

LIFE DESIGN COUNSELLING WITH A LEARNER FROM A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the usefulness of life design counselling for a learner from a vocational school (learner with intellectual impairment) when making post school decisions. Vocational and/or career research and reporting on people with intellectual disability/impairment, especially in the South African education context, is limited and infrequent. A purposively sampled, single, intervention case study was utilised. Data generation and analysis were approached simultaneously. The intervention uncovered career/vocational themes significant to the participant. These themes highlighted the meaning he attributed to work and his role and purpose in the world of work. The intervention also proved effective in cultivating his self- and career-efficacy and adaptability. Post intervention, the participant more confidently pursued his passion and was able to identify and utilise resources more definitely. Further, longitudinal research with groups of people with different kinds of impairment from vocational school settings is needed to further examine the value of the intervention described here.

Keywords: intellectual impairment, self- and career construction, vocational guidance/education, life design counselling, self-efficacy, career-efficacy, adaptability

INTRODUCTION

The South African labour market is characteristically contextually challenging for people with impairment. This, already vulnerable, population is required to be successful despite fewer work opportunities, affirmative action, and discrimination, among others (Maree and Hancke 2011). As part of the South African Life Orientation curriculum, learners in public, private, and vocational schools are afforded career counselling with the aim of equipping them with the skills necessary for adulthood and post school qualification (Maree and Symington 2015). More recently, it has become evident that career counselling practices need to be geared towards

assisting people, especially those with (intellectual) impairment to be more adaptable to changing work and life environments (Maree 2017a). This development implies that school career counselling practices should ideally take on the narrative and self-construction approach to career counselling in assisting people to plan their whole lives (Maree and Symington 2015). Personal and career development interventions are aimed at assisting people overcome context specific societal developmental issues (Guichard 2009).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Being so diverse, disability affects approximately 15 per cent of the world's population, with 3.8 per cent of these being 15 years or older (WHO 2010). In 2019, it was reported that 2.6 per cent of world's population was identified as being diagnosed with some form of intellectual disability (Wagner 2019). According to the last South African national census, there was a 7.5 per cent prevalence of disability (Statistics South Africa 2011). Research on people with intellectual disability/impairment, especially in the South African education context, is limited and infrequent. The 2001 South African national census reported 12 per cent of the population being categorised as having intellectual disability. Later, in 2011, a prevalence rate of approximately 3.6 per cent was reported based on a study in rural South Africa (Foskett 2014). More recently, the Western Cape Forum for Intellectual Disability (2021) purports that 4 per cent of the South African population is affected by some form of intellectual of intellectual disability.

In South Africa, the promotion of education and skills development for the advancement of persons with disabilities is especially important (Department of Social Development 2015). The South African government has prioritised provision for the regulation of equal employment opportunities and fair treatment for persons with disabilities. However, for many years, people with (severe) mental disabilities have rarely, if ever, been afforded equal work opportunities and find themselves being marginalised and excluded from society (Department of Social Development 2015; Office of the Deputy President 1997). Learners from special and/or vocational schools do not typically explore the further education sector. This is (in part) due to their limited subject choice availability and the higher drop-out rate or unsuccessful completion of their basic education (Human Rights Watch 2015) – leaving them with no other option but to pursue work with little to no autonomy in the unskilled, semi-skilled, or temporary employment sectors (Department of Social Development/Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities and UNICEF (DSD, DWCPD, and UNICEF 2012; Foskett 2014). Moreover, society's perception of people with (intellectual) disability in terms of their abilities and capabilities impact the options made available for post school progression and the

possibility of successful long-term employment (Bishop et al. 2010). In collaborating with persons with (intellectual) disability to plan their post school progression and options, societal views; opinions; and beliefs should be considered as paramount to fostering an effective career counselling process (Bishop et al. 2010; Gibbons and Hughes 2016) that shows respect to and acknowledges the dignity of persons with a (intellectual) disability.

South African schools traditionally approach career counselling from vocational guidance and/or career education perspectives while also considering their scholastic achievements and access to resources (Savickas 2012). Career education is the “the totality of experiences (school-based and otherwise) that help individuals acquire and use the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make work a meaningful, productive, and satisfying part of life” (IResearchNet 2020). Comparatively, career guidance is “a systematic process of providing self-assessment and information about the world of work which facilitates individual career development and decision making” (IRedearchNet, 2020). This approach has proved outdated and inadequate in meeting individual needs (Maree 2020). Contemporary career counselling should be subjectively meaningful and collaborative, with a narrative focus which aims to identify and link themes and life stories, and ultimately aim to facilitate the process of empowering people to navigate successfully through periods of transition (Maree 2012a; Maree 2013a; Maree and Molepo 2007). This process of career construction is owned by the learner. The diverse South African population should ideally have access to career counselling strategies suited to their specific contextualised career development needs (Maree and Che 2020). Savickas (2015b) distinguished life-design counselling as presenting a subjective intervention that counsellors may use to assist clients to make career transitions, with the focus on eliciting and drawing on their career-life stories (autobiographies).

Life design counselling

Life design counselling is a principle-driven intervention (Savickas 2015a). This counselling style incorporates both positivist and postmodern approaches to career counselling and aims to explore people’s future work prospects while taking their historical, cultural, and personal contexts into consideration (Maree 2013a). It allows for a reflexive collaborative process of uncovering life themes that are used to shape people’s possible career and life trajectory. Moreover, life design counselling incorporates career construction, and together, the counsellor and the individual identify what is meaningful to people and use what people regard as meaningful to motivate them toward their goals (Savickas 2015a; 2018).

Life design counselling is premised on career construction and self-construction principles.

Career construction theory

Together, career construction and life design characterises a career intervention for the 21st century (Savickas 2012). As part of this intervention, career construction is a narrative based practice which elicits life themes from the individual narrative, aimed at shaping their career story (Dix 2020). Career construction considers people in different settings and their reactions and solutions to evolving crises, thus, encouraging resilience (Dix 2020). Central to career construction counselling, is the Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Savickas 2019). The CCI is comprised of six questions which prompt people to narrate their lives in short stories which then unveil their future selves. The questions are designed to identify themes used to co-construct their lives. The questions elicit information according to the following guides: counselling goals (act); personality, self, and/or social reputation (actor); manifesting interests (agent); a script for linking the self to the setting (author); guidance to self (advice); and identifying the central problem and/or preoccupation (arc) (Hartung 2015).

Self-construction theory

Self-construction theory regards people as active participants in shaping their career lives by maintaining stability and continuity through self-organisation (Guichard 2009). Within the counselling paradigm, self-construction helps people to develop positive, constructive, and emotionally healthy expectations regarding their future based on their subjective identity within their systems of functioning (Guichard 2009). Much like life design counselling, self-construction is context based and focuses on the interaction between people and the systems and subsystems they relate to (Maree and Twigge 2016).

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Historically, South Africans with disability (whether physical or intellectual) have been discriminated against and excluded from the education system and the world of work (Foskett 2014). The researchers' interest in the study stems from personal and professional experience with people with intellectual impairment and those seeking career and/or vocational guidance and advice. Most individuals, at various stages of development, struggle with making life and work choices. This is especially true for learners with intellectual impairment. Within the vocational school setting, where the emphasis is on acquiring life and work skills, marks are not always an accurate indication of progress (Suleymanov 2014). Learners with intellectual impairment attending vocational schools have limited post-school options (DSD, DWCPD, and UNICEF 2012). They are often marginalised and not afforded the same opportunities as their

non-impaired peers. It is from this perspective that the researchers embarked on the current study.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the transition of people from school to work. Yet, very little has been in terms of the transition of learners with intellectual impairment, with vocational training, into the world of work. The participant in the current research was offered the opportunity to partake in the life design counselling process, with the aim of eliciting life themes from his narrative. In so doing, the participant's autonomy and accountability in becoming employable was increased – empowering him to become the architect and constructor of his own future (Maree in De Bruin 2016).

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to explore the possibility and potential limits of utilising life-design counselling to better equip a senior school-leaving learner from a South African vocational school setting with the necessary knowledge and insight to make informed decisions about his future vocational prospects. Life-design counselling was implemented supplementary to the established career guidance practices to investigate its possible influence on and contribution to the prescribed curriculum based career guidance processes. The investigation aimed to identify strengths within the life-design counselling process that could possibly lead to the improvement of career guidance with this learner. The following questions guided the study:

Primary research question

What use does life-design counselling have for the career adaptability and career decision-making process of a learner from a vocational school setting?

Secondary research questions

- How does life-design counselling influence the career adaptability of the participant?
- What use does the intervention have for the participant's decision-making process?

METHOD

Participant and context

Selection criteria for the study required the participant to voluntarily consent and assent to participation; be able to communicate comprehensibly in English; be in the FET phase at a vocational school; and have the desire to further their education for vocational purposes.

Moreri (a pseudonym), an 18-year-old male youth, from a South African minority

population group, was selected conveniently at vocational school in the Johannesburg North Education District of Gauteng. At the time of the intervention, Moreri was in his Grade 9 – final year – of education at the school. Moreri is the eldest of two children and resides with his mother, sibling and grandmother in a township in Johannesburg. Moreri’s mother reported that he had been placed in the vocational school after having been identified as having difficulties with reading and writing. Both his mother and Life Orientation teacher were part of the intervention process.

Mode of inquiry and design

The research questions were explored by means of a Qual+ quan mixed-methods approach. This dictated a parallel mode of data generation, with the qualitative collection techniques taking priority (Armitage 2007). Qualitative research is based on understanding the way in which people view and experience their circumstances, as well as on promoting meaning-making of phenomena within their context (Ravitch and Carl 2016). The qualitative and quantitative data generation and analysis was done concurrently. The Qual+ quan data was interpreted by means of comparing and synthesising the qualitative and quantitative data generation traditions, resulting in the convergence and integration of the data generated (Wium and Louw 2018).

Data generation instruments

Qualitative data generation

The following qualitative data sources were used for this study:

- The life-design counselling process
- Collage
- Lifeline
- Genogram
- Career Construction Interview (CCI) (Savickas 2019)
- Early Recollections Technique (ERT) (Savickas 2019)
- The Career Interest Profile (Ver 6) (Maree 2017b)
- In-depth semi-structured interviewing

Quantitative data generation

Quantitative data was generated by means of the *Career Adapt-abilities Scale (CAAS)*. Having

good psychometric properties, the *CAAS* conceptualises, measures, and evaluates career adaptability (Savickas and Porfeli 2012). As a career intervention instrument for career development, the *CAAS* identifies four adaptabilities, namely: *concern* about the future; taking *control* of and preparing for the future; *curiosity* for and exploring possible future selves and scenarios; and reinforcing *confidence* to pursue their aspirations (Maree 2012b; Savickas and Porfeli 2012)

Rigour of the study

How people come to know is a process of facilitated construction (Trent and Cho 2014). Through crystallisation, qualitative data were blended with the quantitative, with the aim of making sense of, interpreting and producing a single representation of the generated data – from various angles (Ellingson 2009; Larrinaga-Gonzalez 2011).

Data analysis and interpretation

Maree (2013b) advocates for the analysis of qualitative data to precede that of quantitative data. Research practices provide guidance for interpretation, however, findings will always be unique to each study, with the outcomes of analysis only being clear if and when it has been achieved (Patton 2002).

Qualitative data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis can be representative of lived experience and serve to delve deeper into what lies beneath what is presented and/or observed as true. Thematic data analysis was used to identify specific themes from the study, and draw meaning from the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The process of thematic data analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed in order to interpret the qualitative data generated by this study. The process involved:

- i. Familiarising oneself with the data
- ii. Generating initial codes
- iii. Searching for themes
- iv. Reviewing the themes
- v. Defining and naming the themes
- vi. Reporting on and writing up on the themes identified in the analysis process

In addition to the thematic analysis, narrative analysis was utilised to draw meaning from, and represent, the qualitative data. With narrative data analysis and interpretation, the aim is to

uncover a better understanding of human existence, by attempting to associate and meaningfully (re)present events, chosen actions and consequences (Kim 2015). Since the narrative data analysis and interpretation process does not differ much from the thematic approach, the primary researcher chose to only use elements from the narrative approach to supplement the thematic approach. By making use of the element of interpreting faith and suspicion, the aim was to represent Moreri's narrative in a coherent, engaging and interesting manner. The interpretation of faith implied accepting the story that the participant(s) tells as it is; and the interpretation of suspicion aimed to find the hidden meanings in the participant's narrative.

Quantitative data analysis

In conjunction with the prescribed standardised analysis methods, as per the questionnaires, themes were identified; defined; and described (Byrne 2016). The themes emerged from the profiles of the quantitative data generated from the questionnaires, and were compared to, and correlated with those themes generated from the qualitative data analysis process (Maree and Van der Westhuizen 2009).

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the University of Pretoria's Institutional Review Board. Additionally, the researchers obtained approval from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to conduct research in a school. Written informed consent and assent was obtained from Moreri and his mother and Life Orientation teacher respectively for the research, analysis of the data and reporting of the findings. Moreover, ethical practices with regards to voluntary participation; confidentiality; privacy and anonymity; and protection from harm were adhered to.

THE INTERVENTION

Life-design counselling, as an intervention, "moves from scores to stages to stories" (Savickas 2015a, 5). The intervention process with Moreri was structured to his unique situation and had to be adapted accordingly. The sessions took place at the vocational school during a time convenient to him and not disruptive to his schooling. Moreri was a willing and eager participant. However, at times it was difficult to make out what he was saying as he spoke fast with few breaks between sentences and/or phrases. Nonetheless, once he became more comfortable, he volunteered more detailed information with little to no probing needed. Additionally, there were times when Moreri was easily distracted by the interruptions which

come with having the sessions at school. He was able to voice his discomfort when he felt compromised and we could remedy the situation through arranging another venue and re-establishing privacy.

Table 1: Data source and referencing system

	Transcription bundle number and data source	Page number	Number of lines
1.	Participant interview schedule	1–10	1–303
2.	Career Interest Profile	10–54	1–1327
3.	Collage	54–76	1–517
4.	Career Construction Interview	76–93	1–307
5.	Genogram and Lifeline	93–106	1–413
6.	Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Pre-test)	106–107	1–52
7.	Narratives	107–109	1–35
8.	Parent interview schedule	109–116	1–190
9.	Teacher interview schedule	116–124	1–368
10.	Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (Post-test)	129–131	1–19

Table 1 outlines the activities and the three-digit coding system used to reference the data.

As previously stated, once Moreri was comfortable, his narratives and explanations become longer, and as such, some of the activities ran over two sessions. Some of the activities also extended over two sessions when we had to move venues. As part of the intervention, the *CAAS* (Savickas and Porfeli 2012) was administered before and after the intervention. Additionally, Moreri's mother and Life Orientation teacher were interviewed respectively.

OUTCOMES

Presented in Table 2 are the six main themes and a number of subthemes which emerged from the analysis of the narrative data.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

	Themes	Subthemes
1.	Career adapt-ability	Concern about the future
		Confidence to pursue aspirations
		Curiosity about and exploring possible selves
		Taking Control of and preparing for the future
2.	Vocational personality	Career-related needs
		Career-related values
		Career-related interests
		Career-related abilities
3.	Life themes	Past memories
		Present experiences
		Future aspirations
4.	Perceived self-efficacy	Perceived self-efficacy for academic achievement

	Themes	Subthemes
		Ability to resist peer pressure
		Fulfilling expectations (of parents, teachers, peers)
		Self-directedness and/or autonomy
5.	Self-construction	Self-efficacy
		Self-identity
		Self-awareness
		Self as expert
		Sociocultural and/or sociological factors and their influence on achievement
		Influence of personal and social relationships
		Meaning making
		Values, beliefs
6.	Growth / Resilience	Agency
		Feelings of support
		Hope, optimism, positive feelings
		Impairment / Adversity

What follows are Moreri's verbatim responses to substantiate the identified subthemes.

Career adapt-ability

Concern about the future

"I go around with teacher's asking them to give me [information]." (1;1;2)

Confidence to pursue aspirations

"... It's because every Sunday when I go to church, and when I hear the pastor speaking there. The word of God and uplifting others, so I, I know that I can do that" (1;17;212)

Curiosity about and exploring possible selves

"I wanna be a pastor, now they tell me things that which field must I go to. Maybe some of the things that I must look at." (1;2;58)

Taking control of and preparing for the future

"I moved on to be a panel beater." (1;7;190)

Vocational personality

Career-related needs

"... financial maybe like if they can get them bursaries, things like that. It will help a lot." (1;6;162)

Career-related values

“Because I believe in working hard. I may sweat but I won’t be, I won’t I won’t have something in a pocket. But if I work smart, I can have plenty things.” (2;42;894)

Career-related interests

“ ... Dream career? ... To be a pastor. Ah, just that eish. Love it. I love it.” (1;17;208)

Career-related abilities

“... and plus God has called me to do that. I know that I can do, my goal, like I have goals that like a day, a day doesn’t go out, doesn’t go out without I improving, without I uplifting someone. So I believe as a pastor someday I will be uplifting many people in church.” (2;17;214)

Life themes

Past memories

“ ... It’s so surprising that now those people coming to you. You that the elders said you have no value, you cannot lead. You are just a thing. Now it’s so surprising, all of them coming to you now saying, look Moreri how do you deal with one two. ...” (5;117;20)

Present experiences

“It because like, I feel like these people they are not, I don’t know how to say this, they are not in the same standard that I am. Because, like for example, sitting with my peers, they wanna still talk about things that they are going to do now, but I wanna talk about things that are in the future.” (2;35;641)

Future aspirations

“Because I believe in working hard. I may sweat but I won’t be, I won’t I won’t have something in a pocket. But if I work smart, I can have plenty things.” (2;43;894)

Perceived self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy for academic achievement

“... Failing motivates me ma’am. Even if I write a test and I get maybe 23 out of 30, I feel very disappointed so I’ll go harder and I will learn. When I’m writing the test I would make sure I get total. So failing is one of the biggest motivators in my life.” (3;61;144)

Ability to resist peer pressure

“... even my life started to change. I think it was around May, June. Certain friends, cut them out of my life.” (3;72;398)

Fulfilling expectations of parents, teachers, and peers

“... you must run and I want this race to be hot. I said don't worry I will make it. I was speaking my heart” (4;100;296)

Self-directedness and/or autonomy

“Me? No one. I have to do everything by myself. No one. I don't like getting help.” (2;42;1082)

Self-construction

Self-efficacy

“... one thing I have realised is that every battle that I'm getting into, I must just be sober minded. If I'm not sober minded, I'm going to lose the battle because I'm confused myself” (3;62;148)

Self-identity

“A man of my type. A man of my tip. A man of my status because I don't love putting myself beyond the mark. I love putting myself up there. Not because I have pride or something but, I believe why must I settle for less, when there is more to achieve.” (3;74;463)

Self-awareness

“Basically I'm not that type of person who like to go to school, but I encourage people to go to school. The people, okay when I have, when this foundation of mine is going well one day, by the grace of God. I want people to go to school. Those who can't afford fees, they must go to varsity, provide for them and they mustn't be as beggar. I don't want that. Plus besides I love it when they go to school. When they go to school its more when the economy, the economy of the country is going to rise up” (3;75;469)

Self as expert on the individual

“... because I know me I'm that type of person, I love to fix things. So now panel beating also, it's all about fixing.” (1;7;198)

Sociocultural and/or sociological factors and their influence on achievement

“It's because I can see that there is a lot of unemployment rate here in South Africa. So I believe if I can, open a job, many people I can hire them and work. Mm.” (2;14;126)

Influence of personal and social relationships

“Some, some other people are not open, I won’t lie. Because when you tell them that you wanna be a pastor, they say to be pastor doesn’t pay. Ja, it’s like lot of things.” (1;3;86)

Meaning making

“You know ... life without the pain is no life. It’s not a life for you because in order for you to achieve anything, you must go through certain things, and those things they are the ones that which to become the person you are” (3;77;510)

Values, beliefs

“... But, what I value most, when you seeing someone ah ja neh coming to Christ. And even achievements also. Mm. Seeing someone getting born again. That’s good.” (2;35;643)

Growth / resilience

Agency

“I go at home, ... take my phone, ‘cause I wanna be a pastor. Okay, so now I check which colleges are there around” (1;2;38)

Feelings of support

“They support me, they tell me that, Moreri, we can’t force you to do anything. It your life, so we’ll support you in every decision that you take.” (1;6;170)

Hope, optimism, positive feelings

“You see here, don’t compromise, simply means that, for me it’s like never settle for less. You must never settle for less. Even if I see the situation, ja is really bad. But I must never put myself underneath the situation. I must always look at top.” (3;74;439)

Impairment / Adversity

“... Look, I was told that I’m never going to be someone. I’m never going to achieve anything” (7;117;20)

DISCUSSION

The rationale behind the study was to understand whether life design counselling could be useful to a learner with intellectual impairment within the vocational school setting when making life and career decisions. The following section reviews the research questions with regard to the findings that have emerged from the study. Furthermore, literature on life-design

counselling and career- and/or vocational- and life-decisions and choices are referenced to compare the study's findings to previous findings. The study had one descriptive secondary research question and two exploratory research questions – which will be discussed first. Subsequently, the primary research question is considered.

Secondary descriptive question

- *What is the nature of existing programmes aimed at assisting learners from vocational school settings in making career choice decisions?*

The study identified the need for specialised training for the teachers responsible for the vocational guidance of learners with intellectual impairment. Within the South African context, teachers are inadequately trained, which leads to ineffective instruction of learners – more so for those with intellectual impairment (Zwane and Malale 2018). Local programmes aiming to assist learners with intellectual impairment in vocational school settings with making career choice decisions are limited (Zwane and Malale 2018). The employability and career-adaptability of individuals with intellectual impairment is unacceptably low, and can be attributed to some of the factors mentioned. Research found individuals with intellectual impairment to have the lowest rates for (inter alia) work preparation, and little to no vocational and/or post-school prospects (Wong 2016). As a remedy, learning support teachers (LSTs) were introduced to support learners with (intellectual) disability, but the impact and value of this intervention to this marginalised community is questionable and has not been formally investigated (Arvidsson et al. 2016). The study highlighted how learners with intellectual impairment career and/or vocational preparation and training are not encouraged based on their motivation and/or interest in the prospect, but on their identified strengths and aptitudes. Furthermore, the study found Moreri and his peers to have received a limited scope of vocational training and preparedness for our changing world of work, more specifically the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). For individuals with (intellectual) impairment to thrive in the 4IR a specific set of skills are required, which they are evidently not been taught or afforded the opportunity to acquire. These individuals need to be assisted to understand how their innate strengths can be matched to labour market trends and what support is available, and how to access this support (Coney and Jameson-Warren 2018). Subsequently empowering them and fostering situations for career-adaptability and preparedness for change.

Secondary exploratory questions

- *How does life-design counselling influence the career adaptability of the participant?*

“Life-design counselling encourages clients to make sense of their lives by articulating purpose, forming intentions, and making a commitment to self. Of course career decisions are made, yet the real outcome is a sense of purpose that informs the numerous choices that will compose a career” (Savickas 2015a, 13). Constructed from this statement, Moreri’s life-design process yielded positive results. His narrative revealed his ability and wanting to be adaptable and “prepare for, enter and participate in the role and subsequently deal with career transitions” (Savickas and Porfeli 2012, 661). Moreri was able to successfully reflect on his lived experiences (and those of others) to draw meaning, positivity, hope and optimism for his future. Noteworthy, is that Moreri had already decided on, and made efforts to secure the probability for, his future career and possible alternative as required by his mother. His life-design intervention process served only to confirm and substantiate his choice. This is in line with research stating that the building of biographical bridges or (auto-)biographicity (Maree 2014) allows the individual to re-claim their sense of security and stability (Maree 2015).

Life-design counselling as a facilitated intervention allowed the Moreri the opportunity to reflect on his experiences and draw valuable meaning from them. Moreri’s constructed narrative told of positivity, hope and optimism for the future. It seems that even before the commencement of the intervention, he had already determined the next step in his journey. Through the process of de-construction, re-construction and subsequent co-construction, the Moreri was able to confirm and authenticate his choice. Moreri’s process echoes research which states that through (auto-)biographicity (Maree 2014), the individual is able to reconstruct the impaired sense of self (as perceived by self and/or others) and re-claim a sense of emotional security and stability through building biographical bridges (Maree 2015). Research found learners with intellectual impairment to experience an increased level of adaptability through participating in activities that enable them to make meaning of their lives in terms of career/vocation (Dean et al. 2019). Moreri’s intervention process proved him to display self-efficacy in adapting to his changing needs and preparing for his future and its related demands.

- *What use does the intervention have for the participant’s decision-making process?*

Career choice is found to be an extension and expression of an individual’s self-concept, which is constructed through distinct and characteristic experiences (Savickas et al. 2009). Moreri was able to narrate his life portrait very richly and clearly, and articulate his concept of self and reflect on his lived experiences and interactions. Furthermore, he was able to reflect on how these contributed to the decisions he had made.

Moreri presented as being aware of the changing world of work, its requirements, and perceptions based on preconceived notions of individuals with intellectual impairment. Moreover, he seemed to have some sort of an understanding of the 4IR world of work and shared of using technology (his cell phone and its internet capabilities) to do research and seek information to develop himself and improve his chances at employability. The emergence of personal identity and the definition of a life purpose is characteristic of the autonomous decision-making capabilities of the young adult (Melendro et al. 2020). Moreri's narrative depicted him as autonomous and purposeful in pursuing his life's work.

Primary research question

- *What use does life-design counselling have for the career adaptability and career decision-making process of a learner from a vocational school setting?*

The study revealed Moreri as capable of reflecting to draw meaning from his experiences, and gain insight into himself. Life-design counselling is characterised as being a meaning-making dialogue facilitating adaptive action which results in the individual identifying their optimal life (Savickas 2015a). The study found that through de-constructing, re-constructing and subsequent co-constructing of his narrative and his influences, Moreri could learn from his experiences (and those of others) and rely on them as possible solutions to his future uncertainties. Most notable, was that Moreri had already identified some resources and autonomously activated them to reach his goals. His life-design intervention process proved to revive his sense of self, self-efficacy, and self-identity; and further propel him to live out his purpose.

Quantitative findings

Maree, Cook, and Fletcher (2018) found that quantitative results, as measured only by the CAAS, of a career adaptability intervention programme did not improve career adaptability when compared to the traditional career counselling/vocational guidance lessons. However, when compared to curriculum based career/vocational guidance practices, career adaptability interventions were more effective in improving career adaptability. This is evidenced in the current study. There was no significant difference between the post- and pre-intervention CAAS results. Thus, the study was not able to quantitatively confirm that life-design counselling had been successful in enhancing Moreri's career adaptability. Ideally, quantitative assessments should employ a degree of self reflection and meaning-making (Maree et al. 2018). Upon closer inspection, Moreri's scores on some individual items had improved marginally. His responses

presented him as being more self-aware and curious about his future and opportunities available to him. It was found that highly motivated individuals experience narrative interventions more favourably and find more value in regard to career concern and control (Maree et al. 2018). The study's results confirm this, as Moreri had made up his mind about his future even before the onset of the intervention, thus having a relatively easier transition from school to work than his peers.

LIMITATIONS

The trustworthiness of the responses provided by the participant(s) could be questioned due to the subjective nature of the data generating techniques. All communication between the primary researcher and the primary participant was in English, which is not his mother tongue. Moreover, researcher bias is a variable as other researchers may produce variable findings for the same study. The primary researcher acknowledges that their personal views and bias towards individuals with (intellectual) impairment/disability may have had an influence throughout the duration of the career/vocational counselling intervention.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

With regard to improving career counselling practice, it is recommended that life-design counselling be implemented with the senior learners with intellectual impairment in vocational schools. Supplementary to established career and/or vocational guidance and education, the life-design techniques, should be aimed at enabling the learners (with intellectual impairment) to start thinking more holistically about their possible future selves and careers – especially when considering their vocational elective subject choices. Future interventions and processes should include follow-up interviews to monitor the progress and development of the participants. Future research should be aimed at investigating the long-term impact of life-design counselling on the career-adaptability of learners with intellectual impairment from both culturally diverse and non-diverse samples respectively. Lastly, it is recommended that a group-based study be conducted.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the life-design approach as applied in the current research was found highly applicable in the context of the study, despite the fact that the approach was developed elsewhere. The findings confirm the outcomes achieved by other African researchers in the field (e.g., Crous, 2012; Maree and Che 2020; Maree and Pollard 2009; Maree and Symington 2015). It seems that by incorporating a tailored life-design counselling programme into the syllabus and/or as

an auxiliary component, the vocational and/or career guidance offered in schools could better equip the learners for the next chapter in their career-life stories. Most importantly, the study suggests that life-design counselling may be beneficial and of value to learners with intellectual impairment from the vocation school settings when making career/vocational choices. Moreover, using life-design counselling in conjunction with established career/vocational guidance practices, would help career counsellors and Life Orientation and guidance teachers in vocational schools, and mainstream schools, to meet the career/vocational needs of their learners. This would be most beneficial to those individuals who would otherwise not have had access to this intervention.

EPILOGUE

Now, more than a year after the intervention, Moreri is awaiting his graduation ceremony in April 2021. This ceremony will be in celebration and acknowledgement of his achievement to successfully complete a one-year ministerial qualification. In 2020, Moreri obtained a bursary and commenced with his ministerial studies at a local interdenominational ministry college. At this stage, he has completed all three of the required modules and electives needed for completion of his studies. However, Moreri wants to further his qualification and complete a fourth module – Ministry 4. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath globally, his studies have unfortunately been delayed. Moreri wanted to commence with the Ministry 4 module this year (2021) but was told the class was full. However, he managed to register for an elective, Engaging with God’s word in God’s world, which would prepare him for the Ministry 4 module that he intends to start in 2022. The Ministry 4 module will reportedly take two years to complete.

Regarding his further interests, Moreri reported that he also wants to enrol for an online ministry course with another college. When asked why, he stated that he wants to study the theory of ministry from another perspective too. Furthermore, he already enquired about doing volunteer work where he would be able to apply the theory he has learned to start making an impact in his community – “to do the work of God”. Moreri also wants to start his own outreach foundation and has done research both into the process of registering an NGO or NPO, and how to apply for funding. He has decided rather to start with the work in the community and work on raising the funds to support the initiative. He is currently working with some youths whom he encourages with the Word of God and whom he motivates, much like a life coach. At the same time, he is seeking a mentor for himself, as he would like to grow and learn from more senior individuals who are on the same journey as him. Last but not least, Moreri wants to start a chicken farming business. He has already started building the coupe and intends to purchase

his first chickens soon.

Moreri again expressed his gratitude for having had the opportunity to partake in the intervention. According to him, it granted him the opportunity to choose a vocation in which he was not only capable, but also greatly interested. The process allowed him to reflect and consider how he could use his skills and character to make career decisions – an opportunity the majority of his peers would not have received. Moreri identified a quote he currently finds value in, namely “Being faithful in the little that you have”, which rings true for him, especially with regard to his entrepreneurial endeavours. He added that because he knows that God is with him, no person or occurrence would sway him from his purpose. He trusts steadfastly in his God-given purpose. In the words of Savickas (2001, 55), Moreri seems to have “actively master[ed] what [he has] passively suffered”.

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