

Career Guidance and Drop-Out Prevention: A Social Cognitive Perspective

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The Theory

I am very honored to be invited to talk with you today and am especially honored to know that all of you are interested in our research and theory on career behavior. I'm looking forward to presenting and discussing this work with you in the hour we have today. We'll start by talking a bit about Social Cognitive Career Theory and its research base. I will not try to cover the entire theory. Rather, I'll highlight our theoretical view of how people develop interests and how these interests translate (or not) into educational and occupational choices. Then we'll talk some about how the theory might be applied in helping students make better educational and vocational choices since I do believe (and the research supports) that school drop-out can be prevented if students are helped to make better choices about the work that they want to do. This might be especially helpful in working with students taking the vocational track in your educational system.

However, I also believe (and the data again support) that helping students make good choices in today's world is not enough. Rather, they also have to see a connection between their education and their vocational futures—that finding satisfying and sustaining work is actually possible for them and education will help them get there. A large volume of research conducted in the U.S. suggests that one of the strongest (if not the strongest) predictor of school completion is having positive expectations about the future. Students who have positive expectations about their futures tend to be resilient, stress resistant, committed and involved in their school work and their schooling, and are much more likely to complete their formal education than those with more negative

future expectations. Thus, I'd like to finish by talking about some new work we've been doing on how SCCT might explain how these positive future expectations develop even under conditions of great hardship and how we might promote such expectations in our students and clients.

So let's begin. How did Social Cognitive Theory get started? The foundations of the theory lie in Albert Bandura's (1986, 1997) general social cognitive theory. Realizing the relevance of Bandura's theory to career behavior, several researchers in the early 1980's sought to translate his theory into research that would aid understanding of basic career development processes.

Professors Gail Hackett and Nancy Betz were the first to extend Bandura's theory to career behavior. In what has become a classic contribution, Hackett and Betz discussed how one of Bandura's central constructs-- self-efficacy beliefs—could explain how it is that girls and women tend to select certain career options that are societally-defined as appropriate for them and avoid options that are considered “nontraditional” or male-dominated.

Subsequent research by Hackett, Betz, my colleague Bob Lent and me, and many other researchers has found that self-efficacy is, in fact, very useful in understanding certain aspects of both women's and men's behavior—such as career and academic interest formation and choice, academic achievement and persistence, and job performance. This early work progressed from a trickle into a torrent, and emerged rather quickly (by the early 1990's) as one of the most productive streams of research on career development and vocational guidance world wide. However, it gradually became apparent to Professors Lent, Hackett, and me that many researchers in our area were

approaching Bandura's social cognitive theory as if it were a one-factor theory of career development. Most people, ourselves included, were examining the relation of self-efficacy to various career and educational outcome variables, but were not considering the larger theoretical framework in which self-efficacy resided.

To try to remedy this situation, Bob Lent, Gail Hackett, and I sought to construct a larger social cognitive career theory that had three primary goals: (1) to incorporate other important variables from Bandura's theory, (2) to bring together conceptually-related constructs from other career theories, and (3) to provide the basis for a unifying, integrative theory of career development.

The result was published first in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* in 1994 and consisted of three interlocking models and a series of propositions and hypotheses focused on three aspects of vocational and educational behavior: vocational and educational interest development, vocational and educational choice-making, and vocational and educational performance. Dr. Lent and I recently extended the theory to try to provide an integrative theoretical account of how school and work satisfaction is attained, but the theory remains largely a theory of interest development, choice making, and performance. As I said earlier, I'll just focus on the interest development and choice-making parts of the theory.

As a theory based fundamentally on Bandura's social cognitive theory, our theory emphasizes three key person variables: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their ability to perform specific career-or academically-relevant tasks or courses of actions. It helps people determine the types of environments they will approach or avoid, how much effort they

will expand, and how persistent they will be in the face of obstacles. Simply put, we tend to take on, and persist at, tasks of which we believe we are capable. By the same token, we avoid or easily give up on tasks that we believe we are not competent to perform—regardless of our actual levels of abilities. The last part of the preceding statement highlights another important aspect of self-efficacy beliefs—they are ability perceptions (if you will) and may or may not correspond well with a person’s actual task competencies, but are, of the two, the more important determinants of interest development, choice behavior, and persistence. Simply put, a person with high math aptitudes (for example) who underestimates her talents is less likely to become interested in, and choose, math-related school subjects and careers and persist in such endeavors than a person with equal math talent, but more congruent self-efficacy beliefs.

Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about the consequences of a given action, along with the value that one places on these consequences. Self-efficacy is concerned with the question “can I do this?” Outcome expectations, by contrast, ask, “If I do this, what will happen?” That is, what outcomes will follow my behavior? Outcome expectations are also perceived and, therefore, may or may not match the actual outcomes that may accrue for a given action. A person may, for example, perceive that people in a particular occupation are poorly paid when, in fact, the earnings in the field are much higher. Because of this faulty outcome expectation, the person may not develop the type of interest in this occupation that he or she might have from a more accurate view of earnings. Thus, people’s actions (interests and choices in our case) are based both on their beliefs about what they can do well (self-efficacy beliefs) and about what their actions will produce (outcome expectations).

Goals refer to people's determination to engage in a particular activity, or to produce a particular future outcome. By setting goals, people help to organize and guide their own behavior, sustain it over long periods even in the absence of external reinforcement, and increase the likelihood that they will attain their desired outcomes. Goals are central to nearly all theories of career development. When we speak of plans, aspirations, or dreams, we are essentially referring to goals, but in much less explicit terms.

The next slide is a stripped down version of Social Cognitive Career Theory's interest and choice model and shows how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals operate together in the interest development and choice-making process. More specifically, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations are seen as giving rise to interests. Both early in life, and later on, we develop interests in activities at which we view ourselves competent and which we believe will produce desirable outcomes. Moving along in the diagram, it can be seen that interests, along with self-efficacy and outcome expectations, give rise to goals for pursuing specific activities. And goals make it more likely that people will, in turn, pursue activities that are consistent with their goals.

Once people choose—or are required to engage-- in a particular activity, they produce a certain pattern of success and failures that enable them to revise or stabilize self-efficacy and outcome expectations. When it becomes time to choose a particular career pursuit, people will make choices on the basis of their interests which have been developed from their perceptions of competency and expectations of outcomes, as long as there are not insurmountable barriers to translating their primary

interests into occupational choices. In these cases, choices may be determined by self-efficacy beliefs (people still want to pursue work that they think they can do) and other sources of influence (e.g., job availability, family wishes in collectivist cultures).

It is important also to understand that social cognitive theory is not just a decontextualized, person-oriented theory. Rather, we believe that features of the context, or environment, are also crucial to interest development and choice behavior. As you can see in the next slide (which provides a more complete and less stripped down picture of SCCT), environmental influences can directly affect people's choices, or they can moderate choice behavior. For example, environmental barriers can weaken people's abilities to translate interest into goals or their abilities to translate goals into actions. Thus, although SCCT hypothesizes that people will generally enter fields that are congruent with their interests, this can only happen if they have the resources to do so and if there are not insurmountable barriers in their environments to translating their primary interests into real choices. This moderator hypothesis has found support in several studies from our labs—the correlation between interests and choices, for example, tends to be in the .70 range when environmental barriers are low and supports are high, while it falls to the mid-.20 range when barriers are high and supports low. Thus, SCCT suggests that effective career guidance will not only help people identify their primary interests and potentially congruent occupations (as do many career theories), but also must help people identify barriers that limit their choice behavior, develop strategies to cope with or overcome these barriers, and build systems that may support and facilitate their choices.

Contextual factors, like environmental barriers, supports, and resources also seem to influence interest development and choice behavior via their influences on persons' self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (something we didn't originally hypothesize). Persons living in conditions with few resources or opportunities for skill development, will not develop the self-efficacy beliefs that they should or come to view many positive outcomes from work attainment. On the other hand, persons growing up in a resource rich environments with persons who support and encourage their plans and goals will be much more likely to identify areas of talent, develop strong and robust efficacy beliefs about these, and come to see positive outcomes from work engagement. There are also data to support that latter hypothesizes (which we'll see in a minute), but we are beginning to get inkling that supports may be more facilitative of self-efficacy belief and outcome expectation development and choice making than barriers are hindering. We as counselors and researchers tend, I think, to pay a lot of attention (and rightfully so) to the debilitating effects of barriers in people's lives, especially for the under resourced and marginalized, but perhaps don't give sufficient attention to the supports that people have or can access.

For example, we just completed a meta-analysis of the roles of supports and barriers in career development in general and social cognitive career theory in particular. Our findings (based on an analysis of some 160 data sets) suggest that the supports people receive from their families, peers, and teachers, and communities can be quite facilitative of a variety of important career behaviors. For example, we found that supports from these sources correlate more positively ($r = .32$) with the level of career aspirations that people develop for themselves than barriers correlate negatively ($r = -$

.14). Similarly, supports seem to be more facilitative of the types of work and educational goals that people have than barriers are hindering (the correlations are .23 for supports versus -.09 for barriers). Finally, in terms of self-efficacy beliefs the correlation for support is .43, while for barriers it is -.22.

Which is more important (supports or barriers), however, is not the most important issue for us to consider. We all know that the poor and marginalized experience more barriers to their career development and work success than the wealthy and more resource rich and we should not ignore this fact. However, our data and others that I'll mention in a minute do suggest that a failure to consider the supports that these and other people have or could be marshaled is doing them a grave disservice. The bottom line is that we all must give as much attention to helping clients identify and build support for their choices as we do identifying the barriers that they have in their lives.

Social Cognitive Career Theory has generated an enormous amount of research since the theory's appearance in 1994. Betz (2008) indicated that social cognitive career theory, along with Holland's theory of career choice and constructivist perspectives, have generated the most research since 2000. We conducted a Social Science Citation Index count in 2005 of the 1994 theory piece and found that it had been cited in a total of 489 publications since its inception. The research is obviously too voluminous to cover here, but one recent meta-analysis that we conducted provides a nice summary of the findings. The results of this meta-analysis are presented on the next slide. As you can see, the figure provides strong support for social cognitive career theory's major hypotheses about interest development and choice making.—interests are highly related to self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, the relation of self-efficacy beliefs and

outcome expectations to choices are largely, but not fully mediated, by interests. Further, it reveals quite clearly that supports may be more choice enhancing than barriers are choice limiting. More specifically, the path from supports to self-efficacy beliefs is larger (.36) than the path from barriers to self-efficacy (-.12). Notice also that, contrary to our original hypothesis, supports and barriers do not seem to expand or limit peoples' choices directly, but seem to have their effect on choices via self-efficacy beliefs.

Given the pivotal role that self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations have been found to play in interest development and choice-making, it seems also important to ask where these come from and social cognitive career theory has some hypotheses. The data also suggest that building efficacy may be a particularly important means of fostering more positive outcome expectations. Thus, let's focus most on building self-efficacy beliefs. The first and primary source of efficacy information comes from our personal performance accomplishments—that is having a success experience is a building block for self-efficacy, while a failure experience weakens subsequent self-efficacy beliefs.

However what is not displayed on the slide is that the success experiences that people have must be perceived as a success by them if these experiences are to have an influence on their senses of competency. To benefit from a success experience, one must, at least, make adaptive comparisons and attributions. Upward comparisons to more accomplished persons will tend to hinder self-efficacy belief development, whereas comparisons to previous performance (providing that some improvement was shown) will tend to facilitate self-efficacy belief development. For example, a highly academically capable student from a very high achieving school may not come to

develop the types of academic self-efficacy that are ability commensurate if the person compares him or herself only to students in his or her school. On the other hand, a less capable student from a low achieving school may develop self-efficacy beliefs that, to a degree, outstrip his or her talents. The result may be that the former student opts for subsequent courses of study that undershoot his or her talents, while the latter may choose programs of study for which he or she is ill prepared—remember it is self-efficacy beliefs more than actual abilities that drive interests and choices.

The way people explain their accomplishments to themselves also determine the influence of the accomplishment on their self-efficacy beliefs—these are called causal attributions. Believing that a success experience was due primarily to luck, easy tasks, or even hard work will not have the same influence on a person's self-efficacy beliefs than explaining it to competence or growing competence. Persons who believe that their accomplishments are due primarily to hard work may continue to work hard and do well, but such an attribution will have minimal effects on the person's self-efficacy beliefs. Simply put, people need to acknowledge, or be helped to acknowledge, that accomplishment may also be due to talent as well as hard work for self-efficacy beliefs to grow. Why is this important—it's important because of the role of self-efficacy beliefs in interest development and choice-making. Using our math-talented woman again as an example—if she thinks that her success in math is largely a matter of hard work (that is, attributes her successes in math classes primarily to hard work) she will not likely develop the math self-efficacy beliefs that she should and, consequently, she will be less likely to develop an interest in occupations that involve mathematics.

Other than performance accomplishment (and being able to benefit from them), vicarious learning experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states also are instrumental in self-efficacy belief development, but their impact seems to be somewhat less than that of performance accomplishments, although if we change social persuasion to social support the impact of this source of efficacy information might be more substantial. That is, having people who provide emotional sustenance and tangible guidance maybe more impactful than having people who just tell you that you are good at something (and again the data on social support supports this conjecture). In a nutshell then, people are more likely to develop strong self-efficacy beliefs in areas of personal talent if (a) they are exposed to others like them who are successful in their area of talent, (b) have the opportunity to engage in, achieve success, and benefit cognitively in their areas of talent, and (c) have others in their environments who encouraging, supporting, and reinforcing of their performance accomplishments and provide tangible guidance. Persons who lack one or more of these crucial elements are less like to develop self-efficacy beliefs (and positive outcome expectations) in their areas of talent, and, as a result, may prematurely rule out as options occupations that they might like and actually prosper in.

Applications

Let's now consider more fully some implications of SCCT for career guidance--especially guidance that focuses on helping people make career choices.

There are several ways that SCCT can be used to facilitate the choice making process. First, SCCT suggests that persons should be helped to reconsider occupational possibilities that they have previously eliminated from consideration and to explore the

reasons why these options are no longer being considered. Second, it suggests ways to enhance self-efficacy beliefs, especially where these seem to be limiting clients' interests and choice options. Third, it suggests the importance of instilling positive, but realistic outcome expectations. And, finally, it focuses our attention on helping our clients manage environmental barriers and build support systems that will enable them to implement their choices. Let's now highlight each of these briefly.

Expanding Interests and Reconsidering Foreclosed Options

One goal of SCCT-focused counseling is to try to ensure that clients consider as wide a range of occupations as possible, including a reconsideration of occupations that might once have been considered and maybe even options that have never been considered. Thus, a counselor following an SCCT framework would not only ask people what they are interested in or use a standardized assessment instrument to identify current interests, but also ask people directly about foreclosed upon options because these may actually represent options that are still worthy of consideration. They might have been previously eliminated because of underestimated self-efficacy beliefs, inaccurate outcome expectations, barriers that are perceived to be insurmountable, or a lack of (real or perceived) support for pursuing them.. It may turn out that these options remain ones that the person chooses not to pursue, but we believe that the ultimate decision whether or not to pursue them should be as fully informed as possible. After identifying these possibilities, we then explore with the client the bases on which they ruled them out, focusing specifically (obviously) on their self-efficacy beliefs, the accuracy of their occupational knowledge, and barriers to, and supports for, pursuing them.

We generally use one of two strategies here. First, we ask people to list occupations that they have chosen not to pursue and to consider why they chose not to pursue them. Sometimes we might give them a time line-- think of occupations that you considered when you were 12 years old, 16 years old, etc. and tell us why and when you dropped them from consideration.

Once these occupations have been identified, we explore the reasons they might have been eliminated focusing specifically on self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, barriers, and lack of support. Linda Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise also suggest that sex role views are a significant source of circumscription so we explore this too. In the case of self-efficacy beliefs we ask them about the experiences that led them to believe that they lacked talent in the area and, if necessary, have them gather information that might provide more efficacy confirming information. For outcome expectations, we ask people to search out information on the occupation to ensure that they are basing their outcome expectations on accurate occupational information. We also explore barriers and barrier coping strategies and talk about how support could be built for the choice. The client may then want to re-add the occupation to the list of those being considered or he or she may continue to see the option as nonviable. In the latter case, the decision to not pursue it further, is at least now as fully informed as possible.

Building Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Helping people gain a realistic understanding of their abilities and helping them foster stronger self-efficacy beliefs in areas of talent is an important component of counseling according to SCCT. If you'll remember, social cognitive theory suggests that

self-efficacy beliefs stem from four primary sources of information. The first and potentially most important source involves performance accomplishments. This can be accomplished by having clients review past success experiences. Also because clients sometimes discount this information, we have found it useful to have friends or work associates rate the client on relevant skills and compare these with the client to his or her own self-ratings. For example, I had a client once who was a teacher contemplating going back to school to get a degree in school administration. She was stuck because she wasn't sure that she had the organizational and leadership skills required to be successful as a school administrator which was strongly revealed when I asked her to rate herself on various organizational and leadership behaviors. I asked her to have several friends and work associates complete the same scale for her. The results were striking—her friends rated her skills much higher than she rated herself. She decided to pursue the school administration degree and is now a quite successful principle in the suburban Chicago area.

However, in cases where skill deficits are apparent we should avoid creating overly optimistic self-efficacy beliefs, but instead help clients get involved in practical experiences that would help build their skills and self-efficacy at the same time.

No matter what approach is taken to expose clients to personal performance accomplishments it is critical to examine clients attributions for their performances successes—to help them develop skill and ability attributions rather than those just focused on hard work, luck, or task ease.

Modeling is another way to promote self-efficacy beliefs. This can be done by exposing or asking clients to seek out role models that are similar to them in gender, age,

and cultural background. Social persuasion as originally defined by Bandura referred to the encouragement and discouragement that people received from others—encouragement builds self-efficacy while discouragement tears it down. However, given the data that I discussed earlier on the role of social support in efficacy belief development, we think that the influence of others involves more than this and is much more impactful than simple persuasion. We would replace social persuasion with social support and suggest some ways to engender support that is truly efficacy enhancing—it involves providing emotional sustenance, is targeted at efficacy beliefs development, provides modeling, encourages people to approach rather than avoid efficacy-enhancing experiences, helps people set realistic goals, manage anxiety, and benefit from success experiences by providing reinforcement and challenging faulty causal attributions (this also sounds like good vocational guidance too, doesn't it?).

Instilling Accurate Outcome Expectations

Social Cognitive Career Theory also suggests focusing on instilling accurate outcome expectations. In the context of vocational choice guidance, outcome expectations involve clients' beliefs about what different choice options have to offer them, in terms of work tasks, working conditions, and opportunities to fulfill their work values—like the desire to earn lots of money, to help other people, to work independently, and so on. We seek to help clients get accurate information about what to expect from different occupational possibilities. In this way, we are like many other approaches to vocational guidance, but we try to be very specific about the whole process of information gathering. We identify in writing what clients are looking for from work and compare this list of values against what different fields of work have to offer. This

process is a little bit more detailed than simply asking clients to go out and explore different fields. It, rather, provides a structure and explicit purpose for information-gathering efforts.

Managing Barriers and Building Supports

We all know from our guidance work that many clients face environmental obstacles to their career goals. Some clients come from cultures in which elderly family members have the final say on what clients can and cannot do occupationally. Other clients are hampered in pursuing a particular option because of financial limitations, discrimination, or work-family conflicts. Thus, barrier management assumes a very important role in social cognitive vocational guidance and we take a three-step approach to our work with clients: (a) identifying potential barriers, (b) considering what barriers are most likely to be encountered, and (c) preparing strategies to prevent or cope with the most likely barriers. We often use a written balance sheet to do this where clients list the positive and negative consequences of pursuing each option they are considering. The negative consequences represent potential barriers and we then help clients to consider how they might prevent or cope with the most likely ones.

However, as you might have already surmised, we truly think that barrier management strategies are insufficient and must be complemented with equally intense efforts to help clients identify the supports they have for different options and to marshal support where it might be lacking. We ask clients again to write down all people who might be supportive of each occupational option (non-supportive people were probably already identified during barrier management) and how they might help the client pursue the option focusing on the efficacy enhancing qualities of social support. In cases where

support may be lacking, we help clients consider where they might be able to access necessary support from such sources as their extended kin, acquaintances, community organizations, teachers, or formal support groups.

Finally, before moving on, I'd like to mention a few other things about how we might work with clients to promote better choices. These came out of a large meta-analysis of career choice outcome studies that Nancy Ryan Krane and I reported in 2000. What we found in that meta-analysis was that there were certain strategies that seemed to critical to choice counseling outcome, regardless of who the client was, the format that counseling took (e.g., group or individual), the theory used to direct counseling, and anything else that was done in counseling. These were (a) having clients develop written goals for what they were going to do between counseling sessions and, more importantly, what they were going to do when counseling terminated, (b) attending to and providing feedback on the clients' written goals (not just asking them to write them), (c) ensuring clients were exposed to, or were helped to gain access, to age, race, and gender appropriate role models, (d) ensuring the clients make full and extensive use of occupational information, and (e) helping clients consider the support they had or could access for their choice options. We also found that the more of these strategies that were used, the better the outcome was. Thus, we encourage you to employ as many of these strategies in your vocational guidance work with clients as possible, whatever theory you might follow be it SCCT or something else. However, although looking at these and considering what we've already said about how to enhance efficacy and outcome expectations my guess is that they are so powerful because they promote greater levels of

choice making self-efficacy in clients and more accurate outcome expectations about the types of options they are considering.

Vocational Hope: A Social Cognitive Model

Before ending today, I'd like to share with you some other work in which I am currently involved. It is based on a fundamental notion that although helping youth identify satisfying and sustaining occupations will have an impact on drop out rates (especially those choosing the vocational tract in your educational system), it is not enough in today's world. Rather, kids must be helped to develop a sense of hope for their futures—to feel hopeful that meaningful and sustaining work is a real possibility in their futures and that a fundamental task of vocational guidance is to help foster this sense of vocational hope. I'd like to share with you how we think Social Cognitive Career Theory may provide you with some ideas about how to foster vocational hope in your clients. I've been working on this in collaboration with three of my doctoral students—Kristen Lamp (obviously the one on the right), Jason Hacker (on the left), and Kyle Telander (center).

Let's start by defining hope. These definitions suggest to me that hope has four fundamental characteristics. First, it is future oriented. It involves envisioning something in the future rather than thinking about the past or contemplating the present. Second, the something that is envisioned in the future is something that a person desires. Third, it is not only desired, but also seen as attainable. Fourth and finally, it engenders an emotional state that motivates one to persevere—to work toward attaining one's desire. Now given these four characteristics, how might we define vocational hope? It is we think “a positive affective and motivational state associated with envisioning a

vocational future in which satisfying and meaningful work is attainable.” What effects might vocational hope have—it, we think, motivates people to strive for their desired vocational future and persevere in the face of adversity, it will motivate kids to complete the education required to attain their hoped-for future, and will reduce drop-out rates.

How do we suggest that vocational guidance workers help their clients develop a sense of vocational hope? Here’s how- look familiar? It’s an SCCT model of vocational hope that substitutes vocational hope for vocational interests and suggests that people will feel hopeful about their vocational future if they believe they have the abilities to attain it (self-efficacy beliefs) and that work and working at it is worth their effort (that the outcome will yield things that they value). However, whereas our choice model talks about self-efficacy for the tasks involved in different occupations (I will develop an interest in occupations in which I can be successful), the vocational hope model focuses on different types of self-efficacy beliefs—confidence in my ability to make good vocational decisions; overcome obstacles, develop resources, set and work toward goals; and complete the education required to attain my hoped for vocational future. Thus, from this model another task of vocational guidance is to help kids learn good career decision making strategies, help them figure out how to overcome obstacles, develop resources, set and work toward goals, and develop academic skills and help them believe that they are capable of undertaking these tasks in their lives. We do this by reviewing past success experiences, exposing kids to models like them who have attained a desired vocational future, helping them acquire social support systems that will emotionally sustain them and help them develop greater feelings of efficacy, and by helping them have actual efficacy enhancing experiences and benefit from them cognitively.

But hope also involves believing that all of this work will actually have a pay-off at the end—that the effort is worth it—that the outcomes of these efforts will be positive. One way to accomplish this is via self-efficacy belief development strategies that we have already talked about, while another might be to help kids engage in contrast thinking—to compare the hoped- for future against current impediments. The data show that such thinking (as opposed to dwelling on the impediments or even just focusing on the desired for future) fosters school commitment. We haven't tried this yet, but the data suggest that it is worth a try.

Why foster vocational hope? Because, moving along in the diagram, vocational hope, we hypothesize, will inspire kids to set higher educational aspirations and commitments to acquire the education necessary to attain their hoped-for future. These types of aspirations, commitments, and intentions will then, we think, increase the probability that kids will stay in school and perform to the best of their abilities as long as (of course) they have supports in place to sustain their efforts, reinforce their successes, and help them overcome barriers that might stand in their ways.

A challenge for sure, but we think ultimately doable. But there is an even bigger challenge ahead and that involves trust. Many theorists and writers in the field have suggested another component of hope that hasn't yet found its way into our dictionaries—that of having a basic trust in the ultimate fairness and goodness of the world. Can hope flourish in a world that is seen as unjust? Is it real hope or false hope? I have two concluding suggestions. First, I think having hope (even if the odds of attaining the desired outcome are low) will increase the likelihood that the hoped for outcome will be attained. Youth who have positive future expectations versus those with

more negative expectations about the future are more likely to complete school, are more stress resistant and resilient, and tend to use more effective proactive coping strategies.

Are positive future expectations the same as having vocational hope or will vocational hope be shown to have the same school and life-enhancing consequences? We hope so, but that's for future research on our SCCT model of vocational hope to tell us. In the meantime, I would also argue that vocational guidance workers have a duty to work for a fairer and more just world—to be advocates as well as counselors in order to make vocational hope a reality in the lives of today's youth.

Thank you very much for your attention.