

## Editorial: Reassessing Career Counseling in Africa in the 21st Century: Breathing New Life into Qualitative Approaches

Jacobus G. Maree

University of Pretoria

Address correspondence to Professor Jacobus G. Maree, Faculty of Education, Aldoel Building F214, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002, South Africa. E-mail: kobus.maree@up.ac.za

As the title of the Editorial alludes, the theme of qualitative assessment plays a prominent role in virtually every article in this issue. I am delighted by our authors' sterling attempts to reassess career counseling in Africa in the 21st century and breathe new life into qualitative approaches. Allow me to explain what I mean.

### Global Changes that Impact the Practice of Career Counseling in General

The ripple effect of an ever-shrinking workforce fuelled by factors such as downsizing and a downturn in the global economy, in a sense necessitates and facilitates a change in the way people are assessed and career counseling is administered in the 21st century. Changes in people's lifestyles from the globalizing economy have brought fresh challenges to the theory and practice of career counseling. Moreover, new careers requiring innovative skills and compliant attitudes are constantly emerging. Career counseling has to keep abreast of these developments if it is to remain relevant to 21st century society (Savickas 2006a, 2006b; Watson 2004). The days are over when workers fitted their lives into their work and wove their very existence around their careers. Today, ideally speaking, work is viewed as a mechanism to help persons become more whole; to find deep meaning in their lives and to contribute to society (Savickas, 2009a, 2009b). Qualitative assessment strategies are utilized to explore clients' guiding fictions (Savickas, 2005), to assist them to write their life stories and identify major life themes, and to contextualize questionnaire results (such as aptitude, interests and values).

### The Effect of Global Changes on the Practice of Career Counseling In Africa

The African continent is plagued by a myriad of economic challenges, such as an alarming increase in the number of retrenchments and spiralling unemployment and retrenchments, as well as resultant, ever-increasing stress levels and an accompanying escalation in mental health-related diseases. The challenges facing career counseling in Africa in the 21st century are numerous and daunting. Consequently, academics and practitioners repeatedly criticize the continued use in African contexts of assessment instruments that had either been developed some time ago, or not standardized on a representative sample of African populations. Despite Savickas' contention that counselors should seek an approach to enable, rather than to fit (Savickas, 1993; 2004), career counseling in Africa is still characterized by psychometric assessment procedures or established ('proven') assessment methods (Stead & Watson,

1998). Globally, however, career counselors wishing to administer sophisticated, contemporary career counseling, agree on the importance of taking other factors than scores into account as well; *id est*, the merits of a combined qualitative-quantitative approach are recognized and accepted. The value of qualitative approaches is accepted as a *fait accompli*; the sense of deep respect for individuals that is conveyed during the administration and interpretation of qualitative assessment strategies is a welcome, timely and fundamentally important addition to the practice of career counseling.

### The State of Career Counseling Theory in Africa

Decades ago already, calls were made globally for changes to the theory and practice of career counseling in Africa. Career counseling theory and practice have repeatedly been accused of failing to address the needs of non-white, non-Western, non-'standard' populations (MacMahon & Patton, 2002), *inter alia*, because objective methods used in psychology in the past often disregarded the subjective and personal meaning people attach to their lives. This disregard is ever-present, despite the fact that there has been an increased awareness that the therapeutic dimension which characterizes career counseling contexts narrows the gap between counseling and psychotherapy (Savickas, 1993). Regrettably, though, whereas the theory of career counseling has evolved considerably elsewhere in the world, and qualitative approaches are now accepted as a vital facet of career counseling, too little development has taken place in Africa contributing significantly to the ever-expanding body of literature in the field.

A reconsideration of the epistemological paradigms that underlie local research endeavours therefore seems not only advisable but essential. The current use of assessment instruments in Africa – of which the vast majority were developed in the United States and Europe – to assess, for example, intellectual ability and personality are, at best, inappropriate and at worst, potentially dangerous. To be sure, the shortcomings of traditional assessment instruments in career counseling have become so apparent in 21st century Africa that many cannot be used to facilitate appropriate career counseling (Maree, Bester, Lubbe & Beck, 2001; Maree, Ebersöhn & Biagione-Ceronio, 2010). An appropriate paradigm applicable to the large majority of the continent's population that remains in desperate need of any form of career counseling is required. Any approach that excludes the vast majority of Africans will, at best, achieve only limited success.

Savickas (2006a, b; 2007a, b) has shown the world how theories can be merged (blended) to form a grand theory of career

counseling that may provide the fundamentals for enhanced career counseling practice in North America and Europe. African career counseling practitioners would do well to follow his lead in their efforts to indigenize career theories.

### Key Questions Regarding Career Counseling that Need to be Answered in the 21st Century

In the next few years, a number of key questions that relate to the theory and practice of career counseling in Africa in particular, needs to be answered. We are, among others, looking for an approach that might help career counselors address the following key 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, p. 52).

I should like to add the following questions to Winslade’s: What approach would be most useful *and respectful* to a:

- blind young girl in a remote rural village in Zambia?
- 15-year-old boy from Soshanguve who sells newspapers to support his seven siblings?
- homeless learner in rural Sekhukuneland who lives next to a shebeen that is open 24/7?
- man who suffered brain damage in the war in Darfur?
- child soldier who lost his entire family in the Congo?
- mentally challenged woman who spends her days in abject poverty in a squatter camp outside Cairo?
- criminal serving a lengthy prison sentence in Ethiopia?
- six-year old rape victim suffering from AIDS in Kenya?
- child-headed family, such as the three orphans (photograph in Figure 1) living on their own in a decrepit shack (Hammanskraal, South Africa)?

Knowing only too well that it is still the (largely black) rural and township sectors of Africa that are disadvantaged by the lack of appropriate assessment instruments, we need to strive towards finding ways to resolve this situation. In addition, we need to investigate ways in which the lack of appropriate assessment instruments affects the practice of career counseling in Africa, and design ways to address this challenge. A dire need exists to consider not only the short-term but, more importantly, also the longer-term outlook for the practice of career counseling in 21st century Africa.

### How Can We Best Address the Questions Raised thus Far?

The question is often raised about the viability of adapting career counseling assessment instruments developed in North America and Europe so that their use will impact positively and significantly on career counseling in Africa. As I indicated earlier in this editorial, other scholars have called for research into theoretical approaches and tests based on these approaches that are more appropriate in a developing (and in this case, African) country context than traditional ones. The answer seems to lie somewhere in between. Instead of adopting an and/or approach, it seems advisable to adapt a “both . . . and . . .” approach; *id est*, an inclusive approach using what is available, while at the same time developing our own theoretical models and basing the development of our assessment instruments on



Figure 1. Guest Editor with members of a child-headed family from an informal settlement in South Africa. What career paths are possible for children in these atypical families?

these models. In addition, it is worth noting Savickas’ (2006b) comment in this regard, namely that it is not a matter of whether one model is good and the other not good: the overriding factor is the type of economy in which psychologists are working, and the way in which any given country’s economy is structured. The structure of an economy has a direct influence on and, in fact, co-dictates the way in which career counseling is presented.

### What Can Readers Expect in this Issue?

Given this brief background, the contributions in this issue should provide food for thought for career counselors locally and further afield, who devote their lives to the practice of career counseling and attempt to be useful to their clients as the latter design their lives. The themes that emerge from the respective contributions represent the issues that lie at the heart of our debates on the state of career counseling in Africa. I sincerely hope the collective contribution will provide useful ideas in this regard. The contributions to this special issue can be grouped into a number of logical clusters, each of which will be briefly below.

### Innovative Approaches to Career Counseling

In the leading article, Maree sets the tone for the issue with a brief overview of the advancement of postmodern approaches in career counseling. Critically evaluating the influence of changes in the workplace on people’s lifestyles, he elucidates the influence of the different waves in psychology and the economy on helping models in career counseling, and the way in which these waves have shaped the theory and practice of career counseling. Lastly, the article explicates the fairly recent emergence of constructivist approaches – concurrently with the emergence of life designing – and elaborates on career adaptability as a pivotal career counseling aim.

In our second contribution to this section, Maree exemplifies the use of the Three Anecdotes Technique in career-story interviewing. Di Fabio elaborates on the importance of the new paradigm for career construction and self-constructing (life designing interventions) and describes a new, strengthened career genogram for life designing, defining its configuration, administration and intervention modalities. In describing the utility of

quadrant mapping for resilience and career counseling, Ebersöhn adds another exciting perspective to the existing and ever-growing array of qualitative techniques in career counseling. In the last article in this section, Bester and Quinn explain how a personal portfolio could facilitate the narration of an adolescent's life story.

### **Cross-cultural Issues in Career Counseling**

In the first contribution to this segment, Maree, Ebersöhn and Biagione-Ceronio deal with the career counseling needs of disadvantaged clients by describing the effect of narrative career facilitation on the personal growth of a disadvantaged student. Despite the fact that the intervention required valuable time for the participant to prepare and participate in the sessions, he experienced the intervention positively and displayed an increased hunger for success, an improved future perspective, and a more positive academic self-image.

Arguing that quantitative evaluation complements qualitative approaches, including the predictive value of establishing a client's level of intellectual functioning in a comprehensive post-modern approach to career assessment, Shuttleworth-Edwards highlights research outcomes regarding an investigation into WAIS-III test performance (English administration) for a southern African sample. She fittingly concludes that failure to heed culturally induced performance decrements for individuals with English as their second language, and/or with disadvantaged educational backgrounds, might result in underestimating educational and career potential. Elbe, Madsen, and Midtgaard, on the other hand, examined similarities and differences in motivational factors, and reasons for running between Kenyan and Danish elite runners. The results contribute to debates on the superiority of Kenyan runners and increase awareness of cultural sensitivity in sports psychology studies. In our last article in this section, Nkoane and Alexander employ an eclectic mix of theoretical underpinnings, ranging from constructivism to postmodernism to show the relationship within these approaches. In addition, they interrogate the feasibility of narrative approaches to career counseling within the life orientation learning area/subject in South African schools.

### **Exposing Students to the World of Work**

In our penultimate section, a stellar array of authors elaborate on various aspects of exposing students to the world of work. Coetzee and Beukes first investigate the relationship between the employability and career support satisfaction and emotional intelligence of a convenience sample of predominantly black South African adolescents. They conclude that emotional intelligence and employability were significantly related to the participants' satisfaction with the career preparation support they received.

Different from many other disciplines, professional psychology does not offer students at the undergraduate level the opportunity to see or experience the work environment. This may result in students contemplating a career in clinical psychology, e.g., with little or no idea of the context in which this profession functions. Against this background, Pillay and Kritzingler developed a volunteer programme to give undergraduate psychology students some exposure to an inpatient mental health context. The findings indicate that the vast majority of volunteers joined for the experience, or to enhance their applications for postgraduate training.

In the last contribution to this section, Hacýfazlýođlu, Özdemir and Uzunboylu examined the reflections of junior stu-

dents in the teacher education department at a private (foundation) university in Istanbul, on being involved in a social responsibility project. Not unlike the students in Pillay and Kritzingler's research, these student teachers confirmed that the project served them well as an internship experience.

### **Brief Reports**

Uzunboylu and Karahoca firstly elaborate on research and trends in career counseling published in selected professional sources during the period 1980-2010. In the second contribution to this section, Nel delineates the merits of narrative-based responses which allowed participants from the †Khomani San community to express themselves more freely than in semi-structured interviews. Basing his argument on the theoretical framework provided by the concept of discrepant experiences and critical community psychology, he explains and interprets the reasons why more information was revealed in the narrative-based responses, concluding that unequal distribution of power between the researcher and research participants (often so typical of positivist approaches) lies at the heart of such matters. Daleen Alexander subsequently elucidates the perceptions of a middle-aged, previously disadvantaged South African woman regarding her career aspirations and her promotability. Not unexpectedly, the themes that emerged centred on external and internal barriers that the participant perceived to impact her career development, highlighting the relationship between thoughts and career-exploratory behaviour. In our fourth brief report, Mudhovozi investigated factors that mediate the choice of psychology as a major subject by undergraduate students. Analyzing data obtained from a convenience sample from two higher education institutions in Southern Africa, the author found that social influences affect students' choice of psychology as a major subject. In our fifth contribution to this section, Mwamwenda investigated motives for teaching career entry by students at a large South African university. Like other researchers, the author found that participants indicated predominantly extrinsic reasons, such as good salary, good employment prospects, job status, as well as power and control, for choosing teaching as a career. Intrinsic motives, such as love and passion for the teaching profession, as well as a keen interest in facilitating the growth and development of children, and even altruistic motivations also emerged as reasons for choosing teaching as a career.

In our second to last brief report, Seabi, Alexander, and Maite then shed light on the perceptions of parental involvement in career development amongst disadvantaged adolescents from the perspective of Social Cognitive Career Theory. The authors demonstrate the significant impact that parents can have on adolescents' career development.

Daleen Alexander, Joseph Seabi, and David Bischof conclude this section by reporting on a project that utilised a postmodern group assessment procedure to explore the career perceptions of Grade 11 learners from disadvantaged communities. The authors conclude that narrative career counseling in a group setting may provide a possible alternative to individual career counseling and assessment with disadvantaged learners. Given the dearth of studies that investigate and report on this important matter, this study deserves the attention of practitioners, theorists and policy makers.

### **Reaction Article**

In our reaction article, Brendan Morgan analyses and responds to the articles published in this special issue of the *Jour-*



*nal of Psychology in Africa (JPA)* in a superb manner. His thematic analysis of the content of the articles and yielded three common themes, namely: (a) the shift toward postmodern career counseling, (b) the importance of cultural sensitivity in career counseling practice and (c) adolescents' career development. Locating himself in the context of the changing nature of the world of work and the associated changes in career counseling theory and practice, he correctly contends that growing evidence suggest that the use of postmodern techniques can help practitioners address the limitations of traditional career counseling approaches. However, he alerts professionals in the field of career counseling to the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of qualitative techniques in (South) Africa, especially because these techniques have only recently emerged as alternative approaches to psychometric testing. Quite rightly, he recommends that longitudinal and group comparison studies be conducted as a matter of urgency to explore the effectiveness of postmodern (qualitative) career counseling techniques in Africa.

Morgan concludes his article by referring to the positive tone that characterizes all contributions. He applauds the underlying consensus that rather than focus on the problems related to erstwhile career practices, practitioners should transform their practice and focus on techniques that work with clients from diverse contexts.

### Concluding Comments

The contributors have individually and collectively succeeded in identifying gaps in the career counseling literature and have succeeded in addressing these hiatuses. In addition, they have contributed to the notion of career convergence (converging or blending theoretical approaches to career counseling), which is now globally accepted. In so doing, they have provided evidence that the core concepts of 20th century career theories and vocational guidance techniques can be reformulated to fit the post-modern economy (Savickas et al., 2009). The authors show an acute awareness of the need for career counselors to be useful to people trying to make sense of their lives. The contributions reflect a decreased emphasis on the concept of maturity, or climbing the developmental ladder, and an increased emphasis on the notion of adaptability and lifelong learning, and a shift from the construct of personality and vocational personality types to identity (Savickas, 2006b, 2008, 2009b).

In sum, the contributions affirm the belief that life-construction and life designing with their strong emphasis on empowering persons to 'make meaning,' to write their own life stories and to construct their own careers and futures, constitute the fourth wave in career counseling. There is a growing realization that career counseling could help clients find preferred solutions to challenges in an ever-changing world by creating ever more positive storylines that are based on respect and dignity (and live these scripts). Such enabling stories would support the design lives that are more whole and more complete (Savickas, 2009b).

The *JPA* prides itself on being a conduit of critical inquiry, rather than advocacy writing, and I am pleased with these critical voices, and trust that they will stimulate debate on the important topics covered here. As can be expected, readers should not expect clear-cut, uniform 'answers' to all the questions raised. Instead, they should make up their own minds about the various issues. After all, the contributions stem from the authors' own perspectives, which are, of necessity, bound in a

unique location, time and space. Contributors promote an understanding of the changing approach to career counseling internationally and the extent to which novel approaches are already being applied in an African context. They contributors debate the nature of continuing inequitable relationships in career counseling, provide guidelines for overcoming current problems in career counseling in Africa. They also suggest ways in which the needs of all clients can be addressed, and map the way ahead. This wide-ranging collection of trans-institutional, trans-national, trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions, emulates the standard of previous contributions to the *JPA*. Through these contributions, we hope to stimulate the debate on career counseling in Africa and expand the network of academics in African countries, in other developing regions, and in the rest of the world.

Enjoy reading this issue of the *JPA*.

### References

- Maree, J. G., Bester, S. E., Lubbe, C., & Beck, C. (2001). Post-modern career counselling to a gifted black youth: A case study. *Gifted Education International*, 15(3), 324–338.
- Maree, J. G., Ebersöhn, L., & Biagione-Cerone, A. (2010). The effect of narrative career facilitation on the personal growth of a disadvantaged student — A case study. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 20(3), 403–412.
- McMahon, M., & Patton, W. (2002). Using qualitative assessment in career counselling. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 2, 51–66.
- Savickas, M. L. (1993). Career counselling in the post-modern era. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, 7(3), 205–215.
- Savickas, M. L. (2004, April). *Career as story. Using life themes in counseling*. Thirteenth National Conference of Australian Association of Career Counselors, Coolangatta, Australia.
- Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42–70). New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Savickas, M. L. (2006a, April). *Counselling for career construction (facilitating the storied approach in career counselling: practical implementation)*. Fifteenth Australian Career Counselling Conference, Sydney, Australia.
- Savickas, M. L. (2006b, July). *A vocational psychology for the global economy*. Keynote presentation, American Psychological Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Savickas, M. L. (2007a). Internationalisation of counselling psychology: Constructing cross-national consensus and collaboration. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 56(9), 182–188.
- Savickas, M. L. (2007b). Reshaping the story of career counselling. In J. G. Maree (Ed.), *Shaping the story – A guide to facilitating narrative counselling* (pp. 1–3). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.
- Savickas, M. L. (2008, July). Interactive workshop on life design counselling. Thirty-ninth International Congress of Psychology, Berlin, Germany.
- Savickas, M. L. (2009a, April). *Utilising early anecdotes in counselling in the 21st century*. Keynote presentation, SA Society for Clinical Hypnosis, Pretoria, South Africa.

- Savickas, M. L. (2009b, April). *The essentials of life design counseling*. Invited Public lecture, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Savickas, M. L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder J. P., Duarte, M. E., Guichard, J., . . . Van Vianen, A. E. M. (2009). *Life design: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century*. Position Paper on Life Design Counselling. Rootstown, OH: Northeastern Ohio University, College of Medicine.
- Stead, G. B., & Watson, M. B. (1998). Career research in Africa: Challenges for the future. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 52, 289–299.
- Watson, M. B. (2004). Post-modern (narrative) career counselling and education. *Perspectives in Education*, 22(1), 169–170.
- Winslade, J. (2007). Constructing a career narrative through the care of the self. In J. G. Maree (Ed.), *Shaping the story – A guide to facilitating narrative counselling* (pp. 52–62). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

### Author Note

In conclusion, I wish to thank the Editor-in-Chief, Professor Elias Mpofu, for the marvellous opportunity to edit a special issue of JPA and for his sterling help in putting this issue together. I also wish to thank colleagues involved in the editorial and publishing process for their sterling help and support. Our copy editors, Cecilia du Toit and Carol van der Westhuizen and our editorial secretary, Moipone Williams, deserve a special word of thanks for their help and dedication. I wish to thank Ms. Janet Field, publishing editor, sincerely for her marvellous help and commitment. Last, but not least, I wish to thank our reviewers who reviewed the articles in such a professional, prompt and selfless manner. Without your support, there would have been no special issue.