to ask you a few questions with a friend, for 15 minutes. We will ask you questions about what you want for your future & what you think you need to do to achieve that future. You can skip any question if it makes you uncomfortable.

Do I need to participate?

You do not have to participate in this study. You can say no now or you can even change your mind later. It is your choice & no one will be upset with you if you decide not to be in this study.

HOW DO I GET THERE?

ANY QUESTIONS?
ASK US ANY TIME!

ANYCONCERNS?
YOU CAN TALK TO ANY STAFF MEMBER

Will this study hurt or help me?

Being in this study will bring you no harm. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. It will hopefully help us learn more about ways we can help you to move forward in your future and reach your goals.

Where will the info go?

We will be very careful to keep your answers to any of our questions private. Before and after the study we will keep all information we collect about you locked up and password protected.

BY SIGNING HERE, YOU GIVE CONSENT FOR YOUR STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN OUR PROJECT

NAME: _____ DATE: _____
SIGNATURE: _____

Appendix H

Staff Consent Form

STANBRIDGE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CONSENT FORM (Staff)

Description: Urban Compass is invited to participate in a project to explore the views of the future and the steps to get there for Urban Compass youth enrolled in the middle school program.

Your Time Involvement: Two interviews that will last 15-20 minutes will be conducted, one at the beginning and one at the end of the middle-school program.

Risks and Benefits: No negative effects are anticipated from the participation in the project. You may be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews in which you are asked about your perspective on youth's predicted future and the middle school program at Urban Compass. This is not intended to, but may result in feelings of uncertainty or self-consciousness. All of your responses will be kept confidential. We will store all data collected in a locked compartment locked in the department office on our university campus. By participating in this study, you will participate in research that will provide information for future development of the program and allow Urban Compass to complete the requirements for the awarded grant toward the middle school program.

Payment: There will be no payment for participation in this study.

Participant Rights: If you have read and signed this form you are consenting to Stanbridge University Occupational Therapy students to conduct this research at the Watts location, and with the staff at Urban Compass. Information collected and analyzed will be given to Urban Compass for future planning and future program development. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Your alternative is to not participate in this study. The results of this study may be disseminated at professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about this research you may contact the Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sheryl Ryan; Master of Science in Occupational Therapy Faculty, (949) 794-9090 x 5156).

Independent Contact: If you are in some way dissatisfied with this research and how it is conducted, you may contact the Stanbridge University Vice President of Instruction, Dr. Christine Mallon, cmallon@stanbridge.edu; 949-794-9090 x5112.

_____ Initial here

(If applicable, complete the following)

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audio taped during this study.
_____Yes _____No

I give consent to be photographed for this study and for my photograph to be used in any materials (poster, video) resulting from this study.
_____Yes _____No

I give consent to be videotaped for this study and for my image to be used in any materials (poster, video) resulting from this study.
_____Yes _____No

Please keep a copy of this signed and dated consent form for yourself.

Signature _____ **Print Name**_____

Date _____

Appendix I

Institutional Review Board Approval

STANBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

IRB Reviewer Feedback

Reviewer Name: Lakshmi Kodeboyina, PhD
Student Name(s): Stephanie Flank, Chloe Latz, Ean Tolentino, & Therese Vesagas
Advisor Name(s): Dr. Sheryl Ryan, OTR/PhD
Study Title: How Can I Get there? The Effects of a College-Going Program in an Underserved Community
Study ID: 074
Decision: ▢ Approve
▢ Minor Revisions
▢ Major Revisions

Reviewer Comments:

This proposal is approved.

The committee appreciates the attention to detail and for recognition of possible research and response bias and proposing solutions to mitigate this.

Looking forward to the findings from this tudy.

_____
Please type your name as electronic signature