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The Importance of Career Counseling and Post Secondary Readiness for High School Students

Eleanor Hilling

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of a five-week post-secondary planning group on 11th grade students perceived readiness for post-secondary plans. Research suggests that post-secondary planning is important for students to understand and discuss as it prepares them for life after they finish high school. The United States continues to undergo rapid and far-reaching changes economically and socially, which results in a changing workplace. These changes are requiring higher levels of achievement and preparation for the emerging workforce. As a result, the students of today will require an education that provides them with academic, career, technical, guidance, and dispositions to be career ready once students graduate from high school (Gysbers, 2013). Research suggests that school counselors are in the position to assist students in the post-secondary planning process. Each group in this study included discussing post-secondary plans. The groups focused on students better understanding themselves, regarding their interests, personal characteristics, and qualities. The group curriculum also focused on educating, researching, and discussing the various options available to students after high school. Results show an increase in perceived readiness for post-secondary plans. Students also reported positive feedback about the group. This study provided further evidence that attention and focus on post-secondary planning can have positive impact on students.

Introduction

With the vast amount of career options today, career development has become increasingly important for exploring career interests and possibilities. It is essential that students receive career counseling in school so that they are better prepared for life after high school, and the transition into adulthood and the workforce. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, many of the fastest growing jobs in the United States require some form of post secondary education (“Counseling”, 2008). Whether it is technical certification, associates degree,

bachelor's degree or beyond, more and more jobs are requiring some form of post secondary education. Career development is especially helpful and important when working with adolescents ("Counseling", 2008). In a school setting, counselors can help student's post secondary aspirations and attainment (McDonough, 2006). Counselors generally inform students on their post secondary options and guide them through the process. Although counselors are in the position to assist and guide students with post secondary planning and readiness, it is often difficult. Counselors are often overwhelmed with the high counselor to student ratio, administrative duties, and lack of knowledge and training. This paper will explore the history of career counseling, what career counseling and career development are, the importance of career counseling, career counseling in a school setting, college and career readiness skills, and the importance of a school counselor in regards to career and college readiness.

History of Career Counseling

Six Stages of Career Counseling

Mark Pope (2000) explores six stages in the development of career counseling in his article, "A Brief History of Career Counseling in the United States." These stages include the first stage from 1890-1919, the second stage from 1920-1939, the third stage from 1940-1959, the fourth stage from 1960-1979, the fifth stage from 1980-1989, and the sixth stage from 1990- present. Pope's six stages of career counseling offer an understanding of why career counseling began, and how it has transitioned overtime to its significant role in today's world.

First Stage.

Pope called the first stage of career counseling, "Job Placement Services." The first stage took place from 1890-1919. During the time, placement services were offered for an increasingly urban and industrial society (Pope, 2000). Career counseling, which was called "vocational guidance" developed in the United States during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Career counseling

developed out of societal upheaval, transition and change. During this time, jobs in the agricultural sector started to decrease and the demand for workers in heavy industry increased. Veterans returning from World War I, and those workers displaced by their return also increased the need for career counseling (Pope, 2000).

Frank Parsons, often known as the parent of career counseling, founded the vocational guidance movement (Pope,2000). The vocational guidance movement was based on Parson's development of the organization known as the Vocation Bureau of Boston. In 1908, the Vocation Bureau of Boston became the first career counseling institution in the United States. The Bureau created principles and methods of vocational counseling to assist and guide counselors in their work (Jones, 1994).

During the first stage of career counseling, psychological testing became an important factor. Psychological tests became an important and necessary part of career counseling, and gave career counseling respectability in the United States (Pope,2000). In 1913, the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA) was created. The NVGA is now known as the National Career Development Association (NCDA)(Pope, 2000). The National Career Development Association (NCDA), "is the recognized leader in developing standards for the career development profession, for the provision of career counseling programs and services, and for the evaluation of career information materials" (About NCDA, n.d).

Second Stage.

Pope named the second stage of career counseling, "Educational Guidance in the Schools." This stage took place from 1920-1939. During this time period the role of vocational guidance in schools began to solidify (Pope,2000). In 1921, the National Career Development Association published its first version of the "Principles and Practices of Vocational Guidance." The publication

highlighted the importance of providing career counseling to students in a school setting (Pope,2000).

Third Stage.

Pope named the third stage of career counseling, “Colleges and Universities and the Training of Counselors.” This stage lasted from 1940 to 1959 and saw World War II and the USSR’s launching of a rocket that orbited earth and landed on the moon (Pope, 2000). Previous to these two events, the United States had considered itself technologically superior to other countries. When the USSR succeeded in their space program, federal legislators in the United States were forced to address the problems in science and math education in the United States (Pope, 2000). As a result, in 1957 the National Defense Education Act was passed, which established “Counseling and Guidance Training Institutes.” These institutes were put in place to provide improved training for counselors to identify and encourage students to pursue math and science majors for college education (Pope, 2000). This time period was a “boom” period for counselor training, as almost 14,000 people received the counselor training (Pope, 2000).

Fourth Stage.

Pope named the fourth stage of career counseling, “Meaningful Work and Organizational Career Development.” This stage took place from 1960-1979. The 1960’s were a time of idealism and hope (Pope,2000). Many young individuals wanted jobs that were meaningful and would allow them to change the world for the better. Pope stated that as a result of the legislation enacted during this time period, career counseling in organizational settings came to the forefront of the career counseling movement (2000). At the beginning of the 1960’s, the unemployment rate was the highest since the 1930’s, at 8.1%. President John F. Kennedy entered office and as one of his first acts he appointed a panel of consultants to focus on vocational education (Pope,2000). The panel issued a report in 1962 that stated that school counselors must have an “exceptional” understanding

of the complex world of work. During this stage, there was much growth in career counseling in governmental agencies, nonprofit community agencies, and in business and industry (Pope, 2000). Overall, the career counseling movement made many gains and experienced growth during this period of time.

Fifth Stage.

Pope named the fifth stage of career counseling. “Independent Practice Career Counseling and Outplacement Counseling.” This stage took place from 1980-1989 (Pope,2000). The career counseling field began to transition from an industrial age to an information and technology age. There was now an increased demand for workers with technology skills (Pope,2000). Private practice career counseling emerged during this time. Also during this stage, the National Vocational Guidance Association initiated a credential for career counseling professionals. The credential included academic and experiential requirements along with the National Career Counselor Examination (Pope, 2000). Vocational career counseling competencies emerged and provided a list of competencies necessary for counselors to perform the tasks of career/vocational guidance and counseling. With private practice came outplacement counseling as many companies and businesses faced economic difficulties and began to downsize. Outplacement career counselors were hired and brought in to help the workers who had lost their job find new employment and placement. The National Vocational Guidance Association changed its name to the National Career Development Association. Donald Super, who is well known in the counseling world for his career developmental orientation that spans the life of an individual, greatly contributed to the redefinition of vocational guidance (Pope, 2000).

Sixth Stage.

Pope called the sixth stage of career counseling, “ A Focus on the School-to-Job Transition, Internalization of Career Counseling, Multicultural Career Counseling, and Increasing Sophistication

in the use of Technology.” This stage took place from 1990 to present (Pope,2000). During the early 1990’s, career counseling extended in many new directions. Pope referred to the new directions as an upward extension, downward extension, outward extension and inward development (2000). The upward extension focused on individuals who had rarely used career-counseling services. These individuals might include senior managers and executives of companies or businesses (Pope,2000). As a result of economic factors, these individuals were losing their jobs and had no place to turn. The downward extension focused on individuals who were poor or homeless. As a result of new governmental policies put in place, these individuals were required to go to work. The outward extension occurred because of renewed interests and support for career development through various policies implemented by the federal government (Pope, 2000). The School to Work Opportunities Act was authorized and put in place, it revolutionized the education process of schooling in the United States by refocusing the national education resources on the “under-attended” transition that students face from school to jobs (Pope, 2000). The inward development focused on specialties within the career counseling field, which private practitioners began to develop. These specialties included multicultural populations, senior executives and international relocation (Pope, 2000).

Each stage in the history of career counseling was foreshadowed by a major societal change. During the first stage, placement services were offered for an increasingly urban and industrial society (Pope, 2000). The focal point of the second stage was on educational guidance through schools. During the third stage, the focus shifted to colleges, universities and the training of counselors. With the fourth stage came the idea that work can have meaning in an individual’s life. The fifth stage of career counseling focused on the transition from Industrial Age to the Information Age (Pope, 2000). The sixth stage of career counseling emphasized technology, changing demographics, multicultural career counseling, and increased focus on the transition from

school to job. Overall, career counseling has grown tremendously over the years and has had significant impact on the lives of many people. This paper will transition to discuss the importance of career counseling and development.

Career Counseling and Career Development

Career Counseling

As described above, career counseling has been around for many years and has made countless changes overtime. Today, career counseling focuses on career exploration, career change, and personal career development. According to Brown (2012), career counseling refers to services offered to prevent problems with work behavior regardless of the level of education associated with a given work option. Typically career counseling occurs between an individual client and a counselor. Brown (2012) addresses a handful of presenting problems in career counseling, these include help in making and implementing career related decisions, help in adjusting to work and managing ones career, and help in negotiating career transitions and work-life balance. One role of a career counselor, and the career counseling profession is to assist workers in resolving problems they face in regards to career.

In addition to career counseling, there are other services intended to promote peoples career development. Some of these services include guidance, advising, and education (Brown, 2012). Guidance refers to activities that are career oriented. These activities are aimed to better prepare students to become aware of the realities of the work world. Typically, guidance and other career based activities are provided by school counselors and teachers (Brown, 2012). Brown (2012) stated, “Advising, typically associated with teachers and professors, is usually limited to selection of coursework and fulfillment of academic requirements but may involve less formal aspects, including advice regarding career options.” Career education typically refers to programs based in a school setting. Career education is aimed at introducing students to the world of work, assessment of

career-relevant personal attributes and exploration of different career options and paths that might fit a particular individual (Brown, 2012). In summary, career counseling aims to help all types of individuals manage various aspects of their life that relate to work and career.

Career Development

Career development, according to Brown (2012), is seen as the process that encompasses much of the life span. The life span begins during childhood and includes various informal and formal experiences that “give rise” to an individual’s talents, interests, values, and knowledge of the world. Following childhood, the life span continues into adulthood, as an individual’s career behaviors progress. An individual’s career behaviors include the start of work and the adjustment to work over time (Brown, 2012). As Brown describes, career development is something that begins and exists from an individual’s childhood and continues into adulthood. People have different experiences that might interest them more than others. These experiences highlight what the individual values and is interested in, often times these interests point towards an assortment of career paths.

Importance of Career Counseling

Work plays a central role in many people’s lives, as a result, career counseling is important and can become very beneficial for some individuals. Curry (2013) provides one perspective, that work should be an exciting blend of challenge and accomplishment. Work should meet individuals’ personal and professional growth needs. According to Brown (2012), a person’s work often times greatly impacts the kind of life that person lives. Work can have great psychological significance in an individual’s life as many people put a lot of time and effort into their work (Brown, 2012). For many people, work colleagues become an important source of friendship and social support. As a result of the efforts and time that go into a person’s work, work related stress or conflict often affects people’s sense of well being even when they are not at the work place (Brown, 2012). While

some people are able to compartmentalize and separate work life and home life better than others, individuals who are unhappy in their work lives are often unhappy with their lives as a whole. When individuals are unhappy with their lives as a whole, not only does this negatively affect the individual, but his or her friends and family as well. Thus, career counseling aims to either prevent or remediate career related problems for individuals (Brown, 2012). Overall, career and work is often times an immense part of peoples lives, career counseling can be very valuable and helpful for an individuals overall happiness, and to resolve work related issues.

Career Counseling in a School Setting

While career counseling can be beneficial for adults in the workplace, career counseling is also extremely beneficial in a school setting. Schools are an important place for individuals to start exploring different career opportunities. To ensure students future career success, schools must offer diverse curricula and educational options. Having a diverse curriculum and educational opportunities allow students to have wide-ranging opportunities to develop skills and competencies for the world of work (Curry, 2013). As the global economy, industries, and technology constantly change, the preparation of students must keep up with these changes and adaptations. Researcher, educators and policy makers agree that college and career readiness are essential components of a P-12 education, however, there is no clear definition of what this means (Curry, 2013). In summary, schools are a critical place for individuals to start exploring various career opportunities. Career readiness and college readiness are two terms used when addressing the preparation of students in a school setting.

Career Readiness

According to Curry (2013), career readiness involves three major skill areas including core academic skills, employability skills and technical, job specific skills related to a certain career pathway. Core academic skills include the ability to apply proficiency to concrete situations to

function in the workplace. Employability skills include critical thinking and responsibility, which are both a necessity in any career area. Technical and job specific skills refer to the ability to learn, adapt, and perform the skills necessary to a specific job and work task (Curry, 2013). Some additional skills that are emphasized when entering the workforce include basic math and English skills, which are crucial for all individuals entering the workforce. To be successful in the world of work it is also important for individuals to be flexible, responsible, professional, and collaborative (Curry, 2013).

Gysbers (2013) describes career ready students as students who have “a proactive, resilient, and adaptive style of interacting in the present and use that style to assertively move towards self-defined career futures that add meaning, purpose and satisfaction to their lives.” Individuals and students, must have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to plan and visualize their futures.

Gysbers (2013), describes career ready students as individuals who understand that their lives evolve in various life settings, including school and the work place. Career ready students also understand how planned or unplanned life events, can effect them over their lifetime. Career ready students understand how to anticipate possible impacts that events may have on them and their career planning. They are able to plan, but also able to take advantage of unplanned opportunities that may arise (Gysbers, 2013). Curry and Gysbers descriptions of career readiness and career ready students show similarities, while also emphasizing different skills and aspects they believe are essential to the career ready student. While career readiness includes a handful of skill areas that are believed to be essential to the success of a worker, college readiness, which emphasizes preparing students for continued education, focuses on a variety of different skill areas which are believed to be essential for a student to be college ready.

College Readiness

While career readiness focuses on skills essential to succeed in the workplace, career readiness emphasizes the skills necessary to succeed in college. According to Curry (2013), the

college ready student is able to understand what is expected in a college course, can cope with the content knowledge that is presented, and can take away from the course the key intellectual lesson and dispositions that the course was designed to convey. Due to the understanding of the culture and structure of post secondary education, the student is hopefully prepared to get the most out of the college experience (Curry, 2013). The student has the mindset and disposition necessary to prevail in the academic and social environment. Students perform better when they have an idea of what to expect, and are committed to develop the skills and knowledge to successfully get through post secondary schooling (Curry, 2013).

More specifically, college readiness might be defined by grade point average (GPA), performance on achievement exams, and college knowledge (Roderick, 2009). Grade point average (GPA), is a non-cognitive measure of a student's ability to work hard and meet the academic demands (Roderick, 2009). GPA is often used to predict how a student will perform in college. Achievement exams also assess a student's college readiness. The SAT and ACT are two achievement exams used to determine the readiness of a student to attend college. A student's performance on achievement exams illustrates skills students need to gain admission to a four-year college. These scores, similar to GPA, might also predict how well the student will perform in college (Roderick, 2009). College knowledge refers to the information, resources, and skills necessary to effectively navigate the college admissions process (Roderick, 2009). As discussed above, there are many pieces that go into being a college ready student. School counselors are in a great position to prepare students for college, while also assisting students in understanding the skills necessary to succeed in college.

College and Career Readiness Skills

It is important for students to have knowledge of the skills needed for success in college and career. Curry (2013) explored a few skills that he believes all students need; no matter what career

path they choose. These skills include career exploration, social interaction and communication, higher order thinking, financial literacy, self-regulation, and employability (Curry, 2013).

Career Exploration Skills

In regards to career exploration skills, as students enter the 21st century workforce, most likely their career paths will change a handful of times (Curry, 2013). It is important for students to have the skills necessary to explore different occupations and understand their own abilities, interest, values, career satisfaction, and decision making. Students must be able to access accurate information regarding occupations. Accurate information includes; what type of training is required for the occupation, what does a typical day on the job look like, what are average earnings/wages, what specialty areas occur within the occupation, what additional skills are required, and what is the projected growth and outlook for the occupation (Curry, 2013). Students must have a realistic outlook and understanding of an occupation in order to succeed in the workplace.

Social Interaction and Communication Skills

Career success requires social and communication skills. Individuals must be able to collaboratively work together and communicate. Active listening, communicating effectively, compromising, managing conflict, and interacting with a group, are also important factors when discussing career success (Curry, 2013). Every work environment is different as individuals bring their own values, cultural heritage, beliefs, and biases. It is imperative for students to be self-aware and understand how their beliefs, values, and thoughts might affect their interactions with other individuals. As individuals appreciate diversity and respect differences in a work environment, workers are more likely to enjoy and succeed.

Higher Order Thinking Skills

According to Curry (2013), cognitive skills and higher order thinking is another skill students should possess to better prepare them for post secondary plans. Students must be able to retain

information and apply knowledge. At a basic level, students must be able to focus their attention, concentrate, and comprehend instructions. As students move up in education levels, the critical thinking and high-order thinking skills become more demanding. Students in college must be able to successfully engage in tasks such as essay writing, understanding scientific research and solving complex problems (Curry, 2013).

Financial Literacy Skills

Financial literacy skills refer to the knowledge and ability to take effective action in fulfilling an individual's personal, family, and global community goals (Curry, 2013). A student must be able to create and manage a budget based on projected income and lifestyles, which include saving money for college and managing debt. Students must learn and become familiar with management financial matters, debts, mortgage rates, compound interest, car loans and college loans (Curry, 2013). Financial literacy skills are critical as students become adults and are expected to be more independent and responsible of their own lives.

Self-Regulatory Skills

Self-regulatory skills refer to the ability to set goals and manage behavior towards these goals (Curry, 2013). According to Curry (2013), "Self regulation includes directing oneself in day to day activities with discipline , and it's a particularly important skill for facing challenges and being able to problem solve, break down goals into manageable tasks, and focus on task completion." To be successful, students must believe they can be successful and hold the skills to set and attain goals to achieve this success.

Employability Skills

Employability skills include skills necessary to secure a job position. These skills include developing an accurate resume, writing a cover letter, and participating in an interview. Individuals

must also be able to navigate and explore to find open positions (Curry, 2013). Students must also be able to recognize if they are qualified for certain positions within a job.

The Role of a School Counselor

As mentioned a few times, school counselors are in a great position to assist students through the post-secondary planning process. School counselors are in the position to positively affect students post-secondary planning, as it is often a part of their job. Research illustrates that counselors have a positive impact on student's aspirations, plans, enrollment, and financial aid knowledge (McDonough, 2006). School counselors generally inform students of their post secondary options, guide them through the application process, and help students meet with recruiters or visit colleges ("Counseling", 2008). Although school counselors are in a great position to assist students, according to Bangser (2008), high school students experiences, often do not prepare them adequately for post-secondary education and the world of work.

Difficulties Counselors Face

Although school counselors are in the position to positively affect students in regards to post secondary opportunities, there are some obstacles in the way of that. Some of these obstacles include the high student to counselor ratio, the heavy workload and administrative duties, and the lack of information and training.

Counselor to Student Ratio.

Part of the reason school counselors struggle to assist students with career and college readiness is because the counselor to student ratio is so high. This leaves counselors feeling overwhelmed. The American School Counselor Association (2017), recommends a 1:250 ratio, however the national average for the 2013-2014 school year was 1:491, which is almost double the recommended ratio. Research supports that frequent meetings with the school counselor increases a

students chance of enrolling in a four year college, as students, counselors and parents work together the chances of enrolling significantly increases (McDonough, 2006). However if school counselors have such a high case load, frequent meetings with every student is most likely not realistic. In 2013, a College Board research brief found that each additional counselor as a high school increases four-year college enrollment by 10 percent (Indiana Business Journal, 2016). According to Patricia McDonough (2006), increasing the number of counselors and the amount of time counselors have to devote to college counseling is one of the top reforms to improve college access. Again, the more students a counselor has on their caseload, the less time a counselor is able to spend with each student. The National Association for College Admissions Counseling estimates that under current student to counselor ratios, students in public schools can expect less than an hour of post-secondary education counseling during an entire school year (McDonough, 2006). Overall, it is suggested that the more time students spend with the counselor, the more likely they will enroll in a four year college. However, the student to counselor ratio is often times so high that it is difficult for counselors to spend significant one on one time with students.

Heavy Workload and Administrative Duties.

In addition to the high student to counselor ration, heavy workloads and administrative duties also contribute to the lack of time counselors have to spend with students. Often times counselors use large group settings to give career information as they do not have the time to meet individually with students (“Counseling”, 2008). The Indiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that more than half of school counselors in Indiana, spend only 25 percent, or less, of their time helping students with college and career readiness because they are so busy with paper work and administrative duties assigned to them. The majority of these counselors also responded that they would like to devote more time during their workday to the responsibility of college and career readiness with students (Indiana Business Journal, 2016). Overall, counselors struggle to assist

students with college and career readiness as they often have a heavy workload, which includes administrative duties.

Lack of information and training.

In addition to the high student to counselor ratio, and administrative duties, school counselors often lack information and training. In order for school counselors to be effective in assisting and supporting students, it is important for them to be informed and trained. While school counselors are expected to support students and focus on post-secondary preparation, many counselors need additional training and mentoring to feel comfortable and competent throughout this process (Lieber, 2009). With students from disadvantaged backgrounds, counselors can be extremely influential relaying postsecondary planning information (Bangser, 2008). Counselors can provide information on college costs, financial options, course requirements, and college admissions (Bangser, 2008). In order for counselors to assist students and families in this area, the counselor must be aware and informed of the various opportunities and programs available.

School counselors must also understand the prominence of collaboration and consultation with teachers, administration, families and other community members in order to support and assist students (“Academic”, n.d). Along with being informed about post-secondary planning options, school counselors must also understand and be able to assist students who face outside learning barriers. It is important for a school counselor to be able to refer students and families to appropriate community agencies when necessary (“Academic”, n.d). Overall, it is essential for school counselors to be informed of various opportunities and agencies that might prove helpful for students and families. It is also important for schools counselors to be adequately trained to provide information to students as a well as feel comfortable and competent when supporting and assisting students.

Although school counselors are in the position to support, prepare, and positively affect students with their post secondary planning, the high student to counselor ratio, heavy workload, lack of information and training, and lack of resources keeps them from doing so. Schools need to provide counselors with the time and resources to focus on helping students understand and plan their individual academic and life goals.

Method

This study examined the impact of a post-secondary planning group on 11th grade students perceived readiness for post secondary plans. The key variables are perceived readiness (dependent variable) and the post-secondary planning group (independent variable). The students were administered a pre and post test which was created by the researcher. The test consisted of nine statements/questions designed to assess the students perceived readiness for post-secondary plans. The group's data was analyzed using a t-test to compare the mean scores of the students perceived readiness pre and post intervention.

Participants

Participants included in this study were ten 11th grade students who showed interest in attending the groups. The researcher conducted two separate groups and each group consisted of five participants. The first group was composed of three females and two males. The three females and one male identified as African American, and one male identified as Asian. The second group was composed of three females and two males. One female and two males identified as African American, while the other two females identified as Hispanic. The Capstone teachers briefly shared the groups purpose with their classes, and handed out the parent/guardian consent form and recruitment letter for students to bring home to their parents/ guardian. The Capstone teachers asked students to return the form to a school counselor once it was signed. All ten parent consent forms were signed and returned indicating their agreement for their child's participation in the study.

Upon receiving consent forms; participants were invited privately to the counseling office during a free period to be informed that they were selected to participate in the post-secondary planning group. Each participant was informed about the purpose of the group and that he/she would be learning about different opportunities for life after high school. Participants were given the minor assent form to complete. Upon agreement for participation, the student was told when the first group session would take place. During the first group session, students were given the pre-test to complete. All ten participants agreed to be in the group (N=10). Participants could choose to withdraw from the group, not complete the questionnaire, or not participate in a post-secondary planning activity without penalty. Participants were not given any incentives for participation.

Instruments

The variable being measure for this study was perceived readiness. The instrument used for this research study was a “test” created by the researcher. The “test” was created by the researcher to assess what impact the post-secondary planning group had on 11th grade students perceived readiness for post-secondary planning. The pre and post test, which were identical, consisted of four likert scale statements and five short answer questions.

The four likert scale statements included, “I have thought about my future after high school”, “I have an idea of what I want to do after high school”, I have a plan of what I want to do after high school”, and “I feel ready for life after high school”. Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they disagree or agree to the statement. Participants could choose from the following responses for each statement/ item: “Strongly Disagree”, “Somewhat Disagree”, “Neutral/ No Opinion”, “Somewhat Agree”, and “Strongly Agree”. Their responses are scored on a likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Somewhat Disagree), 3 (Neutral/ No Opinion), 4 (Somewhat Agree), and 5 (Strongly Agree).

The five short answer questions consisted of open ended questions which included: “What are your current post-secondary plans?”, “What resources did you use to come up with this goal/plan?”, “What are the steps in achieving this goal/plan?”, “How many hours a week do you spend on post-secondary planning?”, and “In what ways did participation in this group help you prepare your post-secondary plans?” Students were asked to refrain from answering the last question on the pre-test and to answer it on the post-test for additional feedback about the post-secondary planning group.

Procedures

The students attending the post-secondary planning groups during school for 30 minutes. The group began a week after obtaining all ten minor assent forms. The groups met once a week for five weeks. The groups met in the counselor’s office during their Capstone class periods (3rd and 5th period).

The five-week post-secondary planning group was created based on existing information and programs focused on post-secondary planning designed for high school students. The first session included a conversation about confidentiality, the pre-test, and a discussion about post-secondary planning. The researcher defined post-secondary planning and asked students to share their thoughts about post-secondary planning and thoughts about life after high school. During the third, fourth, and fifth group sessions, students were promoted to research various post-secondary planning opportunities. During these sessions students explored different levels of education, and various college opportunities (associates degree, bachelor’s degree, graduate degree). Students also took and reviewed an interest inventory to explore what careers they might be interested in. These group sessions were very open and consisted of much dialogue of different findings, information and opportunities available to students. The fifth and final session consisted of students setting goals to achieve their post secondary plan/plans.

The students completed the post-test during the last group session. Pre and post-test data was collected and compared. Qualitative data was analyzed by the researcher and quantitative data was inputted into SPSS software and a t-test was conducted to compare the total mean scores from the instrument.

Results

This study examined the impact of a five-week post-secondary planning group on the perceived readiness for post-secondary plans among ten 11th grade students. It was hypothesized that participation in the group would increase perceived readiness regarding post-secondary planning among the group members.

Outcome evaluation was conducted by comparing pre and post-test results from the researcher's pre and post-test. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data herself, and input the quantitative data into SPSS software. In SPSS, the researcher used a t-test to compare pre-test and post-test total mean scores from the instrument. As shown in Figure 1, the mean difference between total scores reported on the pre and post-test increased. For all four likert scale items, the mean increased from the pre- test to the post-test.

While there was an overall increase in the total mean scores between pre and post-test, not all four pairs were statistically significant.

Further analysis was conducted by comparing individual questions on the instrument used pre and post-test. Participants were asked to rate their answers on a five point Likert- type scale where 1 is 'Strongly Disagree', 2 is 'Somewhat Disagree', 3 is 'Neutral/ No Opinion', 4 'Somewhat Agree' and 5 is 'Strongly Agree'. Higher scores yield higher levels of perceived readiness for post-secondary planning. As shown in Figure 2, the first two items showed no statistical significance as the Sig (2-tailed) showed a number higher than .05. The items with no statistical significance between pre and post-test was likert- scale statement one and two. Statement one ("I have thought

about my future after high school”), was not statistically significant, with a mean difference of -.4 where $t(10) = .266, p = .168$. The pre-test mean on this question was 4.3 and increased to 4.7 on the post-test. Statement two (“I have an idea of what I want to do after high school”) was not statistically significant with a mean difference of -.4 where $t(10) = .33, p = .269$. The pre-test mean on this question was 4.0 and increased to 4.4 on the post test. The third and fourth statement were both statistically significant with a p value under .05. Statement three (“I have a plan of what I want to do after high school”), was statistically significant with a mean difference of -.7 where $t(10) = .21, p = .01$. Statement four (“I feel ready for life after high school”), was also statistically significant with a mean difference of -.90 where $t(10) = .23, p = .004$. It should be noted that the means of the first two statements which were not statistically significant, increase slightly on the post-test.

Figure 1.

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PrQ1	4.3000	10	.82327	.26034
	PoQ1	4.7000	10	.48305	.15275
Pair 2	PrQ2	4.0000	10	.66667	.21082
	PoQ2	4.4000	10	.69921	.22111
Pair 3	PrQ3	3.7000	10	.48305	.15275
	PoQ3	4.4000	10	.51640	.16330
Pair 4	PrQ4	3.1000	10	.73786	.23333
	PoQ4	4.0000	10	.47140	.14907

Figure 2.

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig.
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 PrQ1 - PoQ1	-.40000	.84327	.26667	-1.00324	.20324	-1.500	9	.168
Pair 2 PrQ2 - PoQ2	-.40000	1.07497	.33993	-1.16899	.36899	-1.177	9	.269
Pair 3 PrQ3 - PoQ3	-.70000	.67495	.21344	-1.18283	-.21717	-3.280	9	.010
Pair 4 PrQ4 - PoQ4	-.90000	.73786	.23333	-1.42784	-.37216	-3.857	9	.004

The qualitative data was analyzed separately. The researcher analyzed the responses to the five open ended questions from the pre and post-test. The researcher gathered key words and themes from the short answer questions to create a narrative of the student’s experiences throughout the group process. Three themes emerged from the short answer section on the pre and post-test. These themes or topics, that stood out to the researcher, include technology as a resource, continued education, and realistic goal setting.

On the pre-test, zero students reported that they use websites or technology as a resource to come up with a post-secondary plan. On the post-test, six students reported that throughout the group experience, websites or technology helped them come up with a post-secondary plan or goal. This suggests that lessons and activities throughout the group process assisted students with exploring and researching post-secondary planning opportunities.

Continuing education was another theme that emerged throughout the pre and post-test process. On the pre-test, eight students reported that they have thought about going to college and continuing their education. On the post-test, all ten students reported that they plan to apply for

college their senior year. This suggests that group lessons, activities and dialogue helped students explore the idea of continuing education and going to college.

Student responses also suggested a better understanding of realistic goal setting. On the pre-test many student's wrote down "do well in school" and "work hard" as their "steps in achieving a goal or plan". On the post-test, almost all ten of the students reported multiple steps to achieve the goal or plan they had set. The responses were also more in depth and included multiple steps to achieve a goal, such as, "get good grades, graduate high school, and get an internship over the summer". This suggests that the group process contributed to students understanding and increased awareness of setting realistic goals and understanding the post-secondary planning process.

Overall, student's answers on the post-test suggest that students had a better understanding of post-secondary planning and the options available to them after high school. Responses were also lengthier and detailed on the post-test, which suggests that the students had a better understanding of post-secondary planning, than they did prior to the group. The researcher believes, because of the qualitative data she collected, that the post-secondary planning group was successful in increasing students' perceived readiness for life after high school.

After comparing the pre and post-test quantitative and qualitative data, the results from the group support the original hypothesis that perceived readiness for post-secondary planning increased after participation in the groups. The result from the researcher's pre and post-test shows an overall increase in perceived readiness for post-secondary planning among group members.

Discussion

This study aimed to contribute to the growing body of research exploring the impact of focusing on post-secondary planning in a school setting. After comparing pre and post-test data, the results from the intervention support the hypothesis that a post-secondary planning groups will increase students perceived readiness for post secondary plans. This illustrates that students agreed

strongly with the statements that they have thought about their future after high school, they have an idea of what they want to do after high school, they have a plan of what they want to do after high school, and they feel readier for life after high school, illustrating students have thought about, have an idea, have a plan, and feel ready for life after high school.

Overall, perceived readiness for post-secondary plans among participants increased. The findings from the pre and post-test showed encouraging results. While two of the items were not statistically significant, results appeared to be clinically significant. Students themselves reported looking forward to the group, and that the group made them feel more prepared about their lives after high school. Students reported that they felt more comfortable and aware of the various opportunities available to them after high school. The students reported that the group was an overall positive and helpful experience.

Limitations & Future Research

There are several limitations to be considered with this research study. The first limitation is found in the sample size and population. The group was made up of only ten students who identified as either African American, Asian or Hispanic. Although the groups were diverse in age and ethnicity, it was a small sample that did not include other races and cultures. The researcher was hopeful that participants who really struggled with planning after high school would take advantage and join the group. The researcher found the participants were students who were doing well in school and maybe didn't need the support and group guidance as much as other students.

Therefore, this study is not generalizable to the larger population. Future research needs to use a larger more diverse sample size to understand the overall impact of post-secondary planning groups.

Another limitation of this study was the limited amount of time allowed to complete the research study. The post-secondary planning group was originally planned to be six weeks but got shortened to five weeks due to school being closed unexpectedly because of snow. Two group

sessions had to be combined into one, which resulted in the group being more rushed than the researcher preferred. Future research should aim to run the group for six to eight weeks to allow for better development of post-secondary planning.

One final limitation of this research was the participant's attendance. Four of the ten group members did not attend every session. Two of the participants did not complete every answer on the post-test which could have impacted results slightly. Future researcher should actively encourage group attendance so participants can get the most out of the group.

Conclusion

Career counseling has tremendously grown over the years. Today career counseling has increased focus on the transition from school to work. In a school setting, it is important for students to prepare and understand skill necessary for post-secondary plans. Whether this means going straight into the work force or attending college, school is a place for students to prepare for life after high school. School counselors are in the position to support, prepare, inform and assist students with this process. Post-secondary readiness is important for students as it prepares them for life after high school. While there are some obstacles and difficulties in the way, school counselors are in the position to effectively support and assist students with post-secondary planning and readiness.

This study provided further evidence that post-secondary planning groups have a positive impact on students and their perceived readiness for life after high school. Moreover, participants reported that they enjoyed the group and looked forward to the group every week. Overall, the five-week post-secondary planning group had a positive impact on 11th grade students in this study. Further research is needed to understand the impact of post-secondary planning groups on students over a longer period of time with a larger more diverse sample. Nonetheless, this study and existing research illustrates the positive benefits of educating and assisting students throughout the post-

secondary planning process. Implementing post-secondary planning programs into educational culture can have a influential and positive impact on students. School counselors are in a unique position to offer such programs during the school day, which can have a positive impact on students feeling more ready and more prepared for post-secondary plans. Finally, school counselors can use this information to provide evidence for the benefits of a post-secondary planning group for students to increase their perceived readiness for life after high school.

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