

# Career counselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: South African institutions of higher education at the crossroads

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## **Abstract**

The current state of career counselling<sup>1</sup> in South African institutions of higher education in the 21st century is explored in this article in an attempt to locate current work in the field of career counselling in South Africa in the light of global trends (academic and economic) and in terms of local history and current economic climate. The article is based largely on an examination of factors that have contributed collectively and individually to the current state of affairs in career counselling in South Africa (with particular emphasis on institutions of higher education). The key aim is to create a deeper understanding of what can be done to help millions of young people in South Africa (including those who are currently excluded from sought-after fields of study and training institutions) access those opportunities that are available and, in the process, to promote equity, access and redress. Some salient aspects of 21st century career counselling, including the history of career counselling in South Africa and elsewhere, the need for a changed approach to career counselling at all levels, and the interplay between the different waves in psychology are explicated. Helping models in career counselling, the narrative approach, the global economy and the impact of global developments on career counselling are considered. It is endeavoured to deconstruct and explain the impact of these factors on what is currently happening in South Africa and determine whether South Africa has kept abreast of contemporary developments historically, epistemologically and at a more practical level.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article forms part of an ongoing investigation into which counselling approaches in institutions of higher education South Africa can best meet the challenges posed by an evolving global world. Fourteen years into South Africa's democracy, a lack of vision and of a unified career counselling strategy is evident in the country; indeed, the career counselling profession seems to be at a crossroads. Locally, calls have been made for changes in the profession, and much still needs to be done before we can confidently claim that South Africa has caught up with the rest of the world in this field. I will expand on this in the following paragraphs.

Career opportunities in South Africa are not fairly distributed. South African career patterns remain skewed in favour of previously privileged groups, and the

majority of black persons are still not receiving adequate career counselling. The following statistics<sup>2</sup> (Shan 2003) indicate the extent to which South African career patterns have been skewed by factors such as the country's apartheid past and the inadequate career counselling received by blacks and to which the 'system' has failed blacks in particular. South Africa's population is 45.9 million of whom 37.6 million persons are black, 4.3 million white, 4 million coloured and 1.1 million Indian. Only 337 out of a total of 21 422 accountants, 347 out of a total of 14 687 engineers, 3 out of a total of 4 024 dentists and 12 out of a total of 497 actuaries are black. Yet, even in 2009, career counselling in South Africa is available primarily only to people who can afford this expensive service.

Career counselling as a profession has recently seen numerous advances *globally*. Changes in people's lifestyles brought about by technological advances and the information explosion have complicated career counselling. New careers requiring new skills and attitudes are constantly emerging, and career counselling has to keep abreast of these developments if it is to remain effective and relevant in postmodern society (Savickas 2006a; Watson 2004). Naicker (1994) and Muller (1999) claim that people change careers an average of five times during their career lifetimes. Savickas (2006b) has found that individuals in the United States of America born between 1957 and 1964 had an average of ten jobs from the age of 18 to 38. While these figures cannot summarily be applied to South Africa, the general trend globally is for employees to migrate more regularly between jobs. Career counsellors are consequently playing an increasingly important integrating role in the effective planning of an individual's career in a situation where new skills are constantly required.

In the 2000s, the idea of a small core of permanent employees and a sizeable group of practitioners whose particular, sought-after skills are bought into an industry or business (in its widest sense) has become commonplace (Handy in Hughes 1997). People are being paid large sums of money for their creativity. Because technology changes continuously, employees have to become lifelong learners, receive ongoing training and acquire the skill to adapt to rapidly changing career contexts and deal with repeated transitions on the micro-level as well as the macro-level. Thus they have to acquire cutting-edge skills associated with the latest technology and remain relevant in a highly competitive job market.

Career theory, practice and assessment *globally* have also been accused of failing to meet the needs of non-white, non-Western, non-'standard' populations (McMahon and Patton 2002). In South Africa, transformation (of the workplace) and diversity remain largely abstract concepts divorced from the real-life situation in the country. Staff attached to psychology departments at historically white institutions remain predominantly white,<sup>3</sup> and the Board of Psychology's ideal of an 80 : 20 (black : white)<sup>4</sup> student distribution in postgraduate courses remains a distant mirage. Only 500 of the ca. 8 000 registered psychologists are black. Even in 2009, far too many learners pass Grade 12 without having received career counselling in any form and consequently are denied the opportunity to apply for acceptance into sought-after

fields of study at tertiary training institutions. They are thus not only denied the opportunity to realise their potential and stand a fair chance to lead fulfilling lives, but they are also denied the opportunity to make a social contribution and contribute to society (2007b).

Flederman (2008, 6) asserts that while ‘tertiary students enjoy good careers guidance services in their student counselling centres and SACDHE (The Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education) provides leadership in this arena’, some of the challenges in information and guidance provision include inadequate coordination, lack of publically available information and an *absence of strategic policy leadership in the field*: ‘The learner needs to be at the centre of a radical re-think of careers services in a lifelong learning framework to ensure learners have access to navigational tools throughout a lifetime of work and study transitions.’

Following this brief introduction, I will now deal with the research questions that guided this article.

## Research questions

This article deals with what course South African institutions of higher education may take in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to remain relevant and aligned with developments globally. Questions addressed in the current article:

- What is the current situation regarding career counselling in South African institutions of higher education?
- What are the major changes (epistemological and in terms of the actual practice of career counselling) that have impacted career counselling globally, and how do these developments impact on the situation in South Africa?
- Which approach to career counselling could best suit the diverse counselling needs of South Africa’s diverse population?
- What are the major policies currently regulating career counselling in South African institutions of higher education?

## Definition and explanation of concepts

- i. I subscribe to Savickas’ (2007a, 183) definition of *counselling* as a concentration on ‘the daily life adjustment issues faced by reasonably well-adjusted people, particularly as they cope with career transition and personal development’. Savickas advocates establishing a cross-national professional identity for counselling; encouraging indigenous models, methods and materials; and promoting international collaboration (2007a, 184–187). I also concur with his view that ‘occupation provides a mechanism for social integration’ (2007a, 48) as well as for making a social contribution.
- ii. *Career counselling* (or guidance) should include ‘services intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make

educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers' (Watts and Sultana in Flederman 2008, 17).

- iii. I also subscribe to Savickas' (1993) assertion that *career counselling in the postmodern era* is characterised by a number of innovations one of which is the assumption that the client is the sole expert or authority (source of authoritative information) on himself or herself. This means that clients need to be empowered rather than made to conform to the 'normal' curve of average characteristics.
- iv. In line with current thinking, the term *postmodern* is used in this article to refer to 'approaches (e.g. narrative, contextual and constructive) that emphasize the importance of understanding our careers as they are lived' (Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey 2002, 87).
- v. *Narrative* is the most natural way for human beings to express the inherent structure of their personal experience (Barresi and Juckes 1997). A client uses narrative under the guidance of a counsellor to make sense of experiences and events.
- vi. *Constructivism*. According to McMahan, Patton and Watson (2003, 195), 'meaning making is fundamental to constructivism'.
- vii. *The underlying aim of career construction* is to empower clients to make informed decisions about their career paths.

I will now delineate *some of the working assumptions* that underlie the reasoning behind much of what follows in this article.

### **Working assumptions**

- a. Since career development theories are not static, a number of these theories will impact significantly on existing career counselling theories (Herr 1996; 1997). Furthermore, the concept of a contingent workforce (employing individuals with special skills for limited periods of time) is gaining ground, and more emphasis is being placed on benchmark concepts such as internationalisation, globalisation of the workforce, the labour surplus, downsizing, outsourcing, corporate reorganisation, diversification, lifelong learning, multi-skilling and the acquisition of IT skills.
- b. Our main aim should be to provide learners at all levels with hope for the future. This can be achieved by providing them with a sense of direction and an indication of which career options are potentially open to them. The current lack of career counselling in the vast majority of South African schools (disadvantaged, rural and township schools in particular) often compromises the achievement of this aim, which in turn impacts negatively on learners' chances of studying at institutions of higher education. A vicious cycle is created: inadequate support at school → inadequate achievement →

inappropriate and/or inadequate study opportunities → inadequate realisation of personal potential → inadequate self-realisation → inadequate contribution to society at large.

Against the frame of reference outlined thus far, I would now like to consider the often repeated challenges that face career counsellors in South Africa in the 21st century.

## **BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CAREER COUNSELLING**

### **Counselling in North America**

Pope (1997, 133) ascribes the developmental stages of career counselling in the United States of America (USA) to ‘major societal change in the USA and the world’. He distinguishes six stages: a) placement and vocational guidance during a period of increasing urbanisation and industrialisation (1890–1919), b) vocational guidance in schools and industry as a result of the 1930s economic depression (1920–1939), c) career counselling and counsellor training in universities and colleges linked to World War II veterans’ adjustment problems, d) the start of organisational career development during the boom period after the election in 1960 of Kennedy as president, e) the transition from an industrial to an information technology age with the focus on the lifelong career development of the American population and outplacement counselling through government policy and professional associations (1980–1989), and f) further technological development and changing demographics, the expansion of private and multicultural career counselling, and the internationalisation of counselling (1990 onward). Savickas (2006a; 2007c), in turn, discerns four identifiable phases in the development of counselling in North America: a) the period of the friendly volunteer, b) the age of vocational guidance, (c) career counselling, and (d) life construction. Careful scrutiny of events in South Africa will reveal that the occurrences that contributed individually and collectively to current career counselling in the USA have impacted significantly on the current status quo in South Africa. I will explain briefly.

### **Counselling in South Africa: The early years (pre-1994)**

Counselling in South Africa has always been a contentious issue rooted in the vocational guidance and counselling movement in the USA even though it was established in South Africa specifically by Afrikaner academics to perpetuate racist ideology and to maintain economic power in the hands of the white minority by uplifting poor whites and applying social engineering to restrict access to careers for the black majority (Leach, Akhurst and Basson 2003; Watson and Fouche 2007).

Nicholas, Naidoo and Pretorius (2006) cite the following five major influences on counselling in South Africa: a) the Industrial Revolution and the influx of immigrants from Holland, France and England, b) the European colonisation of South Africa, which ‘forcibly dispossessed, subjugated and enslaved’ the indigenous peoples who

later constituted a convenient farming and industrial labour supply, c) the discovery of diamonds and the introduction of mining technology and training as part of the rapidly developing mechanisation of industry, d) the urbanisation of poor whites after the Anglo-Boer War and the economic depression of the 1930s, and e) the labour shortages after World War II.

### **Current status (post-1994)**

Career counselling in South Africa is still by and large characterised by relatively privileged counsellors practising career counselling with a large, widely diverse client base the majority of whom are culturally different and whose experiences have been marginalised and limited in terms of content and incidence (e.g. very few rural and township learners have had exposure to the world of contemporary careers). The danger consequently exists that counsellor modes may silence clients during career facilitation thus disempowering rather than empowering them. The consensus view is that the following contemporary issues need to be addressed as a minimum requirement for the positive development of career counselling in South Africa (Leach et al. 2003).

### **Indigenisation**

Duncan (2008) defines indigenisation of the process in which psychology is made useful for South African contexts. The development of an indigenous African-oriented counselling practice is also advocated by Abdi (1975) because the 'Western notion of a talking cure is alien to many black people in South Africa' (Straker 1988, 6). Malott (2008) believes that not only the Western versus non-Western paradigm should be considered but also the challenge of cultural differences across Western countries. He supports Levers' (1997) call for 'psychological pluralism' to include indigenous practices in the counselling curriculum. Indigenisation could 'enable scholars to accept both traditional and imported psychological perspectives' (Sinha as cited in Stead and Watson 2006, 188).

### **Diversity**

Diversity in this article relates particularly to differences (and, likewise, similarities) between counsellor and client as well as between client and counselling approaches and techniques. A core premise of the article is that career counselling deals with subjective experiences and that these envelop 'different implications for differently situated persons' (Fine et al. 2000, 108) in the counselling context. The importance of awareness and monitoring of the possibility of 'othering' in the context of studying diversity is another core premise. The career counsellor is still the expert whose views are accepted unconditionally. I appeal for a mediated approach: the mediator should not be concerned with solving the problem at hand (in our case, career counselling), but, instead she or he should be concerned with how the client approaches the challenge (which is only a pretext for involving the mediator in the client's thinking process) (Greenberg 2008).

## Current status

Many colleagues have criticised Eurocentric career counselling models and have called for research into an approach that will more satisfactorily take a developing (African) country perspective into account. Is this a viable idea whose time has come? Can models developed in North America be adapted and put into practice in such a way as to impact positively on the current state of career counselling in South Africa? Or should we do our own research and develop models that are better suited for career counselling in institutions of higher education in developing countries? More pertinently: Can we achieve this aim? The answer probably lies in a compromise: we need to build on what has been researched elsewhere, conduct our own research and develop an approach that is best suited to our idiosyncratic needs. In order to shed more light on these and related issues, I will now review some of the psychology, career counselling and economy 'waves' of the past 120 years and show the interrelatedness of events over time (vertical perspective) and across subject disciplines (horizontal perspective).

## **OVERVIEW OF WAVES ACROSS SUBJECT DISCIPLINES (PSYCHOLOGY, COUNSELLING AND CAREER COUNSELLING) OVER THE PAST 120 YEARS**

### Waves in psychology

The first wave had psychodynamic theory as epistemological basis. However, the overemphasis on pathology skewed researchers' view of human nature (O'Hanlon 1994). The second wave, which emerged in the 1950s and had cognitive-behavioural theory and problem-focused therapies as its epistemological basis, represented a move away from the overemphasis on pathology and the role of the past and refuted the notion that clients were 'sick' (O'Hanlon 1994). However, therapists were still regarded as the all-knowing experts. Existential-humanistic assumptions and a narrative, constructivist approach underpinned third wave approaches in psychology. O'Hanlon (1994) maintains that, narrative therapy is the most visible of all third wave approaches with the storied approach the guiding metaphor. This wave is probably best explained by the following anecdote: 'For Epston, it was always the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve and each session offered the possibility of a new beginning' (O'Hanlon 1994, 3). O'Hanlon (1994) refers to the family therapy movement (narrative and constructionism) as the fourth wave in psychology. However, Pederson (1991), who does not seem to recognise the narrative perspective or constructionism, refers to multiculturalism as the fourth wave. This wave is characterised by an emphasis on multicultural counselling and theory (i.e. a renewed emphasis on issues of diversity) and represents a more contextual perspective and a reaction to North American and Eurocentric models mainly because they often lack relevance for women and different cultural groups (Pederson 1991).

## **Helping model in career counselling (Savickas 2006a; 2007a)**

The first helping model from about 1850 to about 1910 was referred to as Friendly Volunteers (Savickas 2006a; 2007c). In this era (agricultural era: first wave), workers grew up on farms. Whereas the majority stayed on and knew what to do, those who wanted to leave farms had access to help from a so-called ‘friendly visitor’. However, vocational guidance *per se* only occurred when the industrial era (second wave) replaced the agricultural era, and people started flocking to cities. A new discipline called vocational guidance emerged (Savickas 2006b; 2007c). Following World War II, with the advent of international corporations characterised by bureaucratic hierarchies, vocational guidance personnel reformed themselves into career counsellors (third wave) who advised individuals (offered career counselling) on how to choose an occupation and then develop a career in it by climbing the corporate ladder (Savickas 2006a). Life construction and life design (-ing) (Savickas et al. in press) with its strong emphasis on empowering persons to ‘make meaning’, write their own life stories and construct (not choose) their own careers and futures has replaced the concepts of vocational guidance and career counselling and is generally accepted as being the fourth wave in career counselling.

## **Economic waves (Molitor 1999; 2000)**

Whereas during the agricultural wave (first wave, ca 1850–1910), workers used the land to make a living, during the industrial wave (second wave, ca 1900–1950), the focus was on ‘mass fabrication of fabricated goods’ (Molitor 2000, 324) and ‘jobs’ (a new concept) were created (Savickas 2006a). During the service wave (third wave, ca 1940–1990), the emphasis shifted to the employment of the skills of third party providers to render specialised expertise. The information wave (fourth wave, 1990–), facilitated by communication and computer technology, is characterised by assignments, boundaryless careers, psychological contracts, dejobbing and elimination of standard jobs coupled with growing uncertainty and an increased interest in constructivism (Hartung 2007; Savickas 2006a; 2007a; 2007c).

## **Trait being emphasised (Savickas 2006a; 2007a)**

The first wave comprised a 19th century romantic atmosphere (career as vocation). Character was valued highly (as shown by the value attached to self-sufficiency, humility and frugality) and was expressed through self-expression and individual effort (craftspeople and farmers were the ‘workers’; family traditions were honoured almost evangelically) (Savickas 1993). People were expected to ‘be the same’ and to have the same values. The second wave was characterised by empire builders who organised craftspeople into companies and built large cities (Savickas 1993). Concurrent with the development of science and the emphasis on an objective approach in pure sciences, career counsellors developed ‘objective’ assessment instruments to assess personality (including interests). Parsons (in Savickas 1993) asserts that whereas scientists objectified the world, during this time, counsellors



objectified interests, values, and abilities by using inventories and tests. During the third wave, logical positivism started giving way to subjective perspectives (Savickas 2003; 2004; 2005). Meaning making was coming to the fore. In the fourth wave, identity is foregrounded. These days, the typical questions asked by employers are: Have you been in leadership positions? Have you been in teams? Will you fit into our team? There is a tendency to help people make sense of their lives, which provides the rationale for identity. According to Savickas (2008), a stable identity includes knowing one's story, having a clear and stable picture of oneself, and understanding the world of work. This takes place concurrently with a decreased emphasis on the concept of maturity or climbing the developmental ladder to the notion of adaptability and lifelong learning; from the construct of personality and vocational personality types to identity (Savickas 2006a).

### **Economic situation**

As shown in the preceding few paragraphs, the economic situation at any given stage impacts what is happening in the fields of psychology and counselling. While the world at large is currently experiencing the fourth economic wave (Molitor 1999; 2000), South Africa has been described as predominantly a developing (third world) country with a sizeable first world sector and population. Unemployment hovers between 25 per cent and 46 per cent (Labour Force Survey, Stats Online, Statistics South Africa 2008). The serious lack of skilled workers and the ever-growing number of unskilled, inappropriately skilled and low-skilled workers is well documented. The way in which the South African economy is currently structured has a direct influence on and, in fact, co-dictates the way in which career counselling is presented. Whereas the typical one-on-one counselling paradigm may work well in first world countries, it is not a viable model for South Africa. What is needed is a paradigm that is appropriate for and applicable to the large majority of the country's population that remains in desperate need of any form of career counselling.

Counselling in South Africa needs to move beyond its apartheid past and overcome the micro- and macro-systemic challenges facing it. It can discard its 'Cinderella' image and ensure a transformed 21st century identity through global consultation, research and collaboration. Nonetheless, I agree with Savickas (2006a) when he says that it is not a matter of one or the other approach or whether one model is good and the other not good: the overriding factor is the type of economy psychologists are working in.

The use of assessment instruments developed for use in the USA to assess aptitude and personality is, at best, inappropriate and, at worst, potentially dangerous. Let me explain.

### **Lack of appropriate assessment instruments**

Career counselling as a discipline traditionally favoured an objective (positivist) approach. Sophisticated media such as psychometric tests, work sheets and computer

programs were used to form an objective image of an individual. This image was then matched with the character traits suited to a specific career. If the values, interests and abilities of the individual were considered congruent with the requirements of a specific career, it was assumed that the individual would find that career stable, productive and satisfying. The ‘matching’, ‘objective’ image was accepted as real and true (Watson 2004).

According to Maree, Bester, Lubbe and Beck (2001), the shortcomings of the traditional assessment instruments in career counselling have become so apparent in postmodern, post-apartheid South Africa that they can no longer be used to facilitate appropriate career counselling. Current career-counselling models and methods (including tests) have until recently been available only to white Afrikaans and English-speaking learners. Counsellors who implement current career-counselling models rely mainly on the results and profiles of psychometric tests which are problematic in the diverse South African context because the value of the test results is often exaggerated, and career counsellors are often regarded as experts whose recommendations should be accepted unconditionally – clients are often excluded from the decision-making process. Furthermore, clients often avoid the responsibility of making their own choices regarding a future career, and there are often deprived of the opportunity to explore and develop – tests should consequently also be interpreted dynamically. In addition to this, most clients are not well versed in English, the predominant language of assessment.

To remedy these shortcomings, career counselling needs to move away from the almost sole use of psychometric tests to an approach that recognises the individual’s social and historical background. Research on the identification of appropriate assessment instruments for career counselling in South Africa’s diverse context (and, indeed, in Africa in general) is in its infancy and needs to be broadened. This will, of course, require reconsideration of the epistemological paradigms that underlie local research endeavours.

## **Epistemological issues**

From an epistemological perspective, Watson (2004) contends that career counselling, career research and career education have for some time been hamstrung by the belief that the greater the extent to which a discipline can empirically validate its findings in terms of numerical quantifiers, the more valuable it is.

Savickas (2008) contends that all career theories converge on a) future orientation, b) control/ownership, c) information (curiosity), d) self-efficacy (Can I do it?), e) exploration, and f) behaviour (How will I do it?). What follows in this section should be interpreted against this contention.

Because counselling theories provide psychologists with the theoretical foundation to establish an acceptable counselling practice that is in the best interests of their clients, the following working assumption will guide this article: counselling in South Africa is driven largely by an emphasis on individual needs, yet a culture

of sharing and a focus on collectivistic needs (needs of the group) rather than on individualistic needs is characteristic of roughly 90 per cent of South African society. Furthermore, South Africa is currently in a state of turbulence marked by poverty, xenophobia (which is making a mockery of *ubuntu*), spiralling crime levels, ever-increasing socioeconomic inequality, rising emigration and political volatility. The prevailing political, social and economic culture in which any counselling practice evolves impacts the advance of epistemology (theory of knowledge) and practice, and this should be borne in mind in any discussion of this nature.

Postmodern theoretical assumptions about career counselling are derived from the naturalistic (interpretive) paradigm described by, among others, Savickas (2005; 2006a; 2007a) and Hartung (2007) and are based on Savickas' (2005) career construction theory, which blends the major career counselling theories into one grand theory and implies that persons construct their own lives and careers by identifying (imposing) meaning (on) their vocational (work-related) behaviour and numerous experiences the workplace.

In South Africa today, an approach is needed to provide institutions of higher education with the means to answer the following career-counselling questions: 'How would this approach be useful to a man who has been sentenced to spend the rest of his days in prison; or someone who consumes a bottle of gin a day and lives on the streets; or a gang member in an urban ghetto; or a single mother with four children living in abject poverty?' (Winslade 2007, 52). This highlights the need to a) empower disadvantaged youths to become qualified and motivated professionals; b) contribute to the positive transformation of South African society; and c) enrich and diversify the culture of counselling at training institutions throughout South Africa. The need also exists for an approach that a) facilitates an understanding of individual and collective strengths and barriers in career development; b) enhances assessment (and employment) opportunities for students; c) helps students negotiate major life transitions (e.g. finding a job after having completed their studies); d) assists students when taking their first steps in career pathing; and e) links life stories and career choices. Stated differently, career counsellors should be looking for an approach that 'enables rather than fits' (Savickas 2004, 211).

## **APPROACH TO CAREER COUNSELLING**

### **Traditional approach**

Career counselling in South Africa traditionally has an objective (positivist) orientation. However, the rapidly changing career situation demands a contemporary approach requiring career counsellors to take cognisance of the shift and to adapt their academic discipline to accommodate these changes.

It is often said that career counselling practice at institutions of higher education in South Africa involves a client-centred approach, a behavioural approach, psychodynamic underpinnings and developmental career counselling using a trait-factor approach, yet, in practice, virtually all institutions still adhere predominantly

to trait-and-factor career counselling. Far too often, there is little evidence of the development of decision-making capacity, and indecision and lack of realism in career choice are perpetuated.

In the next section, I will elaborate on some basic principles underlying the third wave approach in psychology as well as the fourth wave approach in counselling.

### **Shedding light on basic principles of a qualitative approach to career counselling**

As I have indicated (above), globally, significant changes have taken place in the field of career counselling over the past decades or more. Career counselling is no longer perceived as a linear process aimed at helping clients find jobs for the rest of their lives. The general aim of narrative career counselling now is to help a person script his or her own life story, which makes this approach suitable for exploring personal meanings and for helping to deal with the many problems involving meaning. An attempt is made to facilitate personal agency by viewing clients as active agents in their personal development and emphasising clients' emotions and passions (Savickas 2007a).

Ideally, all career counsellors should receive training in and exposure to quantitative and qualitative approaches to give them the skills needed to help clients from (sometimes vastly) different contexts.

### **Merits of a combined qualitative-quantitative and positivist-constructivist approach**

Whereas McMahon and Patton (2002) argue that both these approaches should be key elements of the assessment process, Amundson (2006) contends that the counselling continuum should start with some of the more traditional counselling and assessment methods and then go beyond them to include other more dynamic approaches. He argues that one could imagine one pillar of Super's Archway bearing the more quantitative and rational counselling methods and the other pillar bearing more dynamic methods such as metaphor and story telling.

I believe that the introduction of a theoretical framework that combines facets of a quantitative approach with career construction, postmodern approaches is essential in South Africa today. Such a framework could promote counselling in traditional South African society where the focus is on the group, story telling and *ubuntu*. This approach is useful for clients other than upper and middle-class individuals who have access to state-of-the-art counselling and a wide range of careers (Winslade 2007).

### **Questions behind an innovative approach to counselling in South Africa**

I concur with Pomerantz (2008) that the following research questions should be asked to achieve successful career counselling.

1. How do we encourage people to tell their life history story in a way that informs counselling?
2. How do we unobtrusively delve deeper into personal histories and cultures in looking at identity, motivation and other influences?
3. How do we put a story into a perspective or a context and why is this so important?
4. How do we overcome a script or a stereotype written by others that is unhelpful or counterproductive?

Every student, at every institution of higher education in South Africa, should be afforded the opportunity to be assessed and counselled by career counsellors trained to mediate these questions.

Up until this point, I have outlined the most salient factors, as I see them, that dictate and regulate change across the South Africa career landscape in the 21st century. I will now discuss policy issues in higher education; whatever is said from here on should be interpreted against the frame of reference established thus far.

### **Policy issues in higher education**

Until such time as the National Department of Education pronounces the provision of career counselling at all levels as a national policy priority, we cannot expect optimal results. Government introduced numerous policies and laws to regulate the reconstruction and democratisation of South African society after the dismantling of the apartheid system and its discriminatory policies, for example the Labour Relations Act (1995), which includes clauses on joint employer/employee decision making and the regulation of trade union rights; the Skills Development Act (1998), which provides for workplace training linked to guidance and counselling; and the Human Resource Development Strategy (2001), coordinated jointly by the Departments of Labour and Education, which aims to improve information flow on subject and career choices (Kay and Fretwell 2003).

The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (Department of Education 2001, 4) contains an agenda for the role of education in the reconstruction and development programme. The NPHE highlights the ‘chronic mismatch between the output of Higher Education and the needs of a modernising economy’, emphasising the ‘shortage of highly trained graduates in fields such as science, engineering, technology and commerce [which] has been detrimental to social and economic development’ (Department of Education, 2001 3). It also highlights the importance of ‘human resource development: the mobilisation of human talent and potential through lifelong learning’ (Department of Education 2001, 4). Focusing on the need for programmes to correct past imbalances in the fields of science, engineering and technology, the NPHE stresses the need for career-oriented training in education. However, it does not deal sufficiently with the growing crisis in teacher enrolment in South Africa. This is borne out by the fact that a NPHE objective is to shift the

balance in enrolments in higher education (humanities: business and commerce: science, engineering and technology) from the current ratio of 49 per cent : 26 per cent : 25 per cent to 40 per cent : 30 per cent : 30 per cent.

The lack of decisive leadership and systemic coordination at all levels remains a stumbling block in the way of more adequate provision of career counselling at all levels. Dealing with the poverty cycle, escalating socioeconomic deprivation, lack of education, joblessness and spiralling crime levels requires vision and wisdom from all concerned. This could be achieved as soon as teacher trainees at South African universities are taught to teach according to the (Revised) National Curriculum Statement ((R)NCS) (Department of Education 2002). They are also being 'prepared to deal with the schools as they exist', but they must still 'be taught how to use the information about the diverse groups that constitute our schools so that they can adapt instruction to fit the idiosyncratic needs of all learners' (Ribich et al. 2001). This should include training in ways to emphasise the relative importance of the 28 subjects currently on offer in secondary schools in South Africa in terms of the crucial issue of finding work (either after having completed some form of post-school training or without first entering a tertiary training institution to obtain a further qualification).

Training institutions other than 'traditional' institutions should be given equal attention.

Watts and Fretwell (2004), in their World Bank discussion paper on case studies of public policy carried out in seven countries (including South Africa), highlight a number of policy goals of relevance here.

Learning goals including developing human resources to support individual and national growth; supporting the development of a flexible and stronger teaching and learning (education and training) system in order to reduce dropout rates and increase throughput rates; developing a stronger and (more) flexible career counselling system in schools; and strengthening the link between teaching and training systems and the labour market. Labour market goals, in contrast, consist of minimising the current mismatch between supply and demand; dealing with skills shortages and minimising unemployment; and improving labour adaptability in response to market conditions. An important social equity goal on the other hand, is strengthening of the notion of equal opportunities in education, training and employment, disadvantaged and marginalised groups, members of minority groups and females in particular need to be supported to take their rightful place in the economy. In earlier studies (Maree 1986; 1997; 1998; 2006), I voiced the same opinions, but little seems to have changed over the past 23 years.

### **Other tertiary institutions**

Leadership in overall student counselling services at public higher education institutions is provided by the The Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education (SAACDHE) (Flederman 2008). The SAACDHE

offers a comprehensive service that includes the development and monitoring of career guidance services at these institutions. This is achieved through a quality assurance programme, training and networking, and arranging conferences and regional programmes. The provision of career counselling services needs to be expedited, improved and expanded at every training institution in South Africa including further education and training (FET) colleges. Little seems to be happening at these colleges, and the career counselling needs of students at these institutions more often than not go unmet. While some effort has been put into the provision of student and lecturer support material, much more still needs to be done in this regard to meet the diverse needs of the South Africa student population.

The lack of career counselling is exacerbated by state institutions' apparent inability to deliver 'adequate services for all' (Flederman 2008, 26) and the woefully inadequate annual harvest in terms of skilled and suitably qualified persons. Flederman (2008) points out that South Africa's response to these and other challenges takes the form of SETAs, learnerships, volunteer and internship programmes and internet-based work seeker/employer links; however, this response has clearly not impacted significantly on the dire situation spelled out by Flederman.

### **Situation in schools**

This section should be read against the background of the following quotation from the acclaimed Cosser Report:

Career guidance in whatever form ... has a positive effect on intention to enter [Higher Education] HE ... (Cosser 2002, 93).

The Department of Education has included life orientation as a core learning area in the (Revised) National Curriculum Statement (DoE 2002). However, it is unrealistic to expect teachers with little or no training in basic psychology (and, obviously, the basic principles of career counselling) to handle this crucial assignment.

To facilitate entry into institutions of higher learning, career counselling should, as a matter of urgency, be facilitated for learners in South Africa, especially in schools in previously disadvantaged regions where this facility is virtually non-existent. The abandonment of career counselling in schools (following the downgrading of the role and position of 'guidance teachers' by the National Department of Education after 1994) remains a major obstacle in the way of adequate provision of career counselling in South Africa. Even though career guidance found its way back into schools through its inclusion in the life orientation learning programme in 2002 (RNCS 2002), its potential impact is limited by the fact that career counselling constitutes only 20 per cent of the life orientation syllabus and is by and large facilitated by teachers with little or no formal training in career counselling or basic psychology. The impact of in-service training for life orientation teachers seems limited at best and negligible at worst.

## **Situation at institutions of higher education**

The ad hoc implementation and lack of guidance and counselling in black schools during the apartheid era in particular resulted in career indecision among black university entrants who were increasingly admitted to English universities, which were subtly penalised by government funding cuts (Akhurst and Mkhize 2006; Kay and Fretwell 2003; Leach et al. 2003). Because career counselling in the Afrikaans university context employed 'racially oppressive' directive approaches and focused on career issues, blacks associated it with school guidance and consequently regarded it as inferior to clinical psychology. Psychology departments in homeland universities renounced career counselling, and some even implemented training programmes for clinical psychologists (Leach et al. 2003, 625). Currently, all tertiary institutions offer a range of counselling and academic support services to students and prospective students (Kay and Fretwell 2003). However, the career counselling needs of numerous black students still go unmet resulting in inappropriate field of choices and subsequent problems, for example an unacceptably high dropout rate at tertiary level.

The situation is exacerbated by tertiary training institutions' reluctance to adopt contemporary approaches to career counselling. While a shift is taking place globally towards acceptance of qualitative approaches to career counselling, South African institutions of higher education tend still to cling to the traditional, positivist model of career counselling (cf. Section on the Traditional approach). In the early 1990s, Savickas (1993, 207) stated that counselling approaches should 'fit the spirit of the age, if persons are to accept them as useful', that is to say, there is a need for innovative approaches to career counselling to enable counsellors to meet the demands of a changing global world.

## **Current barriers to career counselling: External**

The HIV and AIDS pandemic is affecting productivity, public services, family structures, child mortality and poverty levels (Maree and Ebersöhn 2006), yet counselling services remain inadequate and focus on directive rather than on client-centred pre-test and post-test counselling with hardly any ongoing counselling (Petersen 2004, 39).

The legacy of the past and its current negative manifestation in the country need to be understood if the prevailing violence and dislocation in schools are to be adequately addressed (Hamber 1999). The high level of *violence* in South African schools can be traced to the fragmentation of many families due to the absence of one or both parents (Burton 2008). Ways of dealing with the violence include counselling, story telling and sharing common experiences (Maree and Molepo 2005) as well as consideration of the socioeconomic context and acknowledgement of the 'legacy of violence and mistrust within communities themselves and not merely between the state and its citizens' (Hamber 1999, 125).



## Future trends

Career counselling has the potential to prevent or promote transformation (Swart in Dryden 1990; Leach et al. 2003; Watts 2008). Prilleltensky (in Nicholas et al. 2006) argues that an emancipatory approach and a renewed emphasis on issues that relate to and impact on communities by South African psychologists could bring about social change. On a micro-level, Watson and Fouche (2007) call for a profession that is assertive, that will become more integrated and that will deal with diversity as well as theoretical and research issues. On a macro-level, scholars are calling for a creative rather than a reactive approach to the current technological society and for international networking to meet the needs of marginalised groups such as the unemployed, physically challenged, contract workers and others (Watson and Stead 2002).

Flederman (2008) proposes the accreditation of guidance teaching to create a career path for guidance practitioners that begins at entry level and moves to Master's level. She also advocates accreditation for pre-service training and in-service training (including elective components given the diversity of learners and their diverse situations).

## CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The world of work has changed so rapidly over the past few years that a major paradigm shift is needed in the minds of policy makers. Remaining in one job for a lifetime rarely happens nowadays (Savickas 2006a; Watts 2008). Short-term assignments rather than appointed in one job in one firm on a permanent basis are becoming far more common. Also, the growing gap between what is currently being offered in tertiary training and the skills needed to execute a job successfully needs to be looked at urgently.

The days of applying a test-and-tell approach (based on trait and factor theory) in isolation and of accepting models developed in North America and Europe in South Africa without questioning the validity and reliability of these models in an African context are gone. What is needed is the development of an indigenous theory base for developing appropriate assessment instruments. What is needed is an approach that helps learners see meaning in their careers, accept responsibility for their actions and become life-long learners who can adapt to new demands. The search is on for a viable, 21st century approach that yields results that are demonstrably related to work and life success. The realities of the 21st century labour market should dictate assessment strategies and guide the feedback given to clients. Multi-skilling, for instance, is crucial. Students should be encouraged to become critical thinkers, creative problem solvers and skilled decision makers in order to become employable instead of merely trained linearly for one specific job.

Higher education institutions will have to play a pivotal role in order to create a South African society that is locally relevant and globally competitive. This means that South Africa cannot afford the current high dropout rate at tertiary and secondary

level. Decisive leadership is required, and as many stakeholders as possible need to be actively involved. Such stakeholders include the state, the psychology and education fraternity, parents and the learners themselves. The establishment of a national career counselling body based on, for example, the principles embodied in the Australian Association for Career Counselling should be considered. Membership of such an organisation should not be limited to psychologists but should be broadened to include teachers trained in career counselling.

Whereas appropriate structures are in place at some institutions of higher education in South Africa, and career counselling is currently offered and is freely available to most students at these institutions, this is not the case at all institutions of higher education in South Africa. The frame of reference or theory base for offering career counselling is clearly also in need of a serious rethink. The basic epistemology upon which most of these institutions base their practice as well as questions of equity, access and redress should be re-investigated. All testing, for instance, should be based on the following three broad principles, which have the support of the professional community:

- a. Equity. There should be no untoward privileging in career counselling for any specific group on the basis of gender, resources, culture, language or race.
- b. Redress. Career counsellors at all institutions of higher education should understand the need to find ways to effect redress given the historic imbalances currently still prevailing in South Africa.
- c. Access. Ideally, career counselling should be freely available to everyone in the country. The idea of introducing a cellphone/telephonic helpline to facilitate a free career counselling service (proposed by SAQA; Flederman 2008) should be embraced by all stakeholders and introduced as soon as possible. Access also implies that the principle of 'graded tasks' should be implemented in career counselling. In other words, examinees being tested in their second language should be evaluated more flexibly. More time should, for instance, be allocated to second language learners where necessary.

In order to facilitate and expedite equity, access and redress, the notion of community service needs to be extended to all fields of study. Students across disciplines should also be exposed to the world of work from an early age in order to facilitate a smoother entrance into the workplace. I would also like to suggest the carrying out of regular audit checks to assess the viability of qualifications. If evidence is found that qualifications do not lead to employability in some form or other, consideration should be given either to adapting those qualifications to suit the needs of the market or, in extreme cases, to close down departments that offer such qualifications.

Although in this article I have referred mainly to issues of policy, history and epistemology, I should add that the crucial matter of helping students to find a job receives scant attention in many institutions. Because of the growing unemployment in South Africa, the question should be asked: Is any aspect of career counselling currently more important than helping people find a job as a means of income?

I believe that a counselling strategy that is based on the narrative (qualitative) approach, linking career counselling practice and theory with global ‘realities’, could help expand the theory base in counselling in South Africa into one that is more inclusive, holistic, context based and suitable for large and small groups.

The realisation is growing that it is our task to help our clients find new holding environments in an ever-changing world, create more positive storylines that are based on respect and dignity and design lives that are more whole and more complete (Savickas, 2009).

What I have said here is aimed at promoting an understanding of the nature of the continuing unfair relationships in career counselling and at providing guidelines for overcoming current problems in career counselling. It is also aimed at stimulating debate on career counselling in institutions of higher education in South Africa and at expanding the network of academics in South Africa, in the SADC region and in the rest of the world. We need to work together to co-author a ‘different story’ in the context described in this article.

This article does not pretend to offer a final solution, and much of its content may not be altogether new to the majority of readers. However, I hope that the views expressed here may provide clues for addressing the numerous challenges facing career counselling in institutions of higher education in South Africa and provide indicators for further research on this topic.

## NOTES

- 1 This article argues against restricted definitions of what has become known as vocational guidance, vocational counselling or career counselling (the latter term will be used in the article).
- 2 Despite her best efforts, our librarian, Ms Clarisse Venter could not locate more recent information.
- 3 Fifteen years after 1994, the question as to whether there are sufficient blacks with the requisite qualifications to fill these posts is a non-question.
- 4 The terms ‘black’, ‘coloured’ and ‘Indian’, which reflect an artificial way of distinguishing people racially and ethnically are used in this context in order to highlight inequities in the South African population requiring rectification. Recognition of diversity issues in career counselling constitutes ethical acknowledgement of ‘the situatedness of power relations associated with gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, race and nationality’ (Christians 2000, 142).

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## **LAWS AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES**

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