Art. # 1225, 11 pages, doi: 10.15700/saje.v36n1a1225

Efficacy of using career and self-construction to help learners manage career-related transitions

A Cook and JG Maree
Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
cook@mweb.co.za; kobus.maree@up.ac.za

This article explores the extent to which an intervention programme helped learners from two contrasting educational settings manage career-related transitions. Forty-two learners from two schools were selected, using convenience and purposive sampling, to take part in an intervention programme. Two comparison groups comprised of 45 learners from the same two schools were similarly selected, and continued to take part in the standard, traditional Life Orientation lessons offered by their schools. Quantitative data on their career adaptability was gathered from the pre- and post-intervention results of *The Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory* (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Qualitative data was gathered during in-depth focus group interviews and discussions with the participants, as well as by observing them. Data-gathering techniques included the Collage, the Career Interest Profile and the lifeline technique. Results revealed that career and self-construction helped the participants from both experimental groups manage career-related transitions. It was also apparent that these participants displayed improved career adaptability after they took part in the intervention programme. More research is needed to establish why learners from low resource schools seemingly embrace school-based, career support initiatives without questioning them and/or responding to them without frustration and/or confusion.

Keywords: adaptability; adolescence; career adaptability; career construction; career counselling; career transitions; self-construction

Introduction

Rapid advancements in information technologies and globalisation heralded the start of the 21st century. It has become increasingly more challenging to predict what the future holds for individuals in a globalised world with diminished job prospects as well as more frequent and complex career challenges (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck & Van Vianen, 2009). The need for innovative skills and changes in attitude toward work has developed in response to these rapid changes and multiple transitions that must be faced (Maree, 2009).

Adolescents are not exempt from asking questions pertaining to what they are going to do with their lives in this ever-changing world as they negotiate these transitions (Savickas et al., 2009). Career transitions learners face can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety (Pietarinen, Pyhälto & Soini, 2010). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to provide *consistent and competent* career development support to all learners (Lapan, Tucker, Se-Kang & Kosciulek, 2003:1). The importance and benefits of offering support to learners as they negotiate what are often stressful career-related transitions, are emphasised time and again in the literature (Maree, 2009; Pietarinen et al., 2010). Learners who receive this support in high school are seen to manage career transitions more effectively throughout their lifespans (Lapan et al., 2003). Concern was however expressed, when researchers examined the nature of support offered to learners in this context (Lapan et al., 2003).

Savickas (2008a, 2011) argues that the methods used by career counsellors need to be re-evaluated, as they address the diverse needs of clients in the contemporary world of work. Western career facilitation practices, characterised by individualism, rationality and empiricism, will be irrelevant to many cultures in a globalised world (Marsella, 1998). Chung (2007) calls for the globalisation of these practices, rather than their westernisation, because career counselling practices that are mostly reliant on assessment instruments developed in Western contexts, will have limited outcomes in terms of meeting the career needs of diverse groups of people.

In related discussions, Maree (2009) contends that career counselling in South Africa is primarily reserved for those who can afford it. Moreover, Maree and Beck (2004) argue that traditional psychometric assessment tests (developed or adapted for use in South Africa) are limiting, in that they do not give individuals extensive opportunities to explore and develop. These assessment instruments are only available to select groups of individuals and lack diversity. In addition, learners from schools in areas challenged by disadvantage receive little, if not any, career support in an educational setting and the availability and quality of career counseling services offered to them is considerably different from services in more affluent schools (Maree, 2015b). Career guidance was reintroduced into South African schools in 2002 by incorporating it into the Life Orientation syllabus (Maree, 2009). This only constitutes 20 percent of the curriculum, limiting its potential impact. Moreover, teachers have little or no formal training in career counselling.

Maree (2010a:361) maintains that a fresh paradigmatic approach in career counselling ought to be developed in response to the aforementioned changes in the world of work. The theories of self-construction and

career construction offer viable theoretical frameworks that can be utilised in developed and developing countries.

Literature Review

Self-construction

Guichard (2009) argues that it was appropriate to talk about career choices a century ago, but that this phrase is irrelevant in the contemporary globalised world. He explains that globalisation has brought about increasing economic competitiveness resulting in the development of two distinct groups of employees: most businesses have a stable, core (Guichard, 2009:251) group of qualified employees, who ask how they can capitalise on their experiences and identify future career prospects; while the second group comprises of *peripheral workers* (Guichard, 2009:251). These employees ask how they can cope with the many transitions they will inevitably face in their lives. Giddens (1991) maintains that peripheral workers continually need to construct themselves in the face of the ongoing challenges and uncertainties in contemporary society (Guichard, 2009).

Guichard's (2005) theory of self-construction addresses the core issues of personal and career development in a globalised world. In essence, the theory identifies the main factors and processes that influence the way in which individuals design their lives in striving to cope with the challenges they face (Guichard, 2009). The author maintains that knowledge and identity are cognitive processes that occur through dialogue in specified contexts (Savickas et al., 2009). Further to this, an individual engages in activities and partake in verbal discourse in various life roles. These experiences potentially give an individual the opportunity to identify factors that resonate with a core self, and ultimately result in the construction of self, that is, the development of a self-concept in relation to one's experiences. Self-construction theory sees individuals actively constructing themselves through narration or storytelling in social interaction.

Career construction

Career construction is less general than self-construction, where the former only focuses on the construction of an identity derived from one's career (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2005, 2010a). Savickas (1997) urges individuals to see work as a *quest for self* (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008:319), where work is seen as but one aspect of self-identity (Maree, 2013). This is potentially achieved when individuals attain a sense of personal achievement and make valuable social contributions through their work endeavours (Savickas, 2002, 2005). Career transition will inevitably be challenging to manage if individuals have negative career identities and/or have work roles that are not gratifying.

According to career construction theory, careers develop over time as individuals attribute meaning to their respective work experiences (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013). Moreover, the transitions through the various life roles are seen as a dynamic, fluid process of meaning-making, as opposed to a linear, fixed process of information gathering (Hartung, 2007). Work roles are not necessarily perceived as the most important role in peoples' lives, but are viewed as one of many life roles. It is important for individuals to consider the relative importance they ascribe to each of these roles over the course of their life.

The career adaptability model is an integral aspect of career construction theory (Savickas, 2005). This approach focuses on the propensity to foresee and adapt to career changes and role transitions over a given lifespan (Hartung, 2007). Savickas (2010b) asserts that career counselling interventions should strive to increase clients' career adaptability, in terms of: the amount of concern they express for their careers; the extent to which they feel they are in control of their careers; the level of curiosity they express regarding their career options; and the level of confidence they having in making suitable career choices.

Career and life design counselling

Career counselling efforts should strive to help clients design lives that are conducive to managing repeated transitions (Maree, 2010a, 2015a). Campbell and Ungar (2004) specifically name the potential benefits of life design counselling in this regard. This form of counselling translates Guichard's (2005) self-constructing theory and Savickas' (2005) career construction theory into practice, whereby client's identities develop in a dynamic, nonlinear way as they narrate their respective life stories (Savickas et al., 2009). Central life roles are identified in this process as clients respond to the feedback given in dialogue with their counsellor. Ultimately, counsellors can potentially help clients by enabling them to define their priorities, identify supports, cultivate resources, as well as engaging them in activities that help them discover what is meaningful in their lives (Savickas et al., 2009).

Group-based interventions

The role of supportive audiences, who, through verbal discourse help individuals become the authors of their life trajectories to ultimately facilitate the career decision-making process, has been advocated and reported on extensively in the literature (Brott, 2001; Collin & Young, 2000; Di Fabio & Maree, 2012; Guichard, 2009, 2012; Savickas, 2005; Schultheiss, Watts, Sterland & O'Neill, 2011). Previous studies have advocated the use of group-based interventions to give individuals the opportunity to engage in dialogue to this end (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). Adolescents are

amongst those who benefit from participating in such interventions, as they tend to take into account the subjective opinions of an audience as they begin to establish what is meaningful in their lives (Del Corso & Briddick, 2015). The authors argue that this process potentially alleviates the high levels of anxiety that adolescents often experience in response to having to face the first major transition in life, namely having to leave home. Peers are specifically named as a useful audience in the decision-making process over choice of career (Young, Antal, Bassett, Post, Devries & Valach, 1999).

Goal of the Study

The primary aim of our study was to explore the extent to which a school-based intervention programme (see summary of the career intervention programme) based on career and self-construction helped learners in an independent school setting and in an educational setting challenged by disadvantage, manage career-related transitions. The intervention programme aimed at reaching all learners in a cost-effective way by incorporating it into the Life Orientation syllabus. The primary question that guided our study was the following: to what extent can career and self-construction enhance learners' ability to manage career transitions?

Methodology

Participants and Setting

Convenience and purposive sampling was utilised (Cook, 2015). The study participants were two groups of Grade 11 learners (boys and girls) from Penryn College and Mthombo High School, respectively.[i] Mthombo High School is one of the schools in which Penreach, a non-profit Whole School Development Programme, operates. Penreach aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning in rural communities in the Mpumalanga region, who are challenged by disadvantage (see Penryn College website, www.penryn.co.za).

These afore-mentioned groups were selected because we were interested in exploring the career transition experiences of learners in contrasting educational settings. Learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds following a state-based education system, were compared to more privileged learners from wealthier socio-economic backgrounds, in an independent school setting. Learners in Grade 11 were purposefully selected in this study, as career preparation activities escalate in this grade according to themes covered in the Life Orientation curriculum (Department of Education, 2003). It was likely that these learners had numerous career needs due to the fact that provisional acceptance into South African universities is based on their academic performance in Grade 11.

Research Design

A mixed-method approach was used in our study (Cook, 2015). A *quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test comparison group design* using the results of the CAAS (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) was utilised, to determine the extent of change in career adaptability in participants taking part in the intervention programme, compared to those who participated in the standard, traditional Life Orientation lessons. Quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously collected and then integrated in striving to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2003).

Data Gathering

Psychometric instruments

The *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)* (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) was used in the study (results were interpreted qualitatively only for the purposes of this article). This test measures career adaptability according to four constructs, namely concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. A total score for career adaptability is also generated. Participants from the experimental and comparison groups from both schools completed this test before, as well as after the participants from the experimental group took part in the intervention programme, while the participants from the comparison groups took part in the standard, traditional Life Orientation lessons in their respective schools.

Qualitative techniques

Qualitative data was gathered during in-depth (semi-structured) focus group interviews, and discussions with the participants and the responses in the reflective journals kept by the participants, and by observing them. The following techniques facilitated data collection: the Collage, the Career Interest Profile (CIP) (Maree, 2010b) and the lifeline technique (Cochran, 1997).

Summary of the Career Intervention Programme

Eight lessons were used for the participants from the experimental group to participate in the intervention programme, while participants from the comparison groups took part in the standard, traditional Life Orientation lessons taught by their teachers over a period of two months. The activities in the intervention programme and the intervention process are outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

Data Analysis

Classifying this research project as a mixed-method study necessitated that distinct quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used in striving to answer the primary research question. For the purposes of this article, reference will only be made to the results of the qualitative data.

Table 1 Description of intervention activities

Activity	Process	Number of lessons	Duration
CAAS	Pre-intervention administration of the CAAS	1	Approximately 45 minutes
Career Interest Profile (CIP)	Completion of the narrative questions in the CIP (Maree, 2010b)	2	Approximately 45 minutes
Collages	Making collages depicting the way in which participants saw themselves	2	Approximately 45 minutes
Lifelines	Drawing lifelines noting significant life events	2	Approximately 45 minutes
Post-intervention administration of the CAAS	Post-intervention administration of the CAAS	1	Approximately 45 minutes
Journal entries	Participants from the experimental groups from both schools kept journal entries on their experiences of the intervention programme after each activity	8	No time limit was imposed

Table 2 Description of intervention

Session	Process	Expected Outcomes
	Participants …	
1. Orientation and first CAAS assessment session	from the comparison and experimental groups were orientated to the intervention programme by giving them a brief overview of the study. Thereafter, they completed the pre intervention CAAS.	Participants would be motivated to take part in the intervention programme. The CAAS results would be used to assess whether the pre-intervention CAAS scores of the two schools were significantly different from each other (between school comparisons), with the intention of determining whether or not there was initial bias between schools and groups. The pre-intervention CAAS scores would also be used in the final analysis of quantitative data (see session 8).
2-3. CIP	from the experimental groups completed the narrative questions in the CIP and were given the opportunity to share their responses with other learners in their group.	The aim of this activity was to identify and explore the participants' interests according to their opinions and understanding of their life experiences. It was anticipated that the participants would gain insights into what was meaningful in their lives and acquire self-knowledge.
4-5. Collages	from the experimental groups were invited to depict their lives pictorially by making collages. Thereafter, they shared the meaning of their collages by discussing this with their fellow learners.	The purpose of these activities was to enable the participants to narrate their life stories; ultimately giving them the opportunity to identify life themes inherent in the story-telling process. In so doing, participants could potentially identify what was meaningful in their lives.
6-7. Lifelines	from the experimental groups were asked to draw a lifeline depicting significant life events. Facilitative questions were asked prompting them to reflect on and elaborate on these life events. The content of the lifelines was shared in group discussions.	Participants were given the opportunity to make sense of their lives and further identify life themes by considering the past and present, as well as anticipated (future) life experiences.
8. CAAS	from the experimental and comparison groups were asked to complete the CAAS for a second time.	The post-intervention CAAS results were statistically analysed with the pre-intervention CAAS results to ascertain whether or not the intervention programme significantly improved participants' career adaptability compared to the standard, traditional Life Orientation lessons.
1-8. Journal entries	from the experimental groups were asked to reflect upon and record aspects of their experience of the intervention programme; emotions that were evoked while they completed any of the tasks; as well as thoughts and images they had regarding themselves and their lives.	Reflections in the journal entries potentially gave participants deeper insights into their life worlds. In so doing, they could identify life themes to ultimately arrive at more meaningful understandings of themselves and their lives.

Qualitative data reduction

The data was analysed according to the following six steps: organisation and preparation, by transcribing the focus group interviews and identifying the reflective journal material; reading of the data; coding of the afore-mentioned transcribed material and journal entries; identification of the sub-themes and themes by combining related codes into themes or categories, and labelling of each category; discussion of the themes; integrated the research findings by drawing on the theoretical framework of the study to ultimately interpret the data (Creswell, 2003).

Ethical Issues

Written, informed consent was obtained from the participants, the parents or guardians, the headmasters of the two schools, the chief executive officer of Penreach, and the Department of Education to conduct the research. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that the data could not be linked to individual participants by name. Results were communicated to participants for verification purposes to avoid misinterpretations of the research findings. Counselling services were made available to individuals who manifested behaviours and emotions in response to their participation in this study. The ethical guidelines specified in the Ethics and Research Statement of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria and The Professional Board for Psychology were strictly adhered to.

Results

The six main themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis process are now discussed. These themes focus on the post intervention results.

Theme1: Benefits of Career Intervention Programme

Responses from participants from both schools suggest that the intervention programme helped them acquire knowledge about themselves, make career decisions, clarify their values, improve their work ethic, obtain career information, clarify their interests and to identify positive aspects in their lives. Responses exemplifying each of the named sub-themes are discussed in Table 3.

Participants from Penryn College, unlike those from Mthombo High School, according to the following examples of response, also stated that the intervention programme helped them express their emotions; gave them the opportunity to express themselves honestly; did not cause them to feel judged; and held them in the position of experts of their own lives (see Table 4).

Theme 2: Negative Experiences of Career Intervention Programme

Participants from Penryn College named the following five negative experiences of the intervention programme: difficulty completing some of the intervention tasks; frustration and/or confusion developed; difficulty looking at past; questioning relevance of the lifeline; and no definite career (for job analysis) decisions. Responses indicative of these sub-themes are discussed in Table 5.

Theme 3: Changes to Career Intervention Programme

Participants from Penryn College proposed two changes to the intervention programme. Responses related to this sub-theme are elaborated below (data source appears between brackets).

Sub-theme Timing (Penryn College post interviews for experimental group)

> *I think there is no right time to do this test* [career intervention programme] *because at the beginning of Grade 10, you are a bit immature to decide what is going to happen to you in the future, and Grade 11 is a little too late, because you cannot change subjects and go into Grade 12 with new subjects; so there is not set time to do* [sic].

Sub-theme More discussions (Penryn College journals)

> *What I didn't enjoy: Environment could be more open/discussion taking place to help fit a profile of yourself in your own mind* [sic].

Theme 4: Career Choice Influences

Two sub-themes were identified by participants from both schools in this regard, namely, the influence of other people and guidance from the researcher. Corresponding responses are discussed below.

Sub-theme Influence of others (Penryn College journals)

> *… my parents are the ones who keep forcing me into one particular career choice, which is why my first test might be a narrow-minded choice.*

Sub-theme Guidance from researcher (Penryn College post interviews for experimental group)

> *So, I would like to know what you* [researcher] *can pull out from that* [sic]. *So it is not so much from my part, but from your part if it makes any sense* [sic].

A further sub-theme relating to Theme 4 of 'test results' was named by participants from Penryn College. A response reflecting this sub-theme is provided below.

Sub-theme Test results (Penryn College journals)

> *During the testing I was pretty scared, because these test results are guidance to what career I should be looking into* [sic]. *One question that I kept asking myself was what if I don't like this career which made me stress a bit* [sic] *throughout the testing.*

Table 3 Participant responses from both schools exemplifying theme 1

Subtheme	Data source	Response
Acquire self-knowledge	Mthombo High School journals	*I'm very excited because now I'm finally getting to know who am I* [sic].
Make career decisions	Mthombo High School post interviews for experimental group	*The collage was cool to me because now I really know what I want to do. 'Cause when I was pasting those pictures, that thing getting into my mind, oh why paste those pictures* [sic]? *'Cause I want to become this.*
Clarify values	Penryn College journals	*The lessons we've spent making a collage have showed* [sic] *me exactly what I value most …*
Improve work ethic	Penryn College journals	*I also enjoyed seeing what path I would have to take to get there and how much hard work is needed to live my dreams.*
Obtain career information	Mthombo High School journals	*I experienced more and more careers that I didn't know of* [sic] *…*
Clarify interests	Penryn College post interviews for experimental group	*With my friend, she has interests which have developed – when she did her collage you could see that what she enjoyed was depicted very clearly in her collage.*
Identify positive aspects in lives	Penryn College journals	*The timeline* [lifeline] *was good and reminded me of all the good things of my life instead of all the bad things I'm going through right now* [sic].

Table 4 Participant responses from Penryn College exemplifying theme 1

Sub-theme	Data source	Response
Opportunity to express emotions	Penryn College journals	*Creating my collage was fun because I express my feelings and I got to* [sic] *deep with mine but only few people can understand* [sic].
Opportunity to be honest	Penryn College journals	*This exercise (one of the career intervention programme activities) also help me put aside what other people want me to be because I had to be honest with myself* [sic] *…*
Felt unjudged	Penryn College journals	*I loved it* [participating in the career intervention programme] *because, for the first time in a long time I could open up and feel unjudged* [sic].
Seen as expert of lives	Penryn College journals	*I also love filling in questionaires* [sic] *and doing tests that require my opinion and where I CAN'T BE WRONG!* [sic]

Table 5 Participant responses from Penryn College exemplifying theme 2

Sub-theme	Data source	Response
Difficulty completing some of the assessment tasks	Penryn College journals	*It was hard for me to do the timeline 'cause* [sic] *I find it hard to share my personal experiences.*
Frustration and/or confusion developed	Penryn College journals	*I was confused and irritated because I didn't expect what we were gonna* [sic] *be doing* [it].
Difficulty looking at past	Penryn College journals	*It took me hard to remember because I don't real feel that my past should be remembered/important to me* [sic].
Questioning relevance of lifeline	Penryn College post-interviews for experimental group	*The timeline did not fit for me – it was like the one that did not fit in … Because the others were definitely linked to careers and yourself. With the timeline, I mean it is me, but it is not me as in what I am going to do in a few years time. This is me now. I just felt it was the odd one out if I had to pick the odd one out* [sic].
No definite career (for job analysis) decisions	Penryn College journals	*… I'm really confused* [on completing the career intervention programme] *on what I want to do because there's* [sic] *just so many things I can do…*

Theme 5: Life Orientation Lessons

Participants from both schools discussed Life Orientation lessons according to the following sub-themes: experience of Life Orientation lessons and changes to Life Orientation lessons. Responses to this are discussed below.

Sub-theme Experience of Life Orientation lessons (Penryn College post-interviews for comparison group)

> *Ok, I would like to say from the life skills at school generally there is a lot of things, that I understand with the syllabus. They are trying to work into things we are actually going to need in life like goal setting and certain aspects like health and things, but lots of it is pretty un … some of its unnecessary and there's lots of things which aren't not covered within our life skills lessons…* [sic].

Sub-theme Changes to Life Orientation lessons (Penryn College post-interviews for comparison group)

> *I think in Grade 9 when we did the subject choices, they give* [sic] *us a lot of pamphlets on the universities. And at that stage I did not understand a lot of stuff, and then this year we never got anything again, and I think now would be more beneficial than in Grade 9* [sic].

Theme 6: Career Adaptability

Participants from both schools displayed improved career adaptability in terms of enhanced concern and curiosity after they took part in the intervention programme. Responses indicative of this finding are discussed below.

Sub-theme Concern (Penryn College journals)

> *The overall reflection of all the lessons was very productive and really made me think about what I really want to do with my life and career*.

Sub-theme Curiosity (Mthombo High School post-interviews for experimental group)

> *Yes, since you came, at first I said I wanted to be a lawyer, but then I was indecisive. I asked my sister to arrange an interview with some of her friends who are lawyers and stuff and they told me what lawyers was about this and that and for me it was boring. So I am now going to try and engage with other people who are more like me* [sic].

The intervention programme seemingly had a limited impact on enhancing career adaptability by increasing participants' sense of control over their futures as only one participant from Penryn College commented in this regard. His/her response is given in below.

Sub-theme Control (Penryn College post-interviews for experimental group)

> *… no matter who says what – when I see you I see this or that. I know what I am and I know what I want to be. So it [career intervention programme] … has given me the attitude to say no, it is about what I want.*

The intervention programme appeared to improve career adaptability, in terms of increasing confidence levels in participants from Mthombo High School only. A response reflecting this finding is given below.

Sub-theme Confidence (Mthombo High School journals)

> *… I learnt that the always a way to use to get to my goal or to reach my career* [sic].

Having discussed the themes identified after the implementation of the intervention programme we now turn our attention to any changes that occurred from the pre- to post-intervention themes. These are discussed in Table 6.

Discussion

Participants from both schools seemingly benefitted from taking part in the intervention programme. Furthermore, it was favourably experienced when compared to the standard, traditional Life Orientation lessons. This reiterates the findings by Lapan et al. (2003), who expressed concern when they examined the extent to which current career counselling practices provide the necessary support to learners in educational settings.

Tolentino, Garcia, Lu, Restubog, Bordia and Plewa (2014) state that individuals who are willing and able to adapt are more likely to make successful transitions and adaptations in changing environments. The results of our study suggest that the intervention programme improved participants' (from both schools) concern and curiosity. Furthermore, increased levels of control were noted in one participant from Penryn College, and participants from Mthombo High School experienced enhanced confidence after they took part in the intervention programme. None of the participants from either school stated that the Life Orientation lessons improved their career adaptability across any of the four constructs. Some of these participants stated that they relied on other sources, such as the media, or significant people in their lives, to help them increase their career adaptability skills.

The following response exemplifies the way in which self-reflexivity inherent in the intervention programme, appeared to foster the development of career adaptability: *My expirience* [sic] *… made me think about my future and what I wanted to do … made me think about my life*. This finding concurs with the findings of a study by Brown, Bimrose, Barnes and Hughes (2012) of the career biographies of adults experiencing mid-career changes, where the authors concluded that self-reflexivity can help individuals develop career adaptability skills.

Table 6 Changes from pre- to post-intervention themes

Pre-intervention theme	Pre-intervention sub-theme	Post-intervention theme	Post-intervention sub-theme reflecting change from pre- to post intervention
Strategies to manage career transitions	Work ethic	Benefits of career intervention programme	Improved work ethic
	Marks at school	Benefits of career intervention programme	Improved work ethic (to ultimately improve marks at school)
	Attitude to work	Benefits of career intervention programme	Improved work ethic (ultimately reflecting a positive attitude to work)
	Self-knowledge	Benefits of career intervention programme	Acquired self-knowledge
Career choice influence	Finances	Career adaptability	Confidence (participants from Mthombo High School said that the intervention programme gave them the confidence to overcome financial barriers to their respective career aspirations)
	Performance at school	Benefits of career intervention programme	Improved work ethic (to ultimately improve performance at school)
	Influence of others	Career choice influence	Influence of others (participants from both schools recognised the influence of others on career decisions but at the same time were encouraged through narration to become the authors of their life trajectories)
Life Orientation lessons	Experience of Life Orientation lessons (participants from Mthombo High School spoke favourably about these lessons)	Life Orientation lessons	Experience of Life Orientation lessons (participants from Mthombo High School were more critical of these lessons after they took part in the intervention programme)
Career adaptability	Concern	Career adaptability	Concern (increase in concern noted in participants from both schools)
	Curiosity	Career adaptability	Concern (increase in curiosity noted in participants from both schools)
	Control	Career adaptability	Concern (limited increase in control noted in one participant from Penryn College)
	Confidence	Career adaptability	Confidence (increase in confidence only noted in participants from Mthombo High School)

Opportunities to narrate their life stories during their participation in the intervention programme appeared to give participants from both schools included in this study insight into themselves, improved their work ethic to potentially improve their academic performance, and clarified their values as well as their interests, to ultimately facilitate the self-construction (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, 2005) processes. Brott (2001), Cochran (1997), Maree (2011) and Savickas (2008b) previously recognised the benefits of narration in this regard. Chen (2007) and Savickas (2011) furthermore recognise narration as a useful approach to providing individuals with the opportunity to express emotions that often accompany transitions (Del Corso & Briddick, 2015; Galton & Mornson, 2000). Participants from Penryn College experienced this aspect of narration as a benefit of the intervention process, as career and self-construction unfolded.

Further signs of self-construction (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, 2005) were noted, as participants engaged in exploratory activities during the intervention programme to obtain information on the world of work (Super, 1957). This was more widely applicable to participants from Mthombo High School who like many learners from low resource schools tend to rely on educational settings to give them career information (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

Participants from Penryn College expressed that they did not feel judged, and believed they were seen as the experts of their lives during the intervention programme. Non-judgmental approaches are seen to help participants design meaningful lives as they are based on the utmost respect for individuals (Cochran, 1997; Maree, 2012). The researchers assumed a position of being inadequately informed about the participants' lives (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988) and acknowledged them as informed individuals (Cochran, 1997). This process signals the emergence of the self-construction process (Cochran, 1997; Del Corso & Briddick, 2015; Maree, 2015a; Savickas, 1993), as participants were trusted to narrate their life stories. In becoming the author of their life stories to reflect their authentic selves, participants were able to adapt more effectively to transitions they faced, particularly when they were required to make informed career decisions (Brown et al., 2012; Chope & Consoli, 2007; Christensen & Johnston, 2003; Del Corso & Briddick, 2015; Maree, 2010a, 2015a).

Participant responses confirmed the benefits of using group-based approaches that give individuals the opportunity to make career decisions through verbal discourse with and audience, as well as through reflection (Brott, 2001; Collin & Young, 2000; Guichard, 2009, 2012; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; Schultheiss et al., 2011); and, specifically, through supportive audiences (Maree, 2011).

Limitations and Future Directions

The data in this study was gathered from a relatively small group of learners from particular educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, Mthombo High School is not fully representative of the majority of schools from backgrounds challenged by disadvantage due to the financial and academic support it receives from Penreach.

Furthermore, the primary researcher was somewhat familiar with many of the participants from Penryn College, in her capacity as an educational psychologist at this school. In contrast, none of the participants from Mthombo High School were known to any of the researchers. The potential limitations of The Halo Effect were anticipated at the outset of the study. Making biased judgments due to being more familiar with the participants from one of the schools was avoided as far as possible, by verifying our interpretations with the participants in the study. Differences were noted in terms of how the participants from the two schools experienced aspects of the intervention programme. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore the reasons for this. Future studies can potentially explore these findings further.

Conclusion

The overall responses from participants from diverse settings suggest that they benefitted from taking part in the intervention programme. Signs of self-construction (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, 2005) appeared to unfold during the course of the intervention programme, as participants clarified what was meaningful to them as they strove to manage career-related transitions. We believe that this study has contributed (albeit incrementally) to the participants' self-clarity (Savickas, 2015:139), which, as explicated by Mark Savickas *enables clients to make their intentions more apparent to both themselves and their counsellors* (Savickas, 2015:139). Moreover, it is our hope that this study contributes to the number of studies (Maree, 2011) that promote group-based intervention programmes as support strategies to reduce career choice indecision.

Notes

i. The headmasters of the two schools have given written permission for the naming of their respective schools.

References

Anderson H & Goolishian HA 1988. Human systems as linguistic systems: Preliminary and evolving ideas about the implications for clinical theory. *Family Process*, 27(4):371-393. doi: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.1988.00371.x

Brott PE 2001. The storied approach: A postmodern perspective for career counseling. *The Career*

Development Quarterly, 49(4):304-313. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.2001.tb00958.x

Brown A, Bimrose J, Barnes SA & Hughes D 2012. The role of career adaptabilities for mid-career changers. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3):754-761. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.003

Cabrera AF & La Nasa SM 2001. On the path to college: Three critical tasks facing the America's disadvantaged. *Research in Higher Education*, 42(2):119-149. doi: 10.1023/A:1026520002362

Campbell C & Ungar M 2004. Constructing a life that works: Part 2, An approach to practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53(1):28-40. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.2004.tb00653.x

Chen CP 2007. Narrative counselling: an emerging theory for facilitating life career success. In K Maree (ed). *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Chope RC & Consoli AJ 2007. A storied approach to multicultural career counselling. In K Maree (ed). *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Christensen TK & Johnston JA 2003. Incorporating the narrative in career planning. *Journal of Career Development*, 29(3):149-160. doi: 10.1023/A:1021462028524

Chung B 2007. Models for analysis of individual and group needs: closing comments. In S Soresi & L Nota (co-chairs). *Vocational psychology and career guidance practice: An international partnership*. Symposium conducted at the joint meeting of the International Association for Education and Vocational Guidance, Society for Vocational Psychology, and National Career Development Association, Padua, Italy, September.

Cochran L 1997. *Career counseling: A narrative approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Collin A & Young RA (eds.) 2000. *The future of career*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cook A 2015. Exploring learners' management of career-related transitions through career and self-construction. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria, SA: University of Pretoria.

Creswell JW 2003. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Del Corso JJ & Briddick HS 2015. Using audience to foster self-narrative construction and career adaptability. In PJ Hartung, ML Savickas & WB Walsh (eds). *APA handbook of career intervention* (Vol. 2: Applications). Washington, DC: American Psychology Association.

Department of Education 2003. *Revised National Curriculum Statement: Grades 10-12 (General): Life Orientation*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Di Fabio A & Maree JG 2012. Group-based life design counseling in an Italian context. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(1):100-107. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2011.06.001

Di Fabio A & Maree JG 2013. Career construction and life design: Heralding a new beginning to career counseling in the 21st century. In A Di Fabio & JG Maree (eds). *Psychology of career counselling: New challenges for a new era*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.

Galton M & Mornson I 2000. Concluding comments. Transfer and transition: the next steps. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33(4):443-449. doi: 10.1016/S0883-0355(00)00027-6

Giddens A 1991. *Modernity and self-identity.: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Guichard J 2005. Life-long self-construction. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 5(2):111-124. doi: 10.1007/s10775-005-8789-y

Guichard J 2009. Self-constructing. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3):251–258. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2009.03.004

Guichard J 2012. How to help emerging adults develop their career and design their lives in an age of uncertainty? *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, 7(4):298-310. Available at http://www.world-education-center.org/index.php/cjes/article/view/914/pdf_97. Accessed 11 November 2015.

Hartung PJ 2007. Career construction: principles and practice. In K Maree (ed). *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Kinjerski V & Skrypnek BJ 2008. Four paths to spirit at work: Journeys of personal meaning, fulfillment, well-being, and transcendence through work. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 56(4):319-329. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.2008.tb00097.x

Lapan RT, Tucker B, Se-Kang K & Kosciulek JF 2003. Preparing rural adolescents for post-high school transitions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(3):329-342. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00260.x

Maree JG 2009. Career counselling in the 21st century: South African institutions of higher education at the crossroads. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 23(3):436-458.

Maree JG 2010a. Brief overview of the advancement of post-modern approaches to career counseling. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 20(3):361-367. doi: 10.1080/14330237.2010.10820387

Maree JG 2010b. *Manual for the Career Interest Profile – Version 3 (CIP v. 3)*. Johannesburg: JvR Psychometrics.

Maree JG 2012. Career adapt-abilities scale - South African form: Psychometric properties and construct validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3):730-733.

Maree JG 2013. *Counselling for career construction. Connecting life themes to construct life portraits: Turning pain into hope*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Maree JG 2015a. Life themes and narratives. In PJ Hartung, ML Savickas & WB Walsh (eds). *APA handbook of career intervention* (Vol. 2: Applications). Washington, DC: American Psychology Association.

Maree JG 2015b. Poverty and life design. In L Nota & J Rossier (eds). *Handbook of life design: From practice to theory and from theory to practice*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe Publishing.

Maree JG & Beck G 2004. Using various approaches in career counselling for traditionally disadvantaged (and other) learners: some limitations of a new

frontier. *South African Journal of Education*, 24(1):80-87. Available at http://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/24970/20654. Accessed 10 December 2015.

Maree K (ed.) 2011. *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Marsella AJ 1998. Toward a "global-community psychology": Meeting the needs of a changing world. *American Psychologist*, 53(12):1282-1291. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.12.1282

Pietarinen J, Pyhälto K & Soini T 2010. A horizontal approach to school transitions: a lesson learned from Finnish 15-year-olds. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 40(3):229-245. doi: 10.1080/0305764X.2010.506145

Savickas ML 1993. Career counseling in the postmodern era. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 7(3):205-215.

Savickas ML 1997. Career adaptability: An integrative construct for life-span, life-space theory. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 45(3):247-259. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.1997.tb00469.x

Savickas ML 2002. Career construction: A developmental theory of vocational behavior. In D Brown (ed). *Career choice and development* (4th ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Savickas ML 2005. The theory and practice of career construction. In SD Brown & RW Lent (eds). *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Savickas ML 2008a. Helping people choose jobs: A history of the guidance profession. In JA Athanasou & R Van Esbroeck (eds). *International handbook of career guidance*. Dordrecht: Springer Science. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4020-6230-8

Savickas ML 2008b. *Report of framework and follow-up studies* (Meeting 19 July 2008). Berlin: Life-design International Research Group-Career Adaptability Project, Humboldt Universität.

Savickas ML 2010a. *Life designing: framework and introduction*. Paper presented at the 27th International Congress of Applied Psychology, Melbourne, Australia.

Savickas ML 2010b. Vocational counselling. In IB Weiner & WE Craighead (eds). *Corsini's encyclopedia of psychology* (4th ed). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Savickas ML 2011. *Career counselling*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Savickas ML 2015. Career counseling paradigms: Guiding, developing, and designing. In PJ Hartung, ML Savickas & WB Walsh (eds). *APA handbook of career intervention* (Vol. 2: Applications). Washington, DC: American Psychology Association.

Savickas ML, Nota L, Rossier J, Dauwalder JP, Duarte ME, Guichard J, Soresi S, Van Esbroeck R & Van Vianen AEM 2009. Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3):239-250. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.004

Savickas ML & Porfeli EJ 2012. Career adapt-abilities scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3):661-673. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.011

Schultheiss DE, Watts J, Sterland L & O'Neill M 2011. Career, migration and the life CV: A relational cultural analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(3):334-341. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2011.03.013

Super DE 1957. *The psychology of careers*. New York: Harper & Row.

Tolentino LR, Garcia PRJM, Lu VN, Restubog SLD, Bordia P & Plewa C 2014. Career adaption: The relation of adaptability to goal orientation, proactive personality, and career optimism. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 84(1):39-48. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2013.11.004

Young RA, Antal S, Bassett ME, Post A, Devries N & Valach L 1999. The joint actions of adolescents in peer conversations about careers. *Journal of Adolescence*, 22(4):527-538. doi: 10.1006/jado.1999.0246