




Counselling for career construction for an artistic child with career undecidedness: implications for early child development

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the influence of counselling for career construction on an artistic young girl with career undecidedness. Purposeful sampling was used to select a 14-year-old participant from young children who had sought counselling for career construction in a private practice context. An explanatory, instrumental, single case, intervention study design was implemented and a mixed-methods paradigm adopted as the research framework. Counselling for career construction strategies were employed to gather and analyse the data. The results emphasized the importance of promoting career development in the early years of a person's life. Future research should investigate the viability of the approach demonstrated in the current study in diverse group contexts and as well as the longer-term value of the approach and investigate ways in which career development can be promoted as a facet of early child development.

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Career Choice Decision Challenges

Career choice decision-making challenges can occur at any stage during people's career development (Maree, 2020). Many of these challenges are temporary and should be regarded as a normative phase in people's career development (Gati et al., 2011). Gati et al. (2011) categorize people with 'normal' career decision-making challenges as undecided. A second category of people experience pervasive career decision-making challenges that are pathological in nature. This article focuses on the situation of an 'undecided' person.

People experience career decision-making challenges for different reasons including i. being counselled (or told what to do) by well-meaning family members and friends or incompetent (career) counsellors; ii. being counselled early in their lives and believing that future career choice decisions can be based on the results or outcomes for the rest of their lives; iii. being 'told' what to become in the line of a career by self-styled 'experts'; or iv. being misled by faulty beliefs about the world of work (for instance, that people will stay in one career for the rest of their lives, that people interested into artistic careers will find it difficult to find a job or make a living, or that jobs in a practical-technical field (for instance, electrical work or plumbing) are inferior to 'high status' careers such as (for instance) engineering). Gati et al. (1996) and Morgan and Ness (2003) contend that the following broad challenges or factors contribute to undecidedness in making sound career choice decisions.

- i. Lack of motivation to make such decisions.
- ii. General indecisiveness regarding making decisions.

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iii. Beliefs associated with dysfunctional career decision-making myths such as the belief that people have only one 'right' career choice.

Gati et al. (1996), Holland and Holland (1977), Kelly and Lee (2002), and Wanberg and Muchinsky (1992), and Maree (2019) differentiate between the following causes of career decision-making challenges or problems: i. insufficient career choice information; ii. identity diffusion (inadequate sense of career and self-identity); iii. trait indecision (inadequate or underdeveloped ability to make career choices); iv. choice anxiety (anxiety about making career-related choices), and v. discrepancy between people's own and significant others' views about their career choice (objective or subjective incongruity between significant others' and people's own career choices).

Enhancing Career Development in the Early Years of a Person's Life

The importance of promoting career development in people's early lives and its impact on their later career-lives is highlighted in many career counselling as well as developmental theories. These include Freud's (1964) psychodynamic theory and its later adaptations as well as Super's (1957) lifespan, life-space theory of career development. According to Perosa and Perosa (1985), there is a strong positive correlation between Super's (1957) views on the enhancement of children's self-concepts and Erikson's ideas on children's resolution of identity crises. Both Super and Erikson emphasize the importance of identity formation during early development and early adolescence and the pivotal place it occupies during early career development. Super (1957) refers to this phase as the exploratory life stage of life. Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2017) maintain that '[i]gnoring the process of career development occurring in childhood is similar to a gardener disregarding the quality of the soil in which a garden will be planted' (p. 276).

Freud (1964) stresses the importance of events in the early lives of people on various facets of their later development. Erikson (1964, 1968) highlights the significance of the first five of the eight stages in human development that all children experience and have to work through successfully.

Hartung (2013a), McMahon and Watson (2018), Maree (2018), and Patton (2017) emphasize the importance of career development in the early life of people. Ricoeur (1984) argues in favour of attempts to enhance young children's narrative identity, while Hartung (2013b) and Watson et al. (2015) stress the importance of bolstering young children's sense of meaning and purpose. Erikson (1964) highlights the importance of assisting young children to master key developmental tasks early in their lives. He maintains that unless developmental tasks are mastered satisfactorily by young children, 'unmastered' developmental tasks will resurface later in their lives as 'problems' or challenges that need to be overcome and repurposed (given a new meaning). Fusco et al. (2021), Hartung et al. (2005), Maree (2018), Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2017), Peila-Shuster (2017), Reid and West (2011), Savickas (2012), and Taber et al. (2011) argue in favour of conducting research on and promoting the use of career construction (and life design) interventions during early childhood.

Career counselling theorists, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers constantly endeavour to find appropriate ways to i. observe, examine, and explain the key characteristics of career decision-making challenges and determine its influence on young people and ii. devise appropriate intervention strategies to deal with these challenges. Over the past three decades or so, counselling for career construction theory (Guichard, 2009; Savickas, 2005) has been increasingly used to understand the above challenges. It emphasizes the importance of promoting young people's career adaptability and, accordingly, their employability (Savickas, 2019; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019; Van der Horst & Klehe, 2019). This approach serves as a science-based foundation for intervening to help young people become more (career) adaptable and able to manage repeated transitions during their early and later lives.

Below, I elaborate on some key facets of counselling for career construction (Savickas, 2019), which is widely used as the theoretical framework (lens) for examining and interpreting career counselling research outcomes along with theoretical traditions that cover the topic of development in general and career development during early childhood and early adolescence specifically.

Counselling for Career Construction

Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2019) is a metatheory premised on three theoretical traditions. First, it draws on the differential approach (trait-factor theory), which highlights the value of recognizing people's traits, values, and career interests as key constituents of their sense of self and identity. Second, it draws on Super's (1957) career development theory, which holds that work(-life) roles and personal roles should be viewed together (Hartung, 2011). Third, it draws on the psychodynamic approach to the exposure of key life themes and the promotion of people's construction of their sense of self- and career identity (Savickas, 2005, 2015). Career construction theory and its underlying assumptions speak to the challenges that young people have to contend with while navigating repeated transitions during the first five stages of life as conceptualized by Erikson (1964, 1968). During this time, young people have to master fundamentally important developmental tasks – mastery of which authenticates their sense of who they are, their self-view, as well as their sense of personal and career identity. CCT stresses the importance of promoting people's 'narratability', that is, their capacity to recount or narrate, as well as autobiographicity (their capacity to draw on their multiple micro-life stories in times of change) lucidly. It also stresses the importance of enhancing people's adaptability (which helps them navigate career-life transitions and changes in their selves but also in their contexts) to help them design meaningful and successful lives. Likewise, CCT draws on social constructionist perspectives to bolster people's capacity to uncover their key life themes and unique patterns of personal meaning.

Promoting Narratability and Autobiographicity in the Early Years

Individually and collectively, the theories referred to above emphasize the value of promoting young children's capacity to share (recount) their multiple life stories, their feelings, and their ideals. Communicating (narrating) micro-stories in a lucid and coherent manner is referred to as narratability. Integrated, these multiple micro-stories constitute young children's autobiographies, which they can draw on for inner advice on how to deal with transitions that occur later in their personal and career-lives (Hartung, 2011; Maree, 2013; Savickas, 2015, 2019).

Narratability and autobiographicity lie at the heart of counselling for career construction. Once elicited, career counsellors can help young people construct (share), deconstruct (unpack), reconstruct (re-author), and co-construct (co-author) their life stories. They can then transform painful stories that speak of defeat and lack of hope into inspiring and motivating stories that exude a sense of meaning-making, purpose, and hope. Narratability and autobiographicity thus serve as enabling and facilitating mechanisms that promote young people's sense of self, their decision-making capacity, and their sense of hope for the future.

Career adaptability is discussed next.

Adaptability as an Outcome of Counselling for Career Construction

Career adaptability comprises four dimensions (Savickas, 2008, July): Career concern deals with children's concern about their future career-life and their constructive efforts to shape it positively. Career control relates to children's efforts to take ownership of and responsibility for their career-life.

Career curiosity concerns children's curiosity about the world of work. Lastly, career confidence is about children's self-confidence in their ability to shape their future career-life positively and manage future career choice challenges successfully. Individually and jointly, these concerns uncover children's attitudes, beliefs, and competencies (the so-called ABCs of career construction) (Hartung, 2011; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Artistic talent and career choice-making

Maree (2020) and Stuckey and Nobel (2010) argue that artistic people acquire and clarify their core (career-)life identity by drawing on and executing their sense of creativity, imagination, and, most importantly, heal themselves (and others). In addition, Stuckey and Nobel (2010) argue that their research provides reasonable evidence to suggest that enacting creative commitment meaningfully enhances biological and psychological conditions that relate to improved (emotional, physical, and spiritual) wellbeing. Maree (2020), Reynolds and Prior (2003), and others maintain that creative and artistic self-expression potentially promotes the preservation and reconstruction of people's positive (career-)life identity. Likewise, meaning and meaningfulness. Maree (2020) contended that the need to engage in artistic and creative endeavours constitutes a deep-seated need of artistic and creative learners. Meeting this key need greatly bolsters their chances to experience a sense of purpose, hope, and meaning in their career-lives. Moreover, it enhances their belief and experience that they are making important social contribution and attain 'symbolic immortality' (Huta & Zuroff, 2007) in their career-lives. Likewise, it bolsters their conviction that they are constructing a worthwhile work-related legacy (Doerwald et al., 2020; Maree, 2021; Zacher et al., 2012).

Simpson (1981) contends that '[a]rtists find themselves backing into other jobs to supply necessary income and acquiring . . . secondary identities' (p. 58). This view is supported by Bain (2005), who contends that people with artistic and creative talent and inclinations often take up 'secondary' employment to sponsor their artistic (creative) work and enable them to earn a living income and simultaneously allow them to enact their artistic talents and inclinations.

Rationale for the Study

Numerous studies have been carried out on the effect of career counselling in general and of career construction counselling in particular on young people (see, for instance, McMahan and Watson (2015), Hartung (2015), Ferrari et al. (2015), and Maree and Jude (2018)). However, little research has been done on the value of career construction counselling in helping young children deal with career decision-making issues such as choosing schools and subjects in collaboration with significant others such as their parents and on how it, in the current study, influenced the career decision challenges of a particular artistic young girl (Maree, 2019, 2020). Likewise, little research has been done on the influence of significant others such as parents, teachers, and peers on the artistic aspirations of artistic young people (Maree, 2017a).

Goal of the Study

This study set out to examine how career construction counselling influenced the career decision making of an artistic young girl (with career undecidedness). The study sought to answer the following questions.

- (1) How did counselling for career construction influence the participant's self-design and career construction?
- (2) How did the intervention influence the participant's career undecidedness?

Method

Participant and Context

Angie (pseudonym), a 14-year-old girl in Grade 9, sought career counselling. More specifically, she sought counselling regarding her subject choices in Grade 10 as well as future career choice options. I (the researcher) was approached by the parents in 2020 to provide counselling on the choice of subjects and a career for Angie. In Angie's words: *'Help me choose the "right" subjects for Grade 10. Direct me to fields of study that may suit my "personality profile" so I can find a career that will "suit" ("fit") my profile. I am artistic, I love art, but many people say that people who study art struggle to find work and that it is more important to choose a career that will help me find a good job.'* After I explained what the term 'integrative assessment' meant, the parents, Angie, and I opted for a QUALITATIVE-quantitative intervention (an intervention that guides my own personal career counselling style). In short, psychometric tests would be administered integratively with narrative, career construction (qualitative) assessment instruments. However, Angie and her parents were reminded that while I would provide career-related, psychosocial, and psychoeducational information, the final responsibility for choosing a career would be hers and that no one could make such a key decision on behalf of any other person.

Procedure

Angie's parents wanted Angie to complete the intervention in one day (approximately eight hours, including breaks). Phase 1, the intake interview and assessment, lasted six hours and included a number of breaks. During this phase, Angie's life story was elicited, and an interview was conducted with the parents once she had started completing the first questionnaire. Quantitative measures and qualitative questionnaires were administered concurrently and the outcomes later integrated. During Phase 2, which lasted an hour, Angie's life story was interpreted and authorized by her. After Angie and I had talked about and integrated the assessment outcomes, she and her parents took part in a feedback interview. In the third phase, which also lasted an hour, an action plan was negotiated and set up to promote forward movement. During this phase, I provided information of a general nature together with psychoeducational and psychosocial information. At the same time, I gently guided Angie regarding i. a possible set of subjects, and ii possible fields of study for further examination and job analysis purposes. I concluded the interview by elaborating on Angie's key life themes, which had been uncovered through careful analysis of her earliest recollections as well as her responses to the statements about major challenges she had faced early in her life or experiences that had hurt her so much that she did not want others to experience similar challenges (Maree, 2020; Savickas, 2019).

I repeatedly initiated discussions on her (meta)-reflections on her answers to the quantitative and qualitative questions. In addition, I emphasized that she was the sole expert on herself (Savickas, 2019) and that she knew herself much better than any other person knew her. Her requests for 'advice' were met by reading her responses to her and asking her for her opinion (reflection) on these responses first. I stressed that her perceived areas for development ('weaknesses') could be converted into strengths and that she would have to master actively any hurt or pain that she had experienced passively in life. In ending the session, I asked her to give me regular feedback on her progress.

Mode of Inquiry

The integrative, QUALITATIVE-quantitative intervention used in this study is situated in both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms and can therefore be described as a mixed-methods approach to career counselling. I used an instrumental single, descriptive, and explanatory intervention case study design in a one-on-one research context. In addition, I employed a naturalistic inquiry located in an interpretive paradigm. Against this theoretical and conceptual framework, I explain an

approach that endeavours to ensure that children's need to enhance their narratability and autobiographicity is met. The purpose of this approach is to help children connect what they know consciously with what they are aware of subconsciously (Maree, 2020).

Data-gathering instruments: Quantitative

The Differential Aptitude Tests (Form S) (DAT-S) (Vosloo et al. (2000)). The DAT-S was standardized in South Africa, and its psychometric properties are considered highly satisfactory.

The Maree Career Matrix (MCM) (Maree & Taylor, 2016). Developed in South Africa and premised on Holland's trait and factor theory (Holland, 1997), Super's developmental theory (Super, 1990), and Bandura's social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 1994), the MCM was standardized in the period 2002–2015. Measuring people's interests and their self-estimates of confidence to execute certain careers successfully, the MCM's psychometric properties can be considered good (Maree & Taylor, 2016). Test-retest reliability exceeded .70 for each of its interest categories, and Rasch analysis confirmed that the 19 career interest categories measured a single construct.

Data-gathering instruments: Qualitative

The Career Interest Profile (CIP, Version 6) (Maree, 2017b). A qualitative, storied instrument, the CIP is based on Savickas' career construction theory (Savickas, 2019) and also on elements of Guichard's (2009) self-construction theory, the work of Adler (1933), and the work of Cochran (1997) to reflect the storied, developmental, and (to a limited extent) the differential theoretical premises. The CIP was developed as a career-life story questionnaire for use in diverse South African settings. Credible, reliable, and valid strategies were employed to assess the trustworthiness of the instrument, which can be administered individually and also in groups.

I asked Angie to prepare an autobiographical narrative titled 'My life story' up front and to bring it along with her on the day of the assessment.

Rigour of the Study

The use of the CIP to gather qualitative and the MCM to gather quantitative data as well as the subsequent integration and triangulation of the data enhanced the rigour of the study. In addition, I asked Angie to i. reflect on her answers at all stages; ii. meta-reflect on the meaning of her answers; iii. indicate her agreement or disagreement with the outcomes of the instruments; and iv. reflect critically on the strategies employed and the inferences made. All Angie's observations were reported meticulously. All aspects of the research method were also recorded meticulously to facilitate replication of the case study in different settings. To promote triangulation of the data and confirm the reliability of the deductive process, an external coder (a colleague with a doctoral degree in educational psychology) was invited to code the data independently to establish whether the themes and subthemes I had identified were in line with the data. The use of the CIP to ask different (purposely chosen) questions and the careful examination of the consistency of the responses enhanced crystallization of the qualitative outcomes (Janesick, 2000).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data

I recorded and transcribed all the 'conversations' between Angie and me (the researcher) verbatim. I then used slightly adjusted thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to search for patterns in the data (themes and subthemes) and to check for consistency across the different responses to open-ended CIP questions. In Step 1, as mentioned above, I immersed myself in the data, transcribed, read, and re-read the transcriptions. In Step 2, I scrutinized the data into meaningful segments. In

step 3, I sorted the different codes into possible themes. Code relationships then began to merge into central themes. These themes and subthemes were then reviewed, described, and categorized in Step 4, I reassessed the codes and gathered data to establish if they fitted the proposed theme(s). In Step 5, I named the themes to match and express the research narrative and the phenomenon under consideration to make sure that they would answer the research questions satisfactorily. In addition, I made sure that the overlap between the themes and subthemes was not too large. In step 6, I completed the research report. I drew on a consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach (including the use of open-ended questions, focusing on words rather than on numbers in isolation, and consistently seeking clarification) to arrive at consensus decisions between Angie and me (Hill et al., 2005). I verified the findings by systematically checking them against the original data.

The following specific actions enhanced the qualitative data analysis (Savickas, 2019). I repeatedly asked Angie to explain what her responses to the *CIP* questions (such as her three favourite quotations) meant. I also carefully noted words, expressions, and phrases she repeated. In addition, I read Angie's own words and expressions back to her and asked her to say the words, expressions, and phrases out loud to make sure that she experienced them as authentic. She and I uncovered her life themes by scrutinizing her answers to the question about her three earliest recollections and also her responses to, for instance, the question about the biggest challenges she had to overcome when she was very young. Together we eventually related these themes to a number of fields of study for job analysis (in other words, we co-constructed these themes and fields of study).

Quantitative data

I scrutinized the outcomes of the quantitative questionnaires to identify interest patterns (interest fields and subfields or categories and subcategories). Angie and I discussed these interest fields and subfields to establish whether they aligned positively with her own assessments of her interest fields and subfields. These fields and subfields were then triangulated with fields and subfields identified in the *CIP*.

Ethical Issues

The University's Institutional Review Board approved the research, and I obtained written informed consent and assent from Angie's parents and Angie respectively to analyse and report the research anonymously. As recommended by Hay-Smith et al. (2016), I separated my roles as researcher and practitioner. This was done to ensure that the strategies I used to manage the ethical and methodological facets of these two roles professionally were designed, examined, and reported methodically. I maintained an open relationship with Angie at all stages of the research by discussing every aspect of the intervention with her and explaining in detail the nature of the assessment instruments used (Kewley, 2006). Lastly, I bore in mind that Angie may have wanted to 'please' me by giving me the answers she thought I wanted. This may have influenced (consciously or subconsciously) what she told me, and to reduce this possibility, I repeatedly clarified all her responses with her (Sieck, 2012).

Findings

Quantitative Outcomes

According to the *MCM*, Angie's most preferred interest and confidence categories were the Arts (painting, sculpture and decorating) and culture; Practical-creative and consumer science; Research; Mathematics and/or accounting industry; Office work (administrative and clerical activities);

Persuasive; and Social, caregiving, and community services. (Angie achieved excellent results in the DAT (5), a finding that correlated strongly positively with her excellent academic results and her parents and teachers' observations.)

Qualitative Outcomes

Below, due to space constraints, I discuss only Angie's answers to a number of questions in Part 4 of the CIP. To conserve their authenticity, her verbatim responses were only lightly edited.

Angie's preferred interest categories were the Arts (painting, sculpture and decorating) and culture; Practical-creative and consumer science; Mathematics and/or accounting industry; Research; Persuasive; Office work (administrative and clerical activities); Social, caregiving, and community services; and Adventure, plants, animals and the environment. (There was thus a strong, positive correlation between the quantitative and the qualitative interest profiles.)

My introductory question to Angie was, 'Who knows you better than anyone else?' After having stated that first her mother and, next, her best friend, followed by God, knew her best, she eventually realized that she herself knew herself better than anyone else and that nobody would ever know her as well as she did; in other words, that she would forever be the sole expert on herself. In response to my second question to her, 'How can I be of value, of use, or of help to you?' or 'What are you hoping to gain from this assessment?' (Maree, 2017b; Savickas, 2019), she replied: *'I need help choosing my subjects and finding a career that will suit me. I am creative but I was told that taking a creative or arts subject is unwise because people with qualifications in the arts do not easily find work. I am in doubt because different people say different things about careers.'* (Here, she gives clear evidence of career concern, that is, people's thinking about and planning their careers) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). When probed, she said that many people (including her classmates) believed that choosing a career in the arts would result in her not being able to find work after completing her studies. In response to a question about her greatest strengths, she replied: *'I am dedicated, intelligent, artistic, conscientious, hardworking, obedient, kind, and I always do my best.'* Her teachers and close friends described her as *'a little shy, well educated, displaying very rare artistic sensitivity, good at drawing, and respectful'*. In response to a question about her greatest values, she said: *'Service to others, artistic activities, honesty, and loyalty.'*

She regarded the following people as her role models when she was younger (and still did):
 i. *'Emma Watson, because of her famous designs that made the world an eco-friendlier place as well as her strong desire to learn and to promote education.'* ii. *'Taylor Swift, because she is famous, a hardworking, dedicated artist, and always trying to do the right thing.'* iii. *'The two people who started the organization 4ocean because they are trying to show people that the sea is very polluted; they are helping to clean the sea, and they create jobs for others.'* Asked about her favourite quotations (her advice to herself), she replied: *'Funny that you should ask! I have a "wall of art" at home; a wall filled with my own drawings and inspiring quotes. These quotes and drawings reveal my personality. My three favourite ones are "The world without art is just eh"; "See the good in all things; and "If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough."'* Asked what she wanted to be remembered for, she said: *'Protect the earth and the earth will protect you.'*

(Angie initially referred to her mother (a guiding line) as her role model because of her love for her family, her dedication and positive attitude towards her job, and her compassion for others. However, whereas role models are chosen by people to identify with, guiding lines are given influences in their lives. I therefore asked her to list three other role models as well.)

Her three earliest recollections were the following (Adler, 1958; Cochran, 1997; Maree, 2020; Savickas, 2019):

Inattention leads to embarrassing mistake

'On my first day at school (Grade 1; I was six years old), I somehow failed to note the teacher's instruction to sit in the chair with my name on it. I sat in the wrong one. Some children laughed at me and that made me feel embarrassed. The teacher then again reminded me to sit in the chair with my name, and I quickly found mine.' Asked to tell me how she felt, she said: *'Insecure, inadequate, uncertain, and embarrassed.'*

Exceptional reading skills generate 'fame'

'In Grade 3, at the age of eight, teacher handed out a crate of books to the entire class and told us to start reading our book. However, she then walked up to me and told me that she would bring me a harder book to read. She explained that she did that because of my excellent reading ability. I felt proud and recognized and a little famous.'

Brother's carelessness impedes opportunity to learn

'One afternoon, at the age of six, I asked mommy to take me to my auntie (who was a teacher) so she could teach me how to read even better. I was very excited about the opportunity to learn to improve my reading skills! She gave me a book, told me to start reading, and left the room for a while. My older brother and I were left alone for a while (she had told him to take care of me in her absence). However, he quickly took an interest in something else (I cannot remember what). My auntie's little dog then came to me and lay down beside me. I got distracted, felt sorry for him, started stroking him with my one hand, and was suddenly bitten by him. When my auntie returned, she took me to a doctor. After having put a few stitches in my hand, he also injected me. I felt sad about missing out on the opportunity to improve my reading skills.'

Angie and I uncovered her central life themes by carefully analysing her (qualitative) responses to questions in the CIP. The first of her three recollections ('Inattention leads to embarrassing mistake') sets the scene for her career-life story. Endowed with an enquiring mind, she felt embarrassed and humiliated by not listening to her teacher and consequently ending up in the wrong chair. She realized that focusing properly would enable her to do things correctly and avoid embarrassment (a central life theme). Angie's first verb is 'fail(ed)'. Feeling insecure and uncertain, she did not focus on her teacher's instruction and 'failed' to do what was expected of her. The action described here ('failed') is consistent with the general themes uncovered in the other earliest recollections, including having an enquiring mind, being eager to learn, earning recognition and 'modest fame' by doing well, and discovering that acting carelessly can have painful consequences. She is a perfectionist who wants to achieve, develop, and earn the recognition and respect of others. Angie's second story confirms that she felt proud and 'somewhat famous' following the recognition she received from her teacher for her superior reading skills. Her third earliest recollection provides further confirmation of her eagerness to focus on the task at hand in order to make the most of opportunities to learn, grow, and develop. Interestingly, the theme of carelessness appears twice in the third earliest recollection. Her brother's irresponsibility as well as her own lack of focus on what she was meant to be doing abruptly ended her opportunity to learn – an opportunity that she did not want to miss for anything.

Angie and I discussed in depth all her responses to the CIP questions. I also took pains to highlight the 'concealed' meaning of many of her responses, including the fact that her role models served as the blueprint for their own self-construction advice to herself contained in her favourite quotations. Angie and I together reflected on the intersection between the quantitative and qualitative outcomes to promote triangulation and crystallization.

In the third phase of the intervention, we integrated the qualitative and quantitative information and co-constructed i. her subject set for Grade 10, and ii. study fields that could help her make meaning of her work, experience a sense of hope, and design a successful life in which she could make meaningful social contributions. We jointly created a rough table and listed her 'scores' alongside her 'stories' and the themes we had identified together. Our reflections on the strong, positive overlap between the 'scores' and 'stories' helped her understand her reasons for consulting me. First, we agreed that she should include the following subjects in her subject set for Grade 10: i. two official languages and Life orientation (compulsory subjects); ii. Mathematics; iii. three of the subjects Physical sciences, Life sciences, Design, or Visual art; iv. Accountancy; and v. perhaps

Computer-assisted technology. Second, we agreed that she should analyse a number of fields of study and the associated careers, including Graphic design, Interior design, Communication design, Visual studies/Fine art, Architecture, Microbiology, Marine/Conservation biology, Conservation ecology, and Accounting sciences.

Near the end of the third phase, Angie and I revisited our analysis of Angie's three earliest recollections and her answers to the question about significant challenges ('problems') she had encountered early in her life (Maree, 2020; Savickas, 2019). Angie was reminded that she would have to use her career as a vehicle to actively deal with ('master') the challenges she had previously experienced ('suffered') passively to achieve self-healing by healing others who had experienced challenges similar to the ones she had encountered. Angie and I then together drafted her mission and vision statements to help her 'make meaning' (sense) of the possible fields of study recommended for job analysis and to clarify her purpose in life (Why am I alive? Why am I here?). This is what we arrived at: *'I want to become a designer so that I can enact my artistic talent and do what I really love to do in my job (mission statement; personal meaning) and use my designs to alert people to the need to make the planet a better and healthier environment (vision statement; social meaning) and in the process enact my need for making this world a better place. This will help me address my desire to conserve the environment, become "moderately famous", be admired, feel proud of myself and heal myself, and make my parents and the rest of my family proud.'*

In wrapping up the third phase, I asked Angie how she had experienced the intervention. Asked what she enjoyed, she said: *'Learning more about myself and about exciting opportunities in a structured manner'* (meta-reflection or reflexivity). Asked if she had any further comments, she repeated her love for art especially but also her desire to do well enough academically to realize her dreams. She expressed her wish to *'discover or design something that might contribute to making the planet a better and healthier environment'* (experience a sense of meaning, hope, and purpose in her career-life). Consistent with her responses to other questions, she concluded by stating that she wanted to become *'moderately famous; not as famous as actors and actresses and singers, yet, sufficiently famous for others to know who I am and recognise my achievements'*.

Angie was then asked to return home, carefully reflect on the recommendations, and let me know whether there was anything else she wanted to discuss further.

First Follow-Up

Seven months later, Angie reported that that she had chosen the following subjects in addition to her three compulsory subjects: Mathematics, Physical sciences, Design, and Accountancy. Even though she had not done a job analysis at the time, she stated that she had already limited her list of possible careers to the following: Graphic or Interior design, Architecture or Interior architecture, Accounting sciences. Conservation biology, or Conservation ecology. She and I agreed that she would do a full job analysis and revert to me once she had decided on a specific field of study or if she needed any further input from me.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to examine how career construction counselling influenced the career decision making of an artistic young girl (with career undecidedness). The study sought to answer the following questions.

- (a) How did counselling for career construction influence the participant's self-design and career construction?
- (b) How did the intervention influence the participant's career undecidedness?

In the discussion below, I compare the current findings with other findings regarding the influence of counselling for career construction on career choice-related issues in diverse settings, especially during the early years of people's lives.

Qualitative Findings

How did counselling for career construction influence the participant's self-design and career construction?

The focus of the research was on the value of career construction intervention for an artistic young girl who presented for career counselling. 'Traditional' career counselling ('vocational or career guidance') no longer meets the career counselling needs of people in general and artistic people specifically in the current, rapidly changing work environment (Savickas, 2019). The participant and I therefore agreed on the implementation of an integrative QUALITATIVE and quantitative approach to career counselling to facilitate co-constructive conversation and dialogue between us to help her deal with her career undecidedness. After the intervention, she exhibited an improved sense of self- and career identity as well as greater clarity on her subject and career choices. Moreover, after the intervention, the participant was in a better position to answer the following 'existential' questions: 'What do I really want to do, and, especially, why do I want to do that?' and 'What is the real purpose of my life?' (Hall & Kelly, 2014; Maree, 2017a). These findings support Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) assertion that people's career identities are strongly related to their sense of self. The participant was able to draw on her autobiography to find advice from within to reach decisions regarding her questions (autobiographicity). The tension in her storyline (*'Should I rather pursue a career in the arts or should I choose a "safe" (financially rewarding) field of study?'*) was transformed into intention (she would pursue a field of study that would enable her to actualize her artistic talents and interests but also help her meet her need to make the world an eco-friendlier place) that would bring about action and forward movement. She would thus be able to link her central life purpose with her work environment (Duffy & Dik, 2009). She realized that trying to please friends and parents' (albeit unspoken) advice was not the way to go, that she would always be the only real expert on herself, and that she should heed her own advice to herself. Trying to 'please' others could well result in her ending up in a job that might meet significant others' aims for her and help her make more money, but would probably leave her feeling frustrated. Choosing a career based on the premise that her parents and friends were the ultimate 'experts' on her would undermine her career-choice autonomy (Maree & Jude, 2018). More particularly, doing so would amount to 'backing into other jobs to supply necessary income and acquiring ... [a] secondary [career-life identity]' (Simpson, p. 58).

The intervention enhanced her narratability (her ability to express her innermost feelings) and increased her level of self-understanding and self-appreciation. This happened at a key career-life juncture when she was about to transition from the senior to the further education and training phase. The success of the intervention supports the findings of other researchers regarding the power of career construction counselling to help young people in particular bolster enhance their self- and career identity, improve their self-knowledge, and clarify and actively pursue their future career-life roles (Maree & Jude, 2018; Peila-Shuster, 2017; Porfeli, 2003; Reid & West, 2011; Savickas, 2008, July; Taber et al., 2011).

How did the intervention influence the participant's career undecidedness?

Gati et al. (1996) as well as Osipow and Gati (1998) contend that career decision-making difficulties or career undecidedness flag the causes of career indecision (in the case under discussion, the source of career undecidedness). Clearly, in the current case, the well-intentioned 'advice' of friends and parents was at the heart of the difficulties or challenges the participant presented with (undecidedness) regarding the choice of a set of subjects and a study field and career. This finding supports the

findings of Gati et al. (1996), Maree and Jude (2018), and Xu and Tracey (2017) that identifying the key career decision-making challenges leading to people's career undecidedness provides useful information on how these challenges can be dealt with.

The positive outcome achieved in this study also supports Del Corso's (2017) and Del Corso and Rehfuss (2011) finding regarding the value of constructive feedback and the importance of encouraging young people to focus on their self-design and career choice approach. The establishment of a 'sacred' or 'safe' space where people can trust their counsellor unconditionally (similar to the space created in the current study) will help them reflect on their career-life future and manage future career-related transitions (Maree, 2017b; Maree & Jude, 2018). The growth (development) and enhanced sense of self-efficacy the participant in the current research displayed after the intervention should help her deal successfully with any future career-choice challenges (Bandura, 1991; Miller, 2009).

Overlap Between the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

A strong, positive overlap was found between the career interests identified through the analysis of the *CIP* outcomes (qualitative) and the *MCM* outcomes (quantitative) (see the 'Outcomes' section). These findings support those of other researchers in this field (see, for instance, Maree & Gerrits, 2014; Maree et al., 2019).

Usefulness of the Career Construction Counselling Intervention

Generally speaking, the findings in the current research corroborate earlier findings on the power of counselling for career construction to i. help people achieve increased self-awareness; ii. expose the complexity of people's idiosyncratic circumstances; iii. illuminate people's self- and career identity; and iv. uncover 'the negotiation between identity development and contextual facilitators and constraints' (Kroger, 2018, p. 341). The intervention in the current study substantially improved the participant's narratability and helped her draw on her life story (autobiography) to deal with her career undecidedness. It also helped her connect what she knew about herself at a conscious level (uncovered by the *MCM* and the small quantitative part of the *CIP* as well as the multiple questions in the *CIP*) with what she was aware about herself subconsciously. The latter was revealed in the main by her responses to the questions about her biggest challenges earlier in her life as well as her responses to the questions about her earliest recollections (Maree, 2020). These 'revelations' were extrapolated largely from her reflections at the end of the intervention (confirmed a few months later) that she felt 'more confident' about her choice of subjects and possible careers, 'looked forward' to conducting a thorough job analysis (along the lines agreed upon by the counsellor and herself), and was open to discussing her progress over time with the counsellor.

After the intervention, the parents confirmed their acceptance of Angie's choices and their unconditional support for whatever she eventually decided to study for a career. In their own words: 'We will support her, irrespective of her choices. The only thing that matters is her happiness.' Her mother concluded by stating that she had never directly suggested that Angie should become an accountant. However, she loved her job and believed Angie might have construed her positive comments about her career as an indication that she wanted Angie to become an accountant too. This may explain to some extent Angie's keenness to take Accounting as a subject. Lastly, the findings provide some support for the view that counselling for career construction can help participants convert uncertainty into confidence and hope for a meaningful and fulfilling future (Savickas, 2019).

Some Implications of the Study for Early Child Development

The current study confirms the value of the approach discussed here for an artistic young girl. Among other things, it shows the importance of involving parents in promoting the career development of children from a young age. It also confirms the importance of training teachers (from the early grades onwards) in the basic aspects of career development and helping them understand the rationale for promoting children's career development in the early years.

Sadly, though, in most primary schools, little attention is given to career development. Even in instances where some form of career development does receive attention in primary schools, factors such as gender bias and stereotyping, low socio-economic status, lack of parental education, and the absence of suitable role models impede career development interventions (Archer et al., 2014; Chambers et al., 2020). Chambers (2018) argue that steps should be taken to prevent children from excluding certain career options 'because they believe that their future career choices are limited by their gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background' (p. 15). Chambers et al. (2020) state that the emphasis should be on "broadening horizons and raising aspirations, giving children a wide range of experiences of the world including the world of work . . . and helping to keep their options open (p. 15).

Chambers et al. (2020), for instance, propose that between 12 and 18 years of age career development interventions should be guided by the following four principles.

- i. Promoting meaningful interaction between young people and possible future employers.
- ii. Increasing the provision of career education.
- iii. Familiarizing children with the labour market.
- iv. Strengthening the partnership between career development practitioners and parents.

Executing these and other steps to promote career development in people's early years should help learners design themselves and choose subjects, fields of study, and careers that will not only 'fit' their profiles but help them enact key life themes in their career-lives and experience meaning, hope, and purpose in their future careers.

Limitations

First, the style of intervention implemented in the current research (including, the strong emphasis on encouraging participants to express themselves verbally) is relatively unknown. This may have restricted the participant from expressing herself clearly. Second, despite my attempts to avoid it, my dual roles as researcher and practitioner may have influenced the research outcomes to some extent (consciously or subconsciously) (Hay-Smith et al., 2016). Third, I concur with Sieck (2012) that participants may sometimes give socially acceptable answers to some questions to 'please' counsellors (consciously or subconsciously). Fourth, my bias towards the theoretical approach and its applicability may have to some degree prejudiced my observations and interpretations. Lastly, the parents' insistence on the completion of the entire assessment in one day may have to some extent negatively influenced the participant's processing of the large amount of data she had to deal with. Notwithstanding these limitations, the reflexive and meta-reflexive process delineated here appears to have been more than adequate.

Recommendations for Theory, Research, and Practice

First, career counselling has become increasingly multifaceted over the past three decades or so, and the profession globally has accepted the value of qualitative approaches alongside quantitative approaches. However, more research is needed to establish the value of newer approaches in developing countries in particular. Second, verifying the value and practicability of cross-cultural career counselling is as important as ensuring that larger numbers of counsellors are trained to administer the intervention discussed here in indigenous contexts. Third,

future research (both short term and longitudinal) should focus on individual as well as group counselling. Fourth, the implementation of supplementary as well as alternative approaches and interventions should be considered in the future. Fifth, the use of other instruments (both qualitative and quantitative, used separately and also together) is needed to establish the feasibility of the approach discussed in this article. Sixth, short-, medium-, and long-term follow-up of participants is key to ensuring that their experience of the intervention is positive and contributes to their sense of meaning, purpose, and hope in the workplace. Lastly: Bain (2005) contends that people with artistic and creative talent and inclinations often take up 'secondary' employment to sponsor their artistic (creative) work and enable them to earn a living income and simultaneously allow them to enact their artistic talents and inclinations. Stereotypes abound that it is unwise to venture into artistic careers, and, instead to venture into careers that would ensure that they receive a living income (as I demonstrated in this article). Regrettably, this often results in artistic people experiencing a deep sense of frustration and unfulfilment in their career-lives. This matter deserves the attention of all stakeholders and should be addressed from an early age onwards.

Conclusion

This case study provided evidence of the value of counselling for career construction for an artistic young girl. Moreover, it demonstrated how objective scores and subjective stories could be elicited and integrated to obtain a comprehensive 'portrait' of the participant. Transformation was achieved in that the participant obtained self-insight and was prepared to rethink certain career decisions that had been based on incorrect assumptions. The research also showed that identity can be conceived as both stable and dynamic (hence the notion of adaptability) and how in a career counselling session it is possible to use quantitative and narrative assessment instruments simultaneously. The research also supported the view that counselling for career construction counselling should commence in people's early years (earlier even than was the case in the current study) to boost children's identity formation and improve their chances to establish and enact feasible career-life goals. Doing so will contribute to their identification and execution of individual life projects (Cochran, 2011; Savickas, 2019), make meaning, experience a sense of purpose in their career-lives, and enact their central life goals in the process (Maree, 2021; Rabat & Freedman, 2019-02-24).

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Notes on contributor

Prof. Kobus Maree is a past editor of a number of scholarly journals. He has authored or coauthored 90+ peer-reviewed articles and 50+ books/ book chapters on career counselling, research, and related topics since 2011. A regular keynote speaker across the world, he has also accepted invitations to spend time as a visiting professor at various international universities. He was awarded fellowships of the International Association of Applied Psychology and the Psychological Society of South Africa.

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