

Exploring children's views of what makes a positive adult.

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### Abstract

Poverty significantly influences adolescents through the lack of resources in educational and community contexts. Youth in poor communities, in particular, face constraints and challenges related to poverty. Despite hardships and negative outcomes these children might be faced with, they still have their own views about what success means to them. This research asked adolescents who successful adults were in their community, what resources they would need to become successful adults and lastly, what the role of extracurricular activities was in them becoming successful. Twenty-one participants were interviewed using two focus group interviews. The participants were from grades 8 and 9 where one group was male and the other was female. The community that these children came from was characterized by high rates of poverty and crime. Data was collected and analyzed using grounded theory data analysis. The study found that adolescents had very different ideas about what success was, contrary to the common mainstream ideas about success, which focuses more on individual success. These children defined success as providing for others and giving back to their community. Furthermore, they reported paucity in external resources at their disposal, but indicated that internal resources supplemented this paucity. Extracurricular activities were important and helpful for the attainment of success in the future. They taught them skills and kept them away from negative influences such as drugs. The findings of this study are significant because they inform researchers what success means from young people's perspectives. This study also forms part of growing research on extracurricular activities and success. Future studies should focus on young peoples' definition of success and trying to incorporate this definition into different kinds of extracurricular activities. Incorporating this definition could increase participation as well as make the experience of participation more meaningful and beneficial for adolescents.

*Keywords:* adolescents; poverty; success; extracurricular activities.

## Background

Poverty in South Africa plays a significant role in the education and success of young children. It has been observed that children from poor backgrounds are disadvantaged at many levels from having a lack of qualified teachers who can be able to meet their needs to having a lack of resources in their respective schools (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2008). This negatively influences the children's success and their ability to become competent and successful adults (Pratt-Ronco, 2009). Poverty is often associated with a host of risk factors such as poor nutrition, increased familial stress, lack of access to learning resources i.e. poor schooling, poor parenting, drug abuse, violence and neglect. Townships and informal settlements are where many Black and Coloured populations have concentrated. These two groups experience many risk factors including high unemployment levels (Matthews, Griggs & Caine, 1999). The impermanence of illegal squatting, poverty, a lack of facilities burdens families so much that it appears almost impossible to properly nurture and socialize children in a healthy, satisfying way (McKendrick & Senoamadi, 1991). The location of schools within townships is often problematic in that these communities are often too disadvantaged to support quality education. Furthermore, the number of dropouts of schoolchildren in townships is generally high, which in turn leads to unemployment, which may lead to youth crime (Matthews at al., 1999). The extreme poverty of these communities also contributes to the continuation of this

cycle of violence by producing youth who lack self esteem, personal confidence, and positive role models and who experience almost all the known risk factors associated with turning to crime and violence (Flisher, Ziervogel, Chalton Robertson, 1993). Role models and extramural activities can play a positive role in being able to help these children reach the same level of success that their middle class counterparts are able to attain (Yancey, Siegel & McDaniel, 2002; Jordan & Nettles, 2000).

Role models have been shown to play an important role in children's lives by portraying healthy, prosocial behaviours that can be internalized and re-enacted by the children (Hurd, Zimmerman & Xue, 2008). Similarly, extramural activities have been extensively researched and found- to have a positive effect on youth. Structured extramural activities have been shown to improve social competence and and academic achievement (Shernoff, 2010).

### Poverty and Success

"Poverty is a function of family income, race/ethnicity, and geographic location" (Zorn, Noga, Bolden-Haraway, Louis, Owens & Smith, 2004, p.2). The South African education

system often presents an array of challenges to children from poor backgrounds. Schools serving low-income students have fewer resources, are located in lower quality facilities, face challenges in addressing and meeting students' needs and experience lower levels of parent involvement (Zorn et al., 2004).

Poverty also has a significant effect on the development of cognitive and verbal skills. Children who come from impoverished families are likely to have low cognitive scores, with an average that is 60 % lower than those of high socioeconomic status children. According to Zorn et al. (2004), poverty is linked to success at school, academic achievement and social-emotional functioning. The higher the family income, the better the children will do on ability measures, achievement scores, and the more likely, that the child will finish high school. According to Sen (1999), a lack of access to quality education is an indicator of poverty. Poor children are twice as likely to repeat a grade and are more likely to move frequently than their advantaged counterparts, a primary risk factor for dropping out of school. In South Africa, between 11% and 15% of children leave school each year after grade 9 (Department of Education, 2008). In South Africa, many learners are not able to translate educational inputs into capabilities. In this way, even if learners have resources and equality, they may still drop out of school because their education is of no use to them or is not valued. However, South Africa had 70% of children living in poverty in 2006 and had a high gross enrolment rate of 96 % for grades 0-9 and 86 % of grades 10-12. This indicates that children enrol in school despite the burden of poverty and other challenges that they are faced with. Research has however, found that some children that are faced with adversity are resilient in that they are able to overcome their risks, avoid the negative effects, thrive, and succeed. Resilience requires experiencing adversity and having positive adjustment outcomes despite the adverse experience (Yancey, Siegel & McDaniel, 2002). One factor that has been shown to counteract the negative impact of poverty on children is having positive, prosocial role models (Hurd et al, 2008).

### **Role Models**

According to Bandura (1971), people display behaviours that are learned either intentionally or inadvertently, through the influence of an example. Adolescents are particularly likely to be influenced by the adults in their environment. Similarly, Erikson (1968) posits that adolescents often look to adults in order to determine appropriate and acceptable behaviour as well as to identify models they want to be like. However, adult influence can be both positive and negative and some adults may be more influential than others. Research has found an association between having a role model and positive

outcomes (Hurd et al., 2008). A study on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, found that role models helped to protect high-risk children from several risks that they faced (Werner, 1995). Having an adult who modelled positive behaviour was a reoccurring theme for resilient children (Hurd et al., 2008). Similarly, adolescents with an identifiable role model received higher grades, had higher self-esteem and reported stronger ethnic identity than their counterparts with no role models (Yancey et al., 2002).

The social learning theory indicates that individuals are more likely to focus their attention on models who they perceive as being similar to themselves (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Researchers have suggested that female youth and youth of historically oppressed and disadvantaged ethnic and racial groups identify more with role models from their same group and that role models provide them with explicit examples of what members of their group have the potential to achieve (Zirkel, 2002). Werner (1995) also found that resilient females in her study had the most powerful role models in their employed parents. It is critical for adolescents to have same-sex parent role models with whom to identify with (Hendry, Roberts, Glendinning & Coleman, 1992). Similarly, Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) found that males with male role models engaged in less problem behaviours than their counterparts, who did not have a male role model. Furthermore, Zirkel (2002) also found that race and gendered-matched role models were associated with positive outcomes while non-matched role models were less likely to be associated with these outcomes.

Another factor in addition to having positive prosocial role models, which has also been shown to have a positive impact on children, is participation in structured extramural activities.

### **Extracurricular Activities**

Another factor in addition to having positive prosocial role models, which has also been shown to have a positive impact on children, is participation in structured extramural activities.

There is an achievement gap between middle class and lower class learners. The various reasons that explain this gap include inequity between schools that influences resource distribution, effectiveness of teaching staff and the needs of students (Kozol, 1991). There has been extensive, empirical work done on the effects of participation in structured extracurricular activities and the role it has on youth success. Similarly, extracurricular participation has been shown to be beneficial to at risk children that face challenges such as poverty. However, Bouffard, Wimer, Caronongan, Little, Dearing & Simpkins (2006) reported that children from low-income families were less likely to participate in out-of-

school programs. If they did participate, their attendance rate was lower than that of their middle class counterparts. Furthermore, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that school dropout was reduced among at-risk students who had earlier participation in structured extracurricular activities compared to their counterparts who had little involvement.

Organized extracurricular activities seem to be beneficial to the youth because the activities are supervised. Structured extracurricular activities also play a role in increasing youth's self-concepts of themselves by having activities that improve school performance and in turn facilitate better relationships with teachers and peers (Marsh, 1992). Unstructured activities usually include hanging out with friends or community activities that are not supervised and result in increased behavioural problems, low school attendance, lower academic performance and school dropout (Gilman, Meyers & Perez, 2004).

Regular participation in structured extracurricular activities has been shown to have many positive effects for adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as advantaged backgrounds.

School success and academic achievement must be viewed as a key element in effective prevention and intervention (Bergin, Hudson, Chryst & Resetar, 1992). Structured extracurricular activities have been shown to be an effective strategy in mitigating risk factors, thereby reducing the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour that might hamper school success (Beck, 1999). Similarly, Schnike, Orlandi and Cole (1992) also found that children participating in structured extracurricular activities were less likely to use drugs than those who did not participate. In addition, participating in structured extracurricular activities leads to improved social competence and academic achievement (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Larson & Brown, 2007). Furthermore, children who participate in structured extracurricular activities have been found to exhibit better psychosocial adjustment and social skills than children who did not participate (Darling, Caldwell & Smith, 2005).

Participation in organized sports provides an opportunity for the development of goal setting, persistence, problem solving, teamwork, managing emotions and managing time (Danish, Taylor & Fazio, 2003). Similarly, participation in athletics has been found to be associated with increased academic achievement (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). However, some negative experiences are associated with sports. Eccles and Barber (1999) found an association between participating in sport and alcohol use. Furthermore, sports participation was found to be associated with experiences related to emotional development and negative peer interactions (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003).

Participation in structured extracurricular activities and having positive prosocial role models seem to play an important role in youth success and have been well researched. Both these activities keep youth away from negative influences and facilitate academic achievement and better social competence (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). The idea or the definition of success from young people's perspectives is something that has not received much attention. This definition is important because it comes from adolescents' and is not predetermined by adults or researchers. Being aware of this definition can inform researchers about the types of resources and extracurricular activities these children need to become successful adults.

However, nowhere in the literature could a study be found where adolescents' - were asked what their definition of success was and the resources they would need to become successful before coming up with extramural activities that are meant to foster academic and life success. Furthermore, no qualitative study could be found where adolescents' accounts of extracurricular activities were explored.

This research study aims to understand what adolescent's definition of success is as well as the necessary resources that they need to become successful adults. Additionally, this research also aims to find out what the role of extramural activities is in these adolescents' success.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Design**

Quantitative research makes sense in situations where we know in advance what the important variables are and are able to devise reasonable ways of controlling or measuring them (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). However, there are situations whereby variables cannot be defined in advance and we cannot tell which variables are more important than others or how to measure them. In these instances, we need to engage in the kinds of open-ended, inductive exploration made possible by qualitative research (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Therefore, focus group interviews were used in this study because "in a focus group interview, children are not asked a series of highly structured, predefined questions, as would be the case if a semi-structured or structured questionnaire were to be used. Rather, discussion is initiated and allowed to flow, with some guidance from the interviewers. The goal is for children to raise what they think is important, rather than for the interviewers to impose ideas on them, and for them to discuss it amongst themselves" (Ward, 2006, p. 61). The benefit of focus group discussions as a method of data collection for this research lies in its ability to mobilize participants to respond to any comment on one another's contributions.

In this way, statements are challenged, extended, developed, undermined or qualified in ways that generate rich data for the researcher. In addition, the focus group discussion will provide a setting that is less artificial than the one-to-one interview, which means that the data generated by it are likely to have higher ecological validity (Willig, 2001).

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of two groups of adolescents from each of grades 8 and 9 from a historically Black community. The participants were homogenous according to their gender. Each group consisted of 11 learners. The age of the participants varied from 13-17 years. I chose to work with these groups because during this stage, adolescents are in a transition period from junior to senior secondary school and most of them begin to have a sense of what they want to see themselves as in the near future. Additionally, transition periods are also high-risk for the development of risk behaviours (Parry, Myers, Morojele, Flisher, Bhana, Donson & Plüddemann, 2004).

The other children in the lower grades, such as grade 7 and below, are not yet in this transition period.

### **Procedure**

Teachers were approached by the researcher and asked to select four or five learners from each grade (8 and 9) who could participate in the discussion. The teachers were then informed of the purpose and requirements of the study and asked to assist the researcher in recruiting learners. In addition, the researcher also obtained assistance from one of the employees from EMEP who liaised between the school and the researcher. Teachers chose learners because they knew the children better than the researcher did and had a better idea of who might participate well in a focus group setting. Permission was obtained from the learners' parents for participation in the study; and assent was obtained from the learners themselves before the discussion commenced. The learners came from schools that were affiliated with the Extra-Mural Education Programme (EMEP). The research-enrolled learners who were at least familiar with the concept of extra-mural programmes. Additionally, EMEP had research permission from the Western Cape Education Department, and our research was therefore conducted under their permission agreement.

### **Data Analysis**

The data gathered was analysed qualitatively using the method of grounded theory analysis. Grounded theory is a systematic inductive method of research whose purpose is to generate explanatory theory rather than to test or verify theory (Corbin, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory aims toward an unbiased data



collection, as each line of text is coded into concepts, which allows for the development of categories grounded in the data, rather than using pre-selected categories identified from the literature (Charmaz, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This reduces the likelihood that the researcher's preconceived concepts will influence what is deemed important from the text. Coding transcribed interviews facilitates summarizing, amalgamating, and sorting of the data. Similarities and differences between concepts are highlighted and similar concepts are grouped together. Thereafter, the method is based on the process of constant comparison between concepts that are derived from the coded data and continuous revision and refinement of codes and concepts (Lipshitz, 2007). Constant-comparative analysis is a means of ensuring that the codes fit the data rather than forcing the data into codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin, 1986). The purpose of grounded theory data analysis is to generate a common account from all the data that is true to each individual description and points towards the phenomenon under exploration (Lipshitz, 2007).

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity "... is about acknowledging the central position of the researcher in the construction of knowledge ... that all findings are constructions, personal views of reality, open to change and reconstruction" (Banister et al., 1996).

As a Black, female Honours student from the University of Cape Town, I was aware of the fact that the participants in both groups may hold a particular image of me and this might have facilitated or hindered the data collection process. The participants might have assumed that because I was a Black and female that I too, borrowed the same cultural resources that they did and this might have resulted in them giving me less data than I would have gotten if I were someone else. I could speak the participants' language and this proved helpful because participants felt comfortable expressing themselves in their own language.

I am also someone who has 'made it' (as it were) in that I come from the University of Cape Town. This idea of 'making it' might have masked the ways in which they defined success during the discussion. The learners might have felt intimidated by me and wanted to impress me thereby giving me data that suited the research.

### **Results**

Two focus group interviews were conducted, consisting of adolescents in grades 8 and 9. Participants in both groups were Black and came from the same community. All participants were in a school that offered extramural activities and they also participated in these activities as well. The community in which the participants came from was historically Black and characterized by high rates of crime and poverty.

Three research questions were posed to the participants regarding what a successful adult was in their community, what resources they needed to become this successful adult and what the role of extramural activities was in attaining this success. The results that follow describe the various themes that emerged once the data was collected and analysed.

### **Who is a successful adult?**

#### **Having material goods.**

I think that someone who is successful is my next-door neighbour because when he is driving his car, he sings his songs...he makes me want to be like him.

*(Participant 9, girls' focus group)*

The guy next door can provide for himself, he has nice clothes, phone so I see him as successful. *(Participant 6, girls' focus group)*

My cousin sister stays in the Eastern Cape, she was in grade 12 last year and she passed and got a bursary and went to Uni-Tra. The bursary paid for everything, they bought her a laptop so I also want to be like her. *(Participant 1, girl's focus group)*

In both instances, participants paired success with possession of material goods. In the first instance, success is being able to provide for oneself and having financial independence. Similarly, success is also going on to tertiary education, having fees paid for by a bursary and at the same time, receiving a laptop, which is a material possession that one would receive from getting a bursary. Success in this way is a measure of material things. This is to say that a successful adult is someone who can provide material possessions for themselves.

#### **Sports and success.**

He studied in the township and made it playing football. *(Participant 11, boys' focus group)*

In this instance, success is achieved through sports. The participant mentioned someone who came from their township, left and became a successful through playing sports. However, the girls did not mention anything about achieving success through sports.

#### **Getting out of poverty.**

Just because you see, people here in the location are not doing anything so he kept up with his studies and he went into acting so people can see that even though you stay in the location or why, you can still make it. It is not only people that stay in high places that make it. *(Participant 9, boys' focus group)*

In this regard, the participant recognizes that there are people who were able to get out of poverty and have an “ordinary” middle class life. A successful adult in this case was someone who was from the township, escaped poverty and reached middle class status.

**Fame and success.**

He is an actor; he is famous (*Participant 6, boys' focus group*)

I only know the surname, I do not know the name, its Brother Msotho, he stays at the top, and he is an actor in the TV drama Interrogation Room. Sizwe Msotho.

(*Participant 9, boys' focus group*)

No, it's Thembinkosi Fanteni. (*Participant 10, boys' focus group*) [Ajax Cape Town soccer player]

Ideas about success from the young men came from being ‘famous’. Success in young boys was viewed from the perspectives of males who hailed from and left their community, subsequently becoming celebrities. The notion of success and glamour is consistent with the idea that success in males has become increasingly associated with wealth and prestige. This definition is considered by many authors to be more consistent with masculine socialization of men (Deutschendorf, 1996; Doyle, 1983)

However, the girls did not mention anything about fame and success.

**Providing for others.**

Ok, the person that I see as successful is my uncle because he is a principal and he grew up in a home where nobody was working but now he is a principal and he does everything for me (*Participant 10, girl's focus group*).

My cousin sister has a hairdressing saloon so when I need to do something, she does it for me, or maybe if I want to get my hair done, she does it for me, I can ask for something and she does it for me. (*Participant 5, girls' focus group*)

Ok-I think that someone who is success is the lady that works at crèche, she does not teach there but she works in the kitchen. She has three children and she is able to buy them clothes and does everything for them. (*Participant 8, girls' focus group*)

The ability to support others financially was also defined as part of being successful in this particular instance. It must be noted though that it was not only that these women were successful to the participants, but it was also that their particular success encompassed financial support to the participants.

**Giving back to the community.**

I think that someone who is successful is my bother because he is a chairman of the police here. (*Participant 4, girls' focus group*)

She collects rubbish for recycling. (*Participant 7, boys' focus group*)

He teaches people music. (*Participant 2, boys' focus group*)

He teaches people how to act so that others can be just like him. (*Participant 8, boys' focus group*)

He helps the youth so that they can play football. (*Participant 10, boys' focus group*)

He stays here, teaches children football, and teaches them not to do drugs. (*Participant 5, boys' focus group*)

He is an actor, he is famous and he teaches people what to do when they have problems and he keeps us save from drugs. (*Participant 6, boys' focus group*)

The boys mentioned famous people that hailed from their community as successful. The interesting thing about these boys is that they did not just think that these males were successful because of their fame but also because the majority of them were giving back to the community. Most of these people were giving back to the community in the form of teaching others to follow their example by providing them with the necessary skills.

In this instance, both boys and girls emphasized the importance of giving back to the community. The idea of success was closely tied with helping others in one's community to be able to achieve the same success as them. Another form of giving back to the community was keeping the community clean and protected from negative influences. These successful adults also played a meaningful role in keeping the participants away from negative influences that could hamper the participants' success. A successful adult in this case was someone who played a positive role in the community, regardless of their status.

**Role models and success.** It was clear that the young girls did not understand what a role model in their community was when asked by the researcher. They had to be specifically asked by the second moderator; moreover, she had to explain this concept in isiXhosa so that the girls could understand.

However, there was still a lack of understanding about female role models and only two participants were able to answer this question. This could have been because the term 'role model' is broad and the participants did not understand the context within which role models were placed. The boys however, were able to identify role models but they mentioned people who had left the community after becoming successful. According to Black and Krishnakumar (1998), children growing up in poor communities may be exposed to fewer prosocial role models than their middle class counterparts may.

**Internal resources.**

Ok, I wrote education, you have to have education to be successful and support from your friends and family and you must also be brave and not be scared. *(Participant 1, girls' focus group)*

You need to be patient and educated. *(Participant 4, girls' focus group)*

I think you need to be patient. *(Participant 5, girls' focus group)*

You need to do not lose hope, trust yourself in everything that you do, go to school each and every time, have dreams, goals, career et cetera, have a role model but always believe that one day you are going to change and be successful as ever. *(Participant 10, girls' focus group)*

You need to be talented, achieve, clever, have hope, care for other, educated. *(Participant 7, girls' focus group)*

This is also, what the boys had to say about this-

I wrote if you are, if you start concentrate on something that you want and confidence and work hard to gain what you want. *(Participant 1, boys' focus group)*

You need respect and concentrate on your studies because education is key to success so that I can have a bright future. *(Participant 2, boys' focus group)*

Education. *(Participant 4, boys' focus group)*

Education, respect and be a hard worker. *(Participant 6, boys' focus group)*

Education and respect other people in order to gain respect, don't use drugs, love your neighbours to earn more blessings. *(Participant 9, boys' focus group)*

Almost all of the participants in both focus groups mentioned education as an important resource in them becoming successful. This indicates that the participants in this community value education and see it as an important tool in their success

It was evident during the discussion that participants had a lack of external resources in their community, as they mentioned no external resource that they readily used other than education. Almost all of the girls drew on internal resources like respect, hope, motivation etc. as resources needed to become successful adults. Similarly, the boys also drew on internal resources such as patience, respect, believing in oneself etc. as important for them to become successful adults. Furthermore, both the boys and the girls-also mentioned that it was not merely about having these attributes but they additionally mentioned hard work as an attribute that played an important role in helping them become successful.

The participants' recognition of adversity conditions and being aware that they too can overcome this is corroborated by previous research on resilience. According to Masten (2001), resilience appears to be a common phenomenon that results from the operation of basic human adaptational system. If these systems are well protected and in good working order, development is robust, even in the face of severe adversity.

Although 70 % of children lived in poverty in 2006, South Africa had a high gross enrolment rate of pupils in schools (Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert, 2009). However, the dropout rate rises sharply after grade 9. This might be attributed to the daily burden of poverty, which might cause some of these children to drop out of school (Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert, 2009). In this instance however, children placed a very high value on their education despite the evident disadvantages that they are faced with.

### **Extramural Activities and Success.**

They can help you, say if you want to become an actor, you can participate in drama and when you do decide to become an actor when you are older, it's not a new thing anymore. *(Participant 2, girls' focus group)*

Dance class helps us because if you can't get work, you can travel with dancing. *(Participant 4, girls' focus group)*

It teaches us leadership skills and how to write books. *(Participant 5, girls' focus group)*

To have experience. *(Participant 4, boys' focus group)*

These children emphasized the importance of extramural activities, which helped them with skills building. The participants found the skills that they learned during extramural activities as beneficial in terms of employment in the near future.

This notion is corroborated with previous research, which found that young people reported a desire for action-oriented after-school activities like sports teams, dance and field trips (Larson, Hansen & Moneta, 2006). Structured extramural activities emphasize skill building in which the skill attained increases in complexity under guidance and supervision of competent non-parental adults (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Mahoney and Strattin, 2000). Structured extramural activities also allow for the development and progressive advancement of skills (Larson, 2000). Similarly, structured extramural activities also provide a venue to express personal talents and master challenging skills that are consistent with the school value system (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Finn, 1989; Maton, 1990). Some of the

participants mentioned attitude as another aspect which extramural activities helped them with as well as learning to work in group situations.

Interestingly, one participant mentioned that extra mural activities helped with being able to work within a group and this is what she had to say about this-

To be able to work in a group situation and what is that you need to do to work with other people. *(Participant 1, girls' focus group)*

To respect people who teach you. *(Participant 2, boys' focus group)*

To be determined in what you are doing and to have respect. *(Participant 6, boys' focus group)*

To respect the referee and coach. *(Participant 7, boys' focus group)*

Think fast and protect yourself. *(Participant 8, boys' focus group)*

Extra murals help because, it's like at school, your mind can work properly so they help in that way. *(Participant 9, boys' focus group)*

Research has shown that structured extramural activities provide an opportunity for teens to enhance and develop personal strength (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). This is to say that extramural activities teach them skills, good attitude towards others.

Similarly, research has also shown that structured out of school activities enhance personal confidence and social competencies including learning to work with others (Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin, 2007; Dubas & Snider, 1993; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001).

Both boys and girls mentioned playing sports and some explained the role of sports in their journey to success. However, one participant did mention that she found sport to be fun and that too, could be seen as a positive aspect of extramural activities. Students who participated in athletics were almost twice as likely to remain in school than students who did not participate in athletics because participating fosters capacity for initiative and goal achievement. This may help to explain the positive associations found between athletic participation and increased academic achievement (McNeal, 1995).

Another participant also mentioned that extramural activities provided them with a place to go after school and helped them to stay away from drugs and other negative influences. This is what he had to say about this-

It's like when you get home, you must do other things so some of us go to sports to gym so that our bodies can be strong and healthy, if those things are not there, some of us might get involved in drugs. *(Participant 9, boys' focus group)*

Stevens and Peltier (1994) reported that extracurricular activities could aid in helping youth stay away from risky behaviours such as drug abuse, gang involvement, and destructive activities. Eccles and Barber (1999) also found that adolescents who were involved in prosocial activities had the most consistent positive outcomes, which were high academic achievement and low rates of involvement in risky behaviours.

A number of studies have shown that structured extracurricular activities provide a unique developmental context for adolescents to experience positive phenomenological states including heightened engagement and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991). Another positive aspect that extramural activities had for these children was in their ability to facilitate academic achievement. One participant mentioned that participation in extramural activities helped to concentrate better at school. This is what he had to say-

Extra murals help because, it's like at school, your mind can work properly so they help in that way. (*Participant 9, boys' focus group*)

Research links participation in after school programs and extracurricular activities to improved academic achievement than non-participation (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Similarly, other studies have found that children attending after-school programs or other structured activities earn higher grades and achievement test scores than non-participants.

The children had various views about success, the types of resources that they would need and the role of extramural activities. The majority of what these children said was corroborated by research studies that have looked at role models and participation in extramural activities and their positive effects. However, the children had interesting and differing views about success, which research has not particularly looked at.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this research study was to gather children's views of what a successful adult was and how participation in extramural activities facilitated this process. By utilizing grounded theory data analysis, new theories emerged regarding how adolescents from poor communities viewed success. The ways in which these particular children viewed success, differed from the mainstream ideas about success, which mainly focus on the individual. The girls found females in their communities who were also financial providers for their families as successful. Interestingly, some of the girls also found some males in their community to be successful. This idea challenges the dominant idea of females relating more with other females than with males. However, it must be noted that these girls used a completely different yardstick to measure success in males. They did not associate them with financial



provision, which is something that males have been socialized to become. They instead associated these men with material goods and providing for oneself. These girls measured success in terms of material possessions in these particular males. The boys also mentioned people they thought were successful in their community. They mentioned famous people like actors and soccer players as people that they thought were successful. Males associate success with glamour, wealth and prestige (Deutschendorf, 1996; Doyle, 1983). There was a clear difference between what the girls saw as successful people and what the boys saw as successful as well. The girls viewed females who were providing financial support to their families as successful as well as males, who had material goods and provided for themselves. The boys on the other hand viewed males that were famous in their community as successful.

However, the boys did not just look up to these people because they were glamorous and wealthy, but they were also giving back to the community. They were teaching these boys how to act, play soccer and an array of other skills that played an important role in keeping these children away from drugs and other negative influences. This notion, places males as caring for their community and others in general. This idea has been shown to be consistent with female socialization, not male socialization (Chodorow, 1978). This could be explained by looking at the type of environment these children live in. It might be due to the type of community and the influences in their community as well that there is a shift in the male and female socialization roles. These children came from a community, which was characterized by poverty and violence, therefore these disadvantages could have shifted the ways in which gender role are viewed. Both genders mentioned people who, despite of poverty and coming from a township, managed to make something positive of themselves. These children were aware of the disadvantages that they were faced with but they also stated that, they too, like their middle class counterparts, could make it.

It also became evident that these children had a lack of resources needed to achieve success as they failed to mention any external resource that they readily used, other than education. Given this finding, the education system might want to take this into serious consideration and contribute more into making other resources available to work in collaboration the education. These might include making resources like libraries, which are well equipped available for these children to use. These children drew on internal resources such as hope, respect, patience, believing in oneself and so on for their success. Almost all of the children indicated education as the main resource they needed to become successful. This is despite findings that have found school dropout to be highest at grade 9 level (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert). Some of the children in the group were grade 9 learners and they mentioned

education as a key resource for their respective success. This shows that these children place a high value on education, contrary to some research findings regarding poverty and its negative influences on children's education, leading to school-drop-out at grade 9 level.

Almost all of the children in this study participated in extramural activities and they commented on the aspects that were associated with participation and success. Majority of the children mentioned extramural activities that helped them gain skills that can be used in the near future. The children also mentioned that extramural activities were also helpful because they taught them how to work with other people. The children also remarked on extramural activities that helped them with attitude and offered a place for them to go after school. This is corroborated with research done on extracurricular activities that facilitate interpersonal skills, help with attitude and provide a safe place where children can go after school (Woodland, 2008). Extramural activities also provided a safe net for children and prevented them from using drugs and falling victim to other negative influences. Similarly, extramural activities also played a role in academic achievement at school, as was mentioned by participants. It was clear that extramural activities did indeed play a positive role in these children's lives.

#### **Limitations and Recommendations for future research**

The sample was initially supposed to include grades 8, 9 and 10. However, due to teacher's striking during the most part of August when the data was being collected, this research was not able to get the views of grade 10 learners as a result. This resulted in the loss of data that would have significantly added to this research. Future research needs to get views from older children to identify if there is any difference in the ways in which they define success and the role that extramural activities play in their success as well.

The research made use of only Black participants and perhaps future research needs to focus on conducting the same study with other ethnic groups in order to get a richer and more detailed picture of what they too, think success encompasses.

In general, this research informed us on the different ways in which some children viewed success that has not been previously explored. Children from poor communities have a community-oriented way of viewing success. The children had different ideas about success that differed significantly from the mainstream ideas about success. They linked success with being able to provide for their families financially as well as giving back to their community. Most mainstream ideas involve developing the individual and leaving the community after attaining success. These children believe in the importance of helping not only their family

members, but also their community members. Similarly, lack of resources poses a threat in the attainment of success however; these particular children drew on internal resources to aid them in becoming successful. This finding is significant in that it informs researchers of selective, adaptational methods which these children have internalized to ensure that they too become successful in the near future. Lastly, extramural activities have been extensively researched and found to have a positive impact on participants. These children were also actively participating in various extramural activities and they found participation to be beneficial and important for their well-being and for their success.





