

**The influence of group life-design-based
counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-
construction**

by

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May 2020

*“The choices made during formative periods of development,
shape the course of lives”*

(Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001, p. 187).

Declaration

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I hereby submit this thesis, **The influence of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction**, for the degree PhD in Education at the University of Pretoria. I declare that this work is my own and has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

I adhered to all other rules and regulations as stipulated in the University of Pretoria's examination policy.

.....*Maree*.....

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EXTERNAL CODER'S CONFIRMATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Dr Erna W Gerryts



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ABSTRACT

Developing personal goals by exploring options, establishing prosocial skills, exploring interests and applying good self-regulation practices early on in life, can amount to major benefits for children's prospective professions (Paszowska-Rogacz & Kabzińska, 2012). Numerous scholars emphasise the significance of and the need for early career counselling, as discussed by Härtung, Porfeli and Vondracek (2005), as well as by Watson and McMahon (2005). These scholars concluded that progress made during different stages of early childhood career development affects the choices that children make about the world of work and it also ensures identity development and interpersonal growth. Appropriate career advice can also assist school-going children to enhance their academic progress and to remain occupied in and engaged with education. The purpose of this study was to explore how life-design-based counselling influences Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction.

A qualitative, group-based intervention methodology was used to address the research questions. The intervention was based on the *Career Interest Profile* (CIP, Version 6) (Maree, 2017) and the life design counselling methods as discussed in Savickas et al. (2009). Non-probability, convenience sampling was used to select twelve Grade 7 learners, aged 12 and 13, to participate in this study. Themes and sub-themes were established, and Thematic Analysis was utilised to identify and analyse the data.

Career development is a life-long process and young individuals should be supported and guided as they strive towards their goals. By making learners aware of future career aspirations, they were inspired to construct themselves more appropriately and re-consider perceptions and behaviours regarding schooling. Ultimately, academic self-construction was enhanced through the collaborate processes of life-design-based counselling. The possibilities for future research should assess the value of life-design-based counselling during early childhood development and the integration thereof within schools and the curriculum, so as to benefit the career development of young learners.

Key terms:

Life-design-based counselling, academic self-construction, career counselling, early childhood, career development, school guidance.

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List of abbreviations

SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
CIP	Career Interest Profile
HOD	Head of Department
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Careers constitute a fundamental part of our lives, as identity and self-actualisation are based on perceptions of our achievement in respect of careers (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001). People perceive their self-worth in a positive light when they experience job satisfaction, success and achievement in the working environment. The selection of a career should therefore be done with great care and honesty, as well as in all earnestness. Making decisions regarding future aspirations starts early in life when children develop interests and become curious about the world around them (Maree, 2018). The career development process is not a separate process that needs to be delayed to secondary school age, but it should be realised from a very young age. It is of fundamental importance to enable children to construct themselves and to identify their central career-life themes. Although children are uncertain about making such ‘big’ decisions so early in life, one would be naive to think that these initial choices are not important. This notion is reflected on by Gottfredson (2002) and Super (1990) who state that career development is important throughout the entire human life-span. Their findings are supported by Maree who argues that they “demonstrate the importance of promoting career development and life design in the early years and underscore the importance of completing developmental tasks proficiently in childhood to motivate young people to set and realize specific goals, make meaning in their lives, and pursue purpose” (Maree, 2017, p. 1).

Appropriate career advice can assist school-going children to enhance their academic progress and to remain occupied in and engaged with education (Hooley, 2014). Young learners need to be provided with the necessary guidance towards their lifelong career development. They need to be empowered to make informed decisions about possible careers and to appreciate the role that their current learning plays in these decisions. This was the essence of my research: to assist Grade 7 learners with life-design counselling that would have a positive effect on their career development, which in turn would influence their level of self-understanding, information, skills, motivation, and developmental attributes to construct themselves adequately in an academic environment.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

The first time that children in South Africa are formally introduced to the world of work, is in Grade 7. This occurs at school where the Life Orientation teacher provides the learners with certain activities in the process of self-discovery towards a possible future career. In terms of the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), minimal hours are allocated in the school curriculum to the sub-theme “world of work” in Life Orientation (CAPS, 2011, p. 10).

I work in a primary school as Head of Department (HOD): Educational Guidance, Academic Coordinator and subject head. At the beginning of each term, school management and subject heads have subject meetings to do planning, look at proposed outcomes and discuss any problems that arise, so as to improve our teaching and learning. I attend these meetings, especially for Life Orientation, as this subject is considered part of my portfolio. During one of these meetings, the Grade 7 teacher mentioned that she would like our viewpoints on some interesting occurrences. She was of the opinion that we could do much more in respect of career guidance. I was intrigued by her remarks and proceeded to observe a few of her classes. While I observed the Grade 7 learners in their Life Orientation classroom, it became evident that uncertainty reigned, as the learners cited multitudes of career aspirations. The learners also mentioned some viewpoints and opinions held by their parents and other important role players in their lives. These included phrases such as: “I do not know what I want to become when I finish school”; “I am not very smart, as my marks are very low”; “I am not able to do mathematics, so I can never become a doctor”; “I never want to work as it makes my mother so angry”; “My dad has been searching for work for two years”; “I have no idea what my parents do – something with computers, I think”. I also noticed that the children had very limited knowledge of the vast number of possible careers that are actually available. Through further probing into these responses, it became clear to me that numerous of these thought processes and reasoning were due to limited exposure to and insight into careers and what they entail. The Grade 7 learners also had misguided perceptions about certain occupations, limited support from their parents and inadequate experiences in respect of the most-desired careers.

Having realised how limited, misguided and inadequate the current career experiences of these young children were, I became convinced that there was a serious need to focus on and confront this issue. The career construction theory of Savickas (2005) and the self-construction theory of Guichard (2005) shed light on how children can be guided towards

certain designing processes by drawing on career-life stories, where their goals can be refocused as a means of career intervention. Individual thought processes, previous experiences, and future goals can be utilised to equip learners with the necessary tools to guide their career development. By using such an approach during Life Orientation classes and/or career counselling, the learners involved in my study were helped to construct themselves and their careers from a young age onwards – as a precursor to eventually designing successful lives. Improvement of their academic self-construction was intended to be facilitated simultaneously.

The current study endeavoured to discover how life-design-based counselling can be used to contribute to and inform the career aspirations of Grade 7 learners. The research attempted to assess the effect on Grade 7 learners in general (i.e. their level of self-understanding, information, skills, motivation and developmental attributes) and their academic self-construction in particular.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this study, I aimed to investigate what influence life-design-based counselling had on the academic self-construction of Grade 7 learners.

1.3.1 The rationale for this study

The rationale for the current research could be linked to my first-hand observation of the limited knowledge that Grade 7 learners displayed of the world of work and potential careers. I therefore wished to see if it was possible to improve these learners' lives by helping them with their academic self-construction through life-design-based counselling. According to Kelly (1966), self-constructs (beliefs, ways of seeing the world and the perception of reality) may assist children in becoming active participants in their own development and establishing definite career aspirations in the long term. Developing personal goals by exploring options, establishing prosocial skills, exploring interests and applying good self-regulation practices early on in life, can amount to major benefits for children's prospective professions (Paszowska-Rogacz & Kabzińska, 2012). Maree (2017, p. 2) argues that “[f]rom a very early age, children begin to fulfil a wide variety of roles and take part in a broad array of behaviours and dialogues that gradually enable them to pursue meaning and purpose in their lives. Doing so promotes their self-understanding and clarifies their sense of identity”.

1.3.2 The need to make learners aware of future goals and aspirations early on in life

During the second part of the previous century, a shift occurred towards a life-span concept of career development, where career development is an ongoing process that already starts off in early childhood (Super, 1957; 1990). People develop over time and changes occur continuously as we establish a good sense of self and realise our goals in respect of occupations. The need to make learners aware of future goals and aspirations can be grounded in Super's life and career development *Stage 1: Growth Age 0–14 Characteristics: Development of self-concept, attitudes, needs and general world of work*¹. Here, he emphasises the importance of early career development and the effects these may have on long-term occupational growth (Super, 1990). Children need to be aware of who they are, what they are working towards, and how they are going to be able to achieve certain goals. If we can actively collaborate with learners in their aim to develop self-construction during the primary years of schooling, it may contribute to better career development during the remaining stages of life.

Numerous studies have indicated that higher educational aspirations may lead to improved motivation, self-esteem, and higher achievement and attainment in education (Flouri, 2006; Jacob & Wilder, 2010). As individuals work towards aspired careers and other goals, these actions effect other fulfilments, as “individual aspirations and expectations are considered important because they might influence key choices and outcomes such as educational achievement and occupational attainment” (St Clair & Benjamin, 2011, p. 40). By making learners aware of future career aspirations and goals, they may be inspired to construct themselves more appropriately and re-consider perceptions and behaviours regarding schooling. Other sources that emphasise the significance of advocating the need for early career counselling include Härtung, Porfeli and Vondracek (2005), as well as Watson and McMahon (2005), who concluded that progress made during different stages of early childhood career development affects the choices that children make about the world of work and it also ensures their identity development and interpersonal growth.

The study in hand aimed to indicate whether effective life design counselling of Grade 7 learners co-determines effective and improved academic self-construction.

¹ Emphasis is placed on the initial Growth phase (Super, 1990), as this phase highlights the crucial career development that emerges during early childhood. For the aim of my study, this phase is regarded as the foundation for future career development, as making progress during this phase is essential for making a smooth transition to the subsequent phases.

1.3.3 The justification for doing this research

While considering learners' views and opinions about careers (as expressed in the background to this study), I became increasingly aware that they had limited access to the knowledge, skills and information needed to make real informed career choices, thus the need for career counselling. This observation was consistent with the following comment: "Students will need to have the skills and competencies required for the option they choose" (Hughey & Hughey, 1999, p. 207). Skill and competencies are especially important for Grade 7 learners, as they are already considered to be part of the senior phase of education. The aforementioned assertion supports the view of Schultheiss (2008, p. 7), who reported that "[d]espite the observation that children spend the majority of their waking hours in school or engaged in school-related work, it seems ironic that so few investigations of children's work behaviour have incorporated schools, academic work, or collaboration with educators".

Currently, the opportunities for the majority of young learners in the early grades to embark on an 'optimal occupational journey' after school seem limited. The extent to which their 'future career world' is accessible and applicable to their current life world and experiences at school is also left undiscovered. The outcomes of my study were hoped to contribute to previous research done on early childhood development and in the field of career guidance and counselling². Since career counselling has received so little attention in the primary school curriculum, parents and teachers also do not consider it as a focus point of discussion or development. Awareness has to be raised about the need for earlier intervention in respect of career construction, so that schools and parents would realise the importance of guiding learners towards career readiness well in advance. By the time young people reach adolescence, they will have acquired predispositions and attitudes based on life experiences (Evans, 1997), which emphasise the need to provide young learners with the necessary guidance, knowledge and competencies when they consider their future careers, in advance.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that guided the focus of this research took into consideration the rationale and purpose of this study.

1.4.1 Primary research question

My primary research question was as follows:

² See paragraph 1.6 for definitions of these terms.

What is the influence of group life-design-based counselling on grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

1.4.2 Secondary research questions

The **secondary questions** that were addressed in this study were the following:

Descriptive questions

- What are the essential aspects of group-based academic self-construction programmes that are used to promote Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?
- What are the general aspects of group life design-based counselling aimed at enhancing Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

Exploratory question

- How did Grade 7 learners experience the group life-design-based counselling intervention executed in my study?

1.5 ASSUMPTIONS IN AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

My main assumption in this study was that there is a definite need for career construction, already during the primary school years. Ultimately, academic self-construction may be enhanced through the collaborate processes of life-design-based counselling. I assumed that by addressing learners' academic self-perception and by supporting them to construct their career stories, they would develop the necessary behaviours that would promote career resilience and/or self-construction – both of which would promote career development in the future.

Some of the objectives pursued in this study involved investigating the extent to which life-design-based counselling benefits learners in the early years of their lives by helping them to begin to

- create opportunities for personal and interpersonal growth;
- develop assertiveness and emotional intelligence;
- be motivated to achieve academically;
- make meaning of their life worlds;
- pursue their purpose in life by constructing their careers;
- identify and become aware of prospective career interests.

In summary, I assumed that Grade 7 learners should be enabled and empowered to make informed decisions regarding their desired careers and future career goals. This assumption is supported by the following observation by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2004, p. 12): “Young people need to make a smooth transition from primary school to the initial years of secondary education: the choices that they make at this point have major implications for later education and work options. Career guidance needs to be part of the process that helps them to make a smooth transition”.

1.6 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY USED

The following section serves to clarify key terms used in this study.

1.6.1 Career counselling

Career counselling in the context of this study refers to the process and use of narrative approaches where learners are encouraged and supported to construe, make meaning of and develop potential careers. The life design framework that was implemented in this intervention study included storied approaches, which “encourage clients to make meaningful sense of their career development” (Watson & McMahon, 2009, p. 471). Learners were thus considered creators of their own careers, with the support of counselling based on the learners’ personal experiences and perceptions. The objective of career counselling is after all to improve the lives of those involved, by making appropriate career decisions.

1.6.2 Career construction theory

Career construction theory emphasises how, what, why and by which means people construct careers. Applying career construction to this study in the course of the counselling offered enabled me to determine how the learners make meaning of their lives, based on themes that arise from their stories. Savickas (2005, p. 42) defined career construction as follows: “The theory of career construction explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behaviour”. This theory is based on three components – career adaptability, vocational personality and life themes.

1.6.3 Life design career counselling

Life design counselling relies on stories/narratives that are worked through during the counselling process. The client (in collaboration with the counsellor) makes meaning of previous events that are ultimately related to career choices and other important decisions made in life. According to Savickas et al. (2009, p. 245), “[t]he life-design counselling

framework implements the theories of self-construction and career construction that describe vocational behaviour and its development. The framework is structured to be lifelong, holistic, contextual and preventive”. Life-design-based methods of enquiry were used to achieve the research objectives set in this study.³

1.6.4 Career adaptability

Career adaptability refers to the ability to adapt, without great difficulty, to new circumstances in environmental contexts. The term ‘career adaptability’ evolved from career maturity based on the life-span, life-space theory (Savickas, 1997). Adaptability was adjusted as a single construct to explain career development and readiness in children, where the essence lies in the development of the self. Career adaptability can ultimately be defined as “the readiness to cope with the predictable task of preparing for and participating in the work role with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working condition” (Savickas, 1997, p. 8).

1.6.5 Self-construction

Guichard’s (2005) theory of self-construction maintains that it is important to understand how people choose specific careers and how their career journeys develop and change over time as they are actively constructing their lives. Self-construction comprises certain activities and roles in which people participate and that are identifiable with their core self. Self-concept is also developed through dialogue about life experiences. As stated by Savickas et al. (2009, p. 241), self-construction emerges through the activities facilitated during co-construction, “along with verbal discourse about these experiences”.

1.6.6 Academic self-construction

In this study I expanded further on the concept of self-construction and defined the concept of academic self-construction. Academic self-construction was evaluated to determine how learners were able to construct themselves in terms of *academic* experiences, perceptions, behaviours, activities, motivation and achievements. Exploring academic self-construction was an important factor in addressing the primary research question of this study, namely ‘What is the influence of group-based life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners’

³ An outline of the life-design-based methods that were utilised during this study can be examined in chapter 3, page 50.

academic self-construction?’ The extent to which life design counselling could benefit young learners’ *academic* self-construction, was also examined.

1.6.7 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy (a construct of social cognitive theory) refers to “people’s judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute the course of action required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy is furthermore regarded as specifically believing in one’s personal agency and the belief that an individual can succeed or accomplish an identified task. Such beliefs or judgements about the self are considered determining factors in respect of efforts and emotional reactions, as well as making choices and participating in activities.

1.6.8 Constructivism

Constructivism was used as the main theoretical paradigm of this study, as elaborated on in the theoretical framework. Constructivism proposes that how people construct their identities and make meaning about the world around them are due to the social environment in which they find themselves as well as the experiences of social discourse between themselves and others.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theoretical perspectives were merged and drawn on to elicit a holistic view of these learners’ current academic experiences and how these affected their career development.

Three main theories that informed the theoretical framework of my study are discussed next:

- Life design, consisting of career construction and self-construction (both these theories are embedded in constructivism) as the main theoretical paradigm
- Social cognitive theory/social cognitive career theory (SCCT)
- Super’s life-span, life-space theory (embedded in career construction)
- Self-efficacy, a construct that relates to social cognitive theory and pertains to matters such as motivation and self-regulated learning, was embedded in my framework.

Next, an overview is provided of the main theories that informed the theoretical framework of my study.

1.7.1 Constructivism

Constructivism views learning as a complex, non-linear and interpretive process of development that evolves as people interact with their environment. Constructivism gives prominence to the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences as “[it] is a psychological theory of learning that describes how structures, language, activity, and meaning-making come about, rather than one that simply characterizes the structures and stages of thought” (Fosnot & Perry, 1996, p. 34). Constructivism was used in this study because of the assumption that ‘cognitive feedforward’ mechanisms (such as anticipation and the active construction of meaning in interaction with environmental events) are highlighted. People act upon their environment and do not merely respond to external forces (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). It can thus be said that people are co-constructors of their own realities and they do not simply react to what is happening around them.

1.7.1.1 Life Design Framework

The life design framework aims to “produce specific knowledge and skills to analyse and cope with ecological contexts, complex dynamics, non-linear causalities, multiple subjective realities and dynamical modelling” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 242). These authors further explain that the way in which individuals construct their identities and knowledge is based on their interactions within social contexts and how they extract meaning from these interactions through discourse. The life design framework was used in my study to co-construct the desired knowledge, skills and attributes to improve primary school learners’ academic self-construction. The framework implemented the self-construction theory of Guichard (2005) and the career construction theory of Savickas (2005). Since individuals engage in life construction to ‘fit’ their unique contexts, life design counselling can be structured as a lifelong, holistic, contextual, and preventive framework (Savickas, 2009).

i Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory promotes the notion of individuals’ co-construction of careers through interpersonal processes, where career choices are constructed to shape a subjective career that holds meaning for the client. In my study, this theory was used within the framework of Social Constructionism (Hartung, 2010).

Career construction theory captures subjective life experiences by eliciting personal stories (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011). During career construction counselling, clients' micro-stories are elicited to help them construct a narrative about the self and work (Savickas, 2013). Key patterns of personal meaning are the focus of the counselling as career-life themes are identified. This viewpoint, as regarded from a constructivist perspective, denotes that analysis of early memories, experiences and aspirations uncovers specific life themes that are relevant to the subjective potential career of an individual.

ii Self-Construction Theory

It is essential that individuals continually reconstruct themselves in the face of changes in economic and working conditions (Guichard, 2009). The theory of self-construction (Guichard, 2005) maintains that knowledge and identity are developed as cognitive processes through dialogue within specific contexts (Savickas et al., 2009). According to Maree (2017), people are active participants who act upon their environment; hence they continually construct their own identities from an early age onwards. He adds that, "[b]eginning in the early years, by carrying out various life roles, people participate in a wide variety of activities and discussions that collectively help them understand and give personal meaning to their numerous experiences as key aspects of their core selves" (Maree, 2017, p. 5).

The essence of the current research was to support learners as they perform these life roles and make meaning of their personal experiences during the formative years. Cardoso (2012) argues that interpersonal experiences – and the meanings ascribed to these experiences – are important facets of the way in which people construct themselves. Experiences can be articulated through narrative stories to yield life themes that guide people in their self-construction.

1.7.2 Social cognitive theory / Social cognitive career theory (SCCT)

Social cognitive theory (SCT) can be interpreted as a reciprocal model of causation, behaviour, cognition, personal factors, and environmental influences that interact with one another. This well-known theory is constructed as a bi-directional process (Bandura, 2011). Bandura's conception of reciprocal determinism entails that (a) personal factors in the form of cognition, affect and biological events, (b) human behaviour, and (c) environmental influences create interactions that result in a triadic reciprocity. This reciprocity is displayed in Figure 1.1. The different factors are not necessarily equal in strength and do not always influence each other simultaneously. Time is an important predictor when determining the

influence exerted by a causal factor. Furthermore, social cognitive theory implies that knowledge acquisition and learning can be ascribed to social interactions, joint experiences, and the meaning people take from these experiences. Behaviour is determined by a person's beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, environment and intentions.

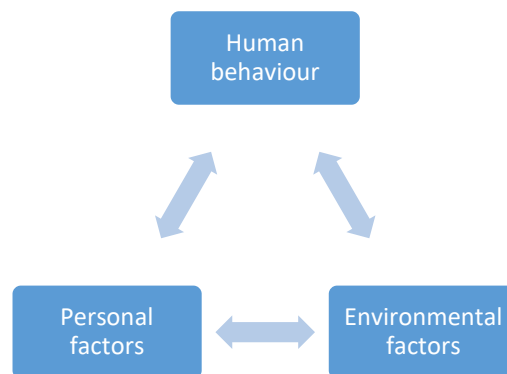


Figure 1.1: Bandura's model illustrating relations between determinants in triadic reciprocal causation

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT), based on Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory above, is relatively new in the field of career counselling and guidance, and it is in contrast to the positive psychology theories (Lent et al., 1994, 2002; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Developed by Lent and others in 1994, SCCT is based on three major variables: (a) outcome expectations; (b) self-efficacy and goals that affect career development; and (c) choice and adaptability (Lent et al., 2002). SCCT explains the extent to which personal, contextual and social cognitive factors influence the development of behaviours that are associated with academic and career interests (Huang & Hsieh, 2011). This framework examines environmental influences to explain how career-related choices are made. Background and contextual influences are taken into consideration when determining why people make certain choices when they consider careers and career goals.

1.7.3 Super's life-span, life-space theory

Career development is a lifelong process because occupational preferences, competencies and life situations all change steadily over time. Super's life-span, life-space framework (1990) on vocational development presents the career as a process of different stages through which people progress during their life-span. Super emphasises the fact that the formation of the self-concept is crucial for career development. Self-concept changes over time and develops through many different experiences. Super also recognises the importance (as discussed in SCCT) of the reciprocal relationship between the person and the environment.

The first stage of this theory – growth – was a fundamental component of the current study, because the sampling population consisted of primary school learners in the initial career development stage of the life-span. As part of the growth stage, children establish a general understanding of the world of work. During this stage, their self-concept, interests, a desire to explore, their capacities, an understanding of their own needs, and a knowledge of work and work roles develop (Super, 1990).

1.7.4 Self-efficacy, motivation and academic achievement

Self-efficacy is not only at the forefront of constructs and assumptions relating to academic motivation and achievement; it is also grounded in the tenets of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy can be defined as the belief that people have of their own capabilities in dealing successfully with situations (Pajares, 2005). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the optimistic belief that individuals have about their own competence to accomplish a goal or task, and to produce a favourable outcome.

1.8 PARADIGM

A paradigm can be explained as a set of beliefs or *worldviews*, and the nature of the relationships in that world (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). It is the manner in which people experience the world around them. Thus, a paradigm can be regarded as a lens through which reality is interpreted (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

In order to address the main research question in this study – *What is the influence of group-based life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?* – I had to establish a paradigm. This paradigm proved to be interpretivist/constructivist in nature, as I was interested in understanding the personal experiences of learners during their academic self-construction. The study was a qualitative research study, as I studied learners in their natural settings and observed how they derived meaning from the world around them. This exploration concurs with the views of Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who argue that the study of humans in their natural setting calls for a qualitative (interpretive) research design. Constructivism (rooted in interpretivism) was used as my main theoretical framework to uncover and interpret the data of life design counselling.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design helps to guide the researcher in the planning and choice of methods that are utilised as part of the research process (Creswell, 2014). Due to the nature of my study, a qualitative research design was used. Qualitative designs are appropriate and suitable when

the researcher aims to understand both phenomena and the meanings that study participants ascribe to them (Creswell, 2003).

1.9.1 Intervention research / narrative enquiry

Intervention research is an innovative addition to research, where the different phases of the research can lead to evidence-based intervention and development. The phases and processes of an intervention research framework are bound to have a significant impact on the behavioural outcomes of individuals as well as the community as a whole (McBride, 2016).

Since the researcher implemented life-design-based counselling, an intervention research design supported the intended purpose. The aim was to determine the influence of group-based life-design-based counselling on the academic self-construction of learners by means of career construction as a collaborative effort between learners and the researcher.

1.9.2 Intervention strategy: Life-design-based counselling

Life-design-based counselling was used as the intervention strategy for this research. As stated previously, life design counselling draws on, integrates, and implements the theories of self-construction (Guichard, 2005) and career construction (Savickas, 2005). Life design counselling is structured to be lifelong, holistic, contextual, and preventive (Maree, 2009, 2017; Savickas et al., 2009).⁴

The intervention activities and techniques that were used are based on the Career Interest Profile (CIP, Version 6) (Maree, 2017), the life design counselling methods referred to in Savickas (2015), and structured or semi-structured interviews.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.10.1 Sampling

Non-probability sampling (more specifically, convenience sampling) was used to select participants to take part in this research study, as this method was most relevant to the research paradigm and research questions that were addressed. Non-probability sampling is considered to be an efficient sampling method in educational settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001), as the participants selected for purposeful sampling are usually accessible and they represent

⁴ A detailed outline and explanation of the steps, techniques and activities relating to the life-design-based framework utilised during this study appear in the literature review, Chapter 2.

specific characteristics of interest to the research topic and questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001)⁵.

1.10.2 Data generation methods

Various forms of data were collected to capture all the useful information required to achieve my research outcomes. For the purposes of this study, qualitative data generation was used.

As mentioned earlier, data was collected by utilising the processes and activities as stipulated in the life design counselling framework. Participants' narratives, collages, favourite sayings, life scripts, etc., were scrutinised for themes and subthemes.

A number of qualitative data-gathering techniques as discussed in Creswell (2014) were also used, and these included observations, interviews and other materials.

1.11 PLANNING FOR QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

1.11.1 Thematic data analysis

Data analysis and interpretation, the last step of the research process, allows for meaning to be generated and conclusions to be drawn. The qualitative method, Thematic Analysis, was used to analyse the data that had been collected during this study. Thematic Analysis is essentially a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The data was analysed only after conclusion of the six-week intervention period. Data reduction and analysis are generally considered a sequential and continuous procedure that guides the complete process. Thematic analysis is a recursive process where one cannot proceed to the next step without having completed the prior phase (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

1.12 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF QUALITATIVE DATA

1.12.1 Trustworthiness

Interpretive analysis is far more subjective and sensitive to the experiences and insights of the researcher than is the analysis of quantitative data. The latter provides an alternative set of criteria that can be used to judge the rigor of interpretive research (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Research needs to be valid and reliable to convince the reader that the findings are worth recognising and of a high standard (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Validity in qualitative research is sufficient to establish reliability, and 'trustworthiness' is the comprehensive term proposed

⁵ Participants and the sampling criteria (as well as a number of aspects related to the research methodology) are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for quality assurance. Qualitative validity (trustworthiness) can also be considered as “the degree to which the interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 407).

1.13 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In a qualitative study, the researcher is considered an instrument in the data generation process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In the current study, the I played a crucial role and assumed multiple responsibilities. The data collected was mediated through interaction and participation of the researcher with and within the research.

1.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are of utmost importance during the entire intervention research process. Certain fundamental principles need to be adhered to when conducting any research that involves humans as research participants. According to Gitlin and Czaja (2016, p. 243), “[t]he protection of the rights, interests, and safety of research participants, regardless of phase along the pipeline, must be considered during the recruitment process, data generation activities, data storage activities, and data analysis and reporting”. Ethical protocols are important as they protect the rights, safety and interest of all involved in the research, as well as promote values and social responsibility. Narrative data can be considered as highly personal accounts and reflections of given life experiences of individuals (Smythe & Murray, 2000). In my study it was fundamentally important to protect and value these experiences and re-collections by considering all ethical aspects.

1.15 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

Chapter 4: Findings of the research

Chapter 5: Discussion of results: Qualitative data and integration of results

Chapter 6: Summary, findings and recommendations

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Children's perceptions about their own academic potential, e.g. marks obtained for certain subjects and early academic experiences, can be an early indication of and a determining factor in choosing a career path. Also, perceptions about different occupations, the availability of certain careers, and parental attributes in guiding their children's options, influence the way in which children reason about specific careers and consider the probability of achieving their career goals (Bandura et al., 2001). These afore-mentioned constructs are highly pertinent to my topic. Young people constantly grow and develop, and therefore they often adjust their career choices as they mature (Super, 1990). During these early stages of the career development process, it is fundamental to support learners in making the necessary and important transitions.

In this chapter, I expand on the background to my research. I discuss the need to consider career development and intervention already during the primary school years and the importance of assisting these learners to adapt to our ever-changing world. Early childhood, schooling and academic achievement are elaborated on next to corroborate the need for early intervention regarding career guidance and counselling. Career aspirations are discussed, followed by the theories that underlie the theoretical framework of this study (including Self- and Career Construction) in order to structure the information in a meaningful way and inform the intervention strategy used in this research.

2.2 CAREER DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1 What is career development?

Career development is a process that begins in early childhood, continues into adulthood and draws to a close in retirement. Moreover, career development is considered to encompass the entire life-span (Brown & Lent, 2012). A career consumes such a large part of an individual's life and plays such a fundamental part in self-fulfilment, identity construction and socio-economic gain that one must seriously consider the role of each phase of the career development process.

Previously, the term career could be described as an objective measure, where individuals' careers were considered as objective possessions. Lately, however, most studies indicate that individuals' careers can be regarded as a subjective measure related to subjective life roles, where people are connected to the social world around them (Hartung, 2005;

Savickas et al., 2009). Career development, as described by various scholars, is a continuous process that involves different crucial life stages that influence career choice and other career-related constructs⁶.

2.2.2 Transformation of the career world

The predominant worldview has shifted away from modernity towards post-modernity, which means that perceptions regarding potential and current careers are more open, global and dynamic. The post-modern world calls for major changes in how people think about and react to the world around them, especially as far as careers and the career development process are concerned (Chen, 1998; Patton, 2005; Stead & Watson, 2006; Maree, 2017). Moreover, we are challenged by technological innovations and globalisation that characterise the 21st century and we have reservations about previous notions of career development (Feller, 2011; Long & Feller, 2013). The effectiveness of previously dominating ‘positivist’ career counselling models is widely reconsidered. Career counselling practices have to keep abreast of the demands of this transformation, as traditional career counselling approaches are “no longer working satisfactorily in a rapidly changing world” (Maree, 2018, p. 2).

Specific reasons for this requirement to adapt to post-modern approaches such as life design counselling are presented in this study.

2.2.3 The role of work and a career in an individual’s life

Ever since ancient times, people have been occupied with work – whether formal or informal – in an effort to build up human civilisation. Most adults devote the bulk of their waking hours to their occupations, more than to any other activity, and a career plays the central role in the lives of most people (Blustein, 2008).

A career does not only provide the resources for meeting one’s needs and desires, but also has other implications such as giving people a sense of identity and belonging; building up communities and societies, and providing personal meaning to life. In the 21st century, individuals associate certain meanings with work. Careers are more likely to be technology sensitive and service driven, which involves taking personal responsibility for the outcomes of work performance (Dubin, 1992). A change of occupational needs leads to a search for meaning through one’s life roles and work activities. Dubin further argues that it is important

⁶ Career development is thoroughly discussed in conjunction with Super’s (1990) Life-span, life-space theory on career development in Section 2.7.4.

to note that most people account for work as a central life interest, which means that they regard performance outcomes of their work as a measure of self-worth, growth and personal satisfaction. Therefore, in a psychological sense, job satisfaction is closely correlated to life satisfaction (Judge & Linger, 2007; Landy, 1978; Moser & Schuler, 2004). More so, doing something meaningful such as having an occupation, can contribute to a person's overall happiness, as having a career contributes to a feeling of accomplishment, status, self-actualisation and competency.

As previously stated, there is a need to reconceptualise the notion of work and the ways in which individuals can achieve their working goals in post-modern times.

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTION

2.3.1 Defining career counselling

Career counselling has many definitions, but for the purposes of this study, it was considered within the frame of a constructivist approach. Career counselling can be defined as a holistic approach where a person's personal life and career are intertwined. Individuals are considered the sole experts of their lives and the active constructors of their careers (McMahon, 2017). As this study was based on the principles and methods as stipulated by career construction and life design, career counselling could further be defined as an interpersonal process of supporting people as they design their lives through work and career (Savickas, 2011). Social constructionist and narrative (storied) qualitative approaches were applied throughout the career counselling process.

According to McMahon (2017), career counselling can hold major benefits for individuals' understanding of themselves, their careers and the world of work, and it helps them to make important occupational, educational and life decisions.

2.3.2 The changing role of career counsellors

Due to the demands of the rapidly changing world, career counsellors have been challenged to adapt their methods and practice. Career counselling and theory have had to change from dominant trait factor approaches to the adoption of alternative lifelong developmental approaches. Traditional career counselling perceptions have also been challenged by more diverse clientele and career issues (Maree & Beck, 2004). The career counselling profession is particularly challenged to fit in with the new global society – to approach careers according to individual scripts (Savickas et al., 2009) and to enable individuals to be as flexible and

adaptable as the rapid, fast-changing economy we are experiencing. It is therefore important to construct a contextualised framework that can make room for the individualised expression of career needs, as individuals derive meaning from personal experiences and cope with their unique contexts.

Alternative approaches to career counselling and guidance, especially qualitative approaches, are increasingly being emphasised, where career counsellors can cater for ever-changing societies and diverse clients (Savickas, 1993; McMahon, Watson & Lee, 2018). Career counsellors need to be responsive not only to the current demands of the labour market, but also to the individual needs of their clients. The realities that learners will be facing in future need to receive sufficient attention so that they will be prepared to realise their intended goals and aspirations. Career counsellors should be equipped to assist their clients and adapt their strategies in accordance with the latter's needs with regard to careers and career counselling changes. New perspectives are essential to guide career counselling practices (Kenny, Blustein, & Meerkins, 2018). In response to this call for adaptation, innovation theories such as life design counselling (Savickas et al., 2009) have been proposed. Relational perspectives can assist career counsellors to effectively address the diverse and complex needs of their clients. Life design counselling can help the 'new-age' counsellor to gain meaningful insight into clients' experiences and address their complex needs.

2.3.3 Career counselling in the Senior Phase

As stated earlier, the 21st century has seen major changes in the life world of most individuals – also of learners in the Senior Phase of schooling. The Senior Phase is made up of learners in Grades 7 to 9, with age averages of thirteen to fifteen years.

The explosive growth in technology and knowledge has brought about the need to equip Senior Phase learners with the knowledge and skills they will need to reach their intended goals. There is a dire need to develop learners' career awareness, curiosity, exploration, adaptability, thinking, and knowledge systems, and to establish a culture of lifelong learning – already during the early years of childhood (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005; Watson & McMahon, 2005). Developing these crucial skills will provide young learners with opportunities to cope with modern career demands, as career intervention during early adolescence leads to more realistic occupational ambitions. According to Savickas (1993), these attitudes towards work are shaped early on in life.

The focus of my study was to determine the influence of life design counselling and career intervention on the career development of learners during early childhood. During the Senior Phase, learners' career aspirations usually become more stable and realistic occupational choices are developed (Howard & Walsh, 2010). Such stabilisation is essential for further career development during adulthood (Hartung et al., 2005). Grade 7 learners were asked to participate in the current study as they are making the transition from primary school to secondary school. During this transition they are faced with tremendous challenges as they develop a sense of who they are, and they are expected to make numerous significant choices regarding their future. This crucial stage provides educators and counsellors a golden opportunity to establish positive career-related attributes and to support learners in making informed decisions regarding their aspired careers. It is important for young learners in the Senior Phase to realise how their current learning affects these decisions, and that school and learning are essential for the development of work beliefs, habits, values and employability skills (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999).

2.4 CAREER ASPIRATIONS

2.4.1 Career aspirations in the South African context

The culture and socio-economic conditions in which learners find themselves have an influence on their life aspirations (Ingrid, Majda & Dubravka, 2009). We are acutely aware of the economic crisis in our country that is reflected by the unemployment rate among young South Africans – despite the many initiatives that have been and are being implemented to address this problem.

Although learners are hopeful and aspire towards a bright future, many have no guarantee that they will be able to reach their goals. Contextual factors such as poverty, low socio-economic status and limited education can become a definite barrier in the realisation of their career aspirations. When learners are hampered by barriers and/or inadequate support systems, they are less likely to translate career interests into goals, or into the actions that are necessary to pursue these goals (Lent et al., 2000). Many adolescents live in poverty or are part of low-income households and unfortunately these living conditions do not only affect their pursuit of desired goals, but also their interest in self-regulated learning and schooling (De Jager, 2011; Roman et al., 2015). Social contexts shape individuals' perceptions and attempts at making sense of their interactions with and within their environments, and all of

these have an influence on how they construct their career purpose and goals, and design a life for themselves (Maree, 2010).

Therefore, it is important that learners be supported in the task of constructing their careers, as this may influence their future career aspirations. By implementing effective interventions designed to minimise the impact of risk, we are able to support and enhance protective factors in the child's environment (Holgate, Evans & Yuen, 2007), which will contribute to overall well-being and enable them to pursue their goals.

2.4.2 Key role players in the development of career aspirations of young learners

Family members and other key role players within a community have a significant influence on shaping the perceptions and decision making of young individuals in their pursuit of future career aspirations (Robbins, Wallis, & Dunston, 2003). Parents, teachers and other role models (mostly those close to them) are regarded as having the most significant influence on learners' prospective professions; therefore, any support and guidance from these persons with regard to careers should be considered seriously.

Previous studies on the career aspirations of many young South African children indicated that the occupational aspirations of young learners are not only consistent with those of their parents, but also to some extent based on the parents' own satisfaction with their occupation (Watson, McMahon & Longe, 2011). As discussed in the conceptual model of career self-efficacy, Bandura et al. (2001) concluded that parental career-efficacy, socio-economic status and academic aspiration had an enormous effect on their children's academic aspirations, scholastic achievement and self-efficacy to pursue certain types of careers. Learners are strongly influenced by their parents' ideas and conceptualisation of desired careers and career options, and by the support they are given during these stages (Hartung et al., 2005; Whiston & Keller, 2004). The experiences of parents can to a significant extent be linked to their children's career interest and development (Bryant, Zvonkovic & Reynolds, 2006; Archer, DeWitt & Wong, 2014). Parents meaningfully shape their children's future careers as they instil in them career-related attributes, values and norms.

2.4.3 The role of schools and learning in career aspirations of young learners

Since schools can provide the necessary information and opportunities for young learners to learn about a wide range of careers, they are an excellent starting point for career guidance

(Liu, McMahon, & Watson, 2015). Future career aspirations and attainment are highly reliant on schooling and the development of career-related skills.

Supporting young learners from an early age is essential in the modern world and this notion is becoming increasingly evident in many schools. When learners are counselled from a young age, counsellors and teachers have the opportunity to influence their later career development in significant ways. As many career development tasks of young learners are performed in the classroom and at school level, providing occupational information and establishing future career aspirations of learners can have a fundamental impact on learners' lives.

Alternative approaches are being researched to determine the nature of career guidance where "career teachers, guidance practitioners and counsellors have to create a productive equilibrium between a constructivist approach (in which they co-create a career narrative together with their students) and a 'traditional' teacher role that provides students with the information they need in order to thrive and survive in a 'risk society'" (Hughes & Meijers, 2017, p. 133). There is a need to include teachers in curriculum development as they are well aware of the changes which are needed in education and how to implement initiatives. They are the individuals who can facilitate the positive improvement and change within the school environment (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997) to provide the guidance needed in the life orientation classroom.

Therefore, schooling and the development of career-related skills can have a substantial effect on future career attainment. Schools provide a space where learners can interact with their peers and teachers as they embark on career development. Moreover, schools provide learning opportunities where children can work collaboratively and also where they are exposed to the ideas and opinions of others. Career aspirations are elicited and influenced by means of exposure, the curriculum (Life skills), role models and formal career guidance. Although some schools provide great opportunities for career development, unfortunately only a minority of learners are privileged enough to benefit from them, as they mostly come at a great cost and are not readily available in most South African schools.

In his career development model, Super (1996) stresses the importance of early childhood and career development during the initial or 'growth' stage. Young learners develop a positive self-awareness and perceptions regarding their future professions. For this reason, it is fundamental that learners become aware of the important role of their current

schooling and learning during these early years so that they integrate their learning with these aspired, prospective professions. In a study conducted by Nazli (2007), it was found that learners as young as nine years old try to plan their futures, which implies that they already have career aspirations. Learners need to realise that the effort they put into their learning, the skills they develop and the knowledge they acquire, can have critical consequences for subsequent stages of career development and choices regarding aspired careers. Schools need to empower and support learners' learning where they "undertake exploration about their future lives, and [...] think about the effect of their present lives on their future" (Nazli, 2007, p. 459).

The essence of the current study relies on the connections that young learners make between school activities/learning and future career development. Learners' academic orientation can shape their belief and efficacy for different potential careers, and it can be a determining factor for the careers that they choose, aspire to and ultimately pursue (Bandura et al., 2001). Only limited research has been done in this field. However, the importance of early childhood career development and the relevance of the school curriculum for potential careers have been researched by some. Consensus exists that the school curriculum needs to be career based to promote career development in children already during the primary school years (Caspi, Wright, Moffitt & Silva, 1998; Seligman; Watts, 1996), as their current learning influences their aspired careers and choices.

Furthermore, learners themselves should be supported in developing the capacity to make a connection between their learning and work. This view is shared by Gillies, McMahon and Carroll (1998b) who found that "career education activities lead to a better understanding of and more interest in career information and a clearer perception of how school activities may relate to future work" (Watson & McMahon, 2007, p. 567). Research conducted by Watson and McMahon (2007) also indicates that "primary school children fail to make any meaningful connection between school activities and their career development" and that there is a definite need to make learners aware of the ways in which learning provides opportunities for future work. It can be concluded that there is a clear call for future research into the relationship between learning during early childhood and career aspirations.

2.5 SELF-CONSTRUCTION

2.5.1 Self-construction

The discussion so far has dealt with how individuals (especially young learners) relate with their own environments, and focused on the influence that these environments have on their career development. How young learners interpret and act upon their immediate environments and how these outcomes shape their career futures were worthy of being noted in the present study. Self-construction theory was explored, as this theory examines how individuals actively construct themselves through discourse and social interaction.

Self-construction was discussed to highlight how it portrays individuals' daily functioning and career development, helps to direct lives and has an effect on career choices. Self-construction is based on three major propositions: sociological, psychological/cognitive and individual/dynamic-semiotic (Guichard, 2001; 2003; 2005). The first proposition, the sociological, states that society influences how individuals relate to and construct themselves. Secondly, the psychological proposition or cognitive perspective is concerned with the cognitive structures entailed in self-construction, and lastly, the individual or dynamic-semiotic proposition refers to the two fundamental types of reflexivity as cited in Guichard (2005, – the 'I-me' reflexivity (Lacan, 1977) and the 'I – you – s/he reflexivity' (Harre, 1984). Within this self-construction framework, the aim of an intervention is to support individuals as they construct their subjective identity forms. Guichard (2008) developed an interview method in which the counselling intervention aims to

- map out subjective identity forms in which individuals are constructing themselves at that time;
- help individuals to become aware of what constitutes each of their subjective identity forms;
- describe how individuals are organising their subjective identity forms;
- determine the relationship between the subjective identity forms;
- elicit some of the expected subjective identity forms which individuals wish to commit to;
- find specific ways that will enable individuals to reach their objectives and goals as they modify their subjective identity forms, if necessary.

To summarise, individuals construct their subjective identity forms according to the societal context within which they find themselves. They then use these subjective identity forms to act in, interact with and relate to their given context. The self-construction model can therefore

be described as “a dynamic system of (past, present and expected) subjective identity forms (SIF), the synthesis and dynamism of which originate in a tension between two kinds of reflexivity” (Guichard, Pouyaud, De Calan & Dumora, 2012, p. 52). As previously stated, self-construction is used within the life design counselling model to help individuals to design and redesign their lives.

2.5.2 Self-construction and career development

As outlined above, the self-construction theory emphasises the main contributing factors that influence the way in which individuals design their lives and also their careers. Through interactions and social processes, the self-concept is developed, and these subjective identity forms influence how individuals make sense of the world around them. Self-construction maintains that individuals construct themselves in their working lives according to various projections (Guichard & Dauwalder, 2010). Their careers are also developed accordingly. Individuals actively act upon their environment and subsequently their career development is influenced by their subjective identity forms. Self-construction plays a crucial role in the career development of any individual, and as it enables these individuals to design their own lives in the society in which they live. Hence self-construction should be taken into account during career interventions and counselling (Savickas et al., 2009).

2.5.2.1 Academic self-construction

Academic self-construction is a term that is commonly used in this thesis and it refers to the means by which individuals construct themselves academically. The term relies on the self-construction theory of Guichard (2005) where people (learners, in the context of this study) construct their subjective identity forms according to their academic perceptions, attributes, motivation, attitudes, skills, knowledge, self-efficacy and achievements. My research focused on the influence of life-design-based counselling (self-construction and career construction) on Grade 7 learners’ academic self-construction. The aim was to examine the influence of group-based life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners’ academic self-construction.

The purpose was to see whether (and, if yes, how) the kind of intervention used in my study could be used to support learners as they make meaning of their academic expectations and prospective professions to improve their lives.

2.6 CAREER CONSTRUCTION

Career construction is considered a post-modern theory of career counselling. Post-modern approaches address the needs of individuals in an ever-changing world where they are expected to develop and adapt to a modern career world. The career construction theory maintains that careers are actively constructed by means of interpretive processes where social processes and meaning making guide occupational choices and development (Savickas, 2005). Career interventions should assist individuals as they build their lives in relation to the contexts in which they live. Career construction theory is next discussed in terms of narrative career stories, career adaptability and life themes.

2.6.1 Career as a story/ narrative

Career construction theory can be described as a holistic framework that captures individuals' life stories through narratives in which the individuals can articulate their subjective life stories and ascribe meaning to their lives. Careers are explored based on memories of the past, current experiences and future aspirations, in the form of a life theme. Narrative career counselling methods are considered a modern approach towards career guidance and counselling, where "clients' multiple micro- and macro-career stories are elicited and built on during the counselling process to facilitate sound career-related decisions" (Maree, 2013, p. 413). Together, the individual and the counsellor establish a working alliance where they co-construct a narrative that makes individuals become aware of how their stories have laid the groundwork to enable them to "develop a cohesive identity, adapt within their environment, and construct the next chapter of their career story" (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011, p. 335). Career construction theory addresses the questions of *how* and *why* individuals construct their careers as they make sense of their career lives. Narratives are used within a framework of individualised stories about the past, the present and the future. By means of reflection, individuals attempt to describe their experiences and how these experiences have an impact on their daily lives and careers. Career life stories are co-constructed and serve to enable individuals to take the necessary action or steps to move their lives forward (Maree, 2013).

Career construction theory involves three main domains: vocational personality; career adaptability; and life themes. Narrative interventions based on these three domains support individuals as they develop a cohesive identity, adapt to their environment and construct their future stories. These three domains are discussed briefly next.

2.6.1.1 Vocational personality

The concepts put forward in the vocational personality work of Holland (1997), the life-span framework of Super (1980) and individual psychology of Savickas (1997) are integrated in the career construction theory as the differential, developmental and dynamic components of vocational or career behaviour (Savickas, 2005). Narratives are used to assist individuals to identify their unique vocational personality, life themes and the behaviours that drive them towards achieving their career goals. Vocational personality, within the framework of Career Construction, deals with the *what* of career-related abilities, needs, interests and values, and it depends on the social constructions that support them.

2.6.1.2 Career adaptability

Career adaptability refers to “the quality of being able to change, without great difficulty, to fit new or changed circumstances (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). According to the career construction theory, individuals need to constantly and actively construct themselves and adapt to new expectations and experiences where they integrate and relate their storied selves to their work roles. Individuals need to be able to proactively respond to new circumstances and cope with new work roles as prompted by change within the work role or environment. Adaptability implies being ready to cope with new challenges, as it involves the adaption of attitudes, self- and environmental exploration and informed decision making, seeing that planning, exploring and deciding are important processes that form part of career adaptability. The four dimensions of career adaptability – concern, control, curiosity, and confidence – are utilised to pursue career goals. Career adaptability aims to discover the *why* of career construction, where individuals are guided (by means of co-construction) to achieve their goals.

People navigate transitions and career changes by means of coping mechanisms, and they deal with role transitions and navigation tasks in order to adapt to the demands of their careers (Hartung, 2011).

Career adaptability is applicable to Grade 7 learners as they are continuously challenged by a fast-paced environment that constantly changes. They are also in the process of transitioning to secondary school where they will be faced with choices regarding subjects and other factors that will have a major influence on their futures. The aim of my research was to support them as they face all these challenges to make informed decisions and to cope with the demands of adapting to school, academics and the future adult-world.

2.6.1.3 Life themes

Life themes are shaped as individuals ascribe meaning to certain life experiences. During career counselling sessions, phrases and repetitions within narratives contribute to the process of uncovering the underlying life themes of individuals. As life themes emerge, interpersonal and interpretive processes are emphasised to determine how individuals make meaning of their lives and what drives their direction towards their occupational behaviour. Life themes address the *why* of vocational behaviour displayed by individuals to make meaningful choices about their work roles. By means of self-defining stories, and by identifying themes that derive from those subjective stories, the meaning that guides occupational choices are also established. The life themes or life stories provide a biographical bridge that enables and supports individuals as they face transition in their careers.

The Grade 7 learners were supported by means of different activities to determine how they could make meaning of their lives and establish a sense of life purpose. Different experiences and environmental factors were analysed, discussed and interpreted to help them make decisions about what drives and motivates them, especially regarding academic self-construction and choices regarding aspired careers.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section focuses on discussing the theoretical framework that underlay the study reported on in this thesis. The theoretical framework was considered a frame of reference, or a lens, that guided me during the research process and constituted an essential aspect of the effective planning and implementation of my research methodology (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). In this study, the theories that guide the research enabled me to examine how Grade 7 learners could make meaning of their lives and begin to establish a sense of purpose in their lives. Narrative stories were elicited that could shed light on young learners' academic self-construction and bolster their academic functioning through self- and career construction counselling.

The following main theories informed the theoretical framework of this study:

- Constructivism as the main theory and, subsumed under constructivism, life design
- Social cognitive theory and social cognitive career theory (self-efficacy was also discussed as an important construct embedded in these two theories)
- Life-span, life-space theory

The following diagram graphically represents the theoretical framework used in this study.

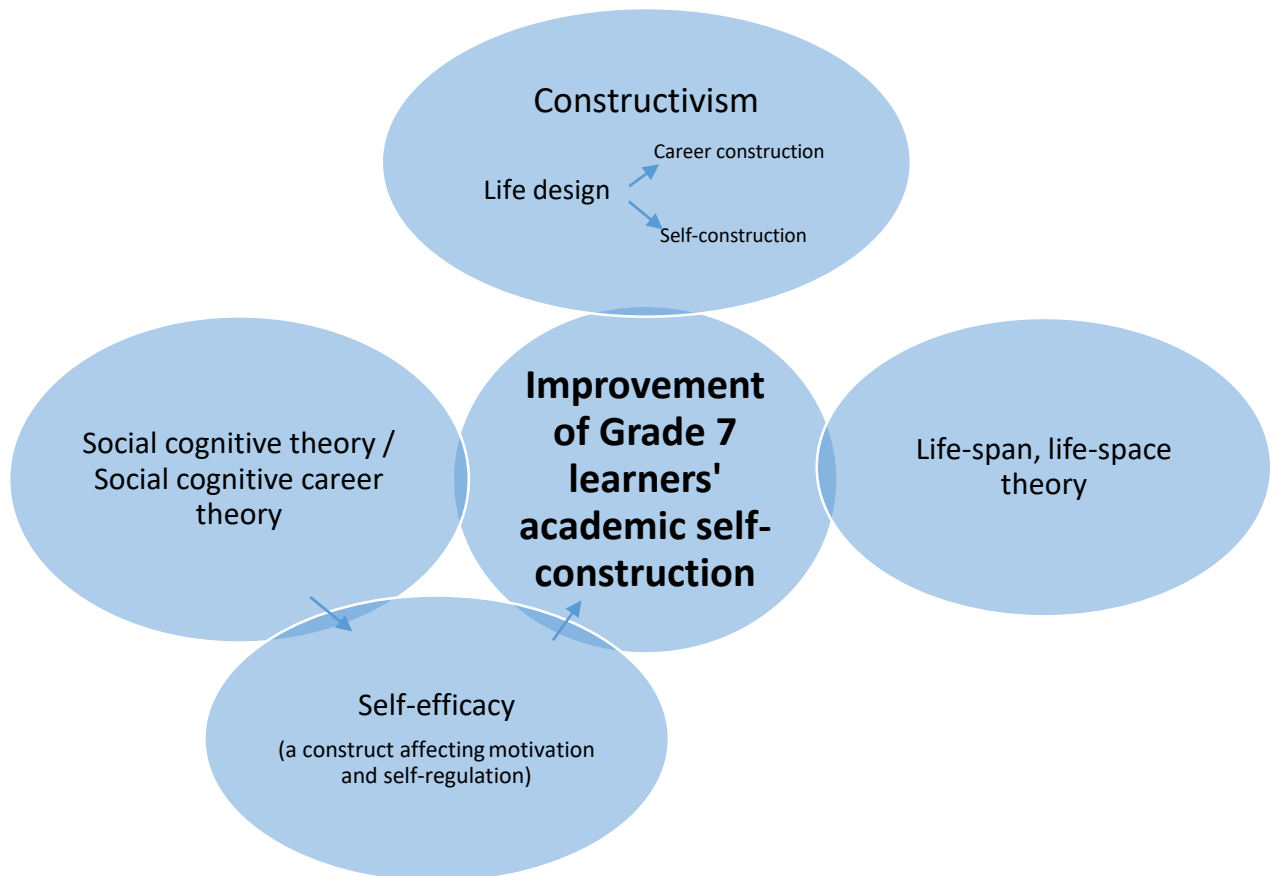


Figure 2.1: Graphical representation of my theoretical framework

As displayed in Figure 2.1, the theoretical framework consisted of four elements: life design; Super’s life-span, life-space theory; social cognitive theory; and self-efficacy. The graphical representation unveils how each one of these theories held a unique stature, and also, how each one affected the improvement of academic self-construction.

A discussion of these theories follows next.

2.7.1 Constructivism

Constructivism can be described as a continual process where learners construct, interpret and modify the representations of their realities based on their experiences (Creswell, 2003). It is a theory that states that learners actively construct and create their own knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1996; Fosnot, 1996), when they are actively involved in making meaning of their experiences (North, 2016). Learners actively engage in learning experiences and ascribe meaning to these experiences, which then construct their realities. Learning is thus achieved as learners actively participate within and with the world around them. Constructivism was

used as a theoretical lens to guide this research, seeing that learners participated in career counselling activities and learning as a means to personally achieve their career ambitions and enhance their academic self-construction.

Using constructivism within career counselling requires from the individual and the counsellor to be both actively involved in the different phases of counselling. It is a fundamental requirement that the individual should actively participate in meaning making during career education (Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1993). Furthermore, it is essential that individuals should construct personal meaning and knowledge as well as reflect on the processes of the interaction (Peavy, 1996).

2.7.2 Life design

Work-related changes in the 21st century urge us to reconsider the traditional methods and techniques used in supporting people with their career choice and development. Already during the early 1990s, research found that traditional approaches to career counselling do no longer yield satisfactory results, as individuals are not passive beings and cannot be reduced to mere quantitative variables. They cannot be assessed *only* according to measurable traits, as qualitative research yields rich, comprehensive and in-depth data (Whiston, Mitts, & Li, 2019). Post-modern techniques based on subjective information during career counselling were found to hold major benefits and to support individuals during the important phases of development. During the discourse on life design, the unique needs of people must be taken into account. The unique demands of their careers and the career stories that shape their work roles are reflected on, as life design emphasises the subjective aspects of career counselling (Maree, 2015). Savickas and other (2009, p. 241) use the term “life trajectories” to refer to the different life domains, including working careers, that individuals incorporate as they design their lives.

Life design counselling is based on career construction (Savickas, 2005) and self-construction (Guichard, 2005). The focus is on collaboration and co-construction as individuals make meaning of their lives and take action to pursue their goals. Individuals are enabled to make informed decisions and solve their problems according to their specific contexts as they construct their unique life stories. Furthermore, life design aims to focus on “central life roles that are identified in this process as clients respond to the feedback given in dialogue with their counsellor” (Cook & Maree, 2016).

Savickas et al. (2009) state that life design is based on the following five assumptions:

- (i) **Relevance of contextual experiences:** Professional identities are not static and should be regarded as patterns that change and evolve constantly, and that can be elicited from clients' stories. Self-organisation eventually shapes professional identity through the multiple experiences of daily life.
- (ii) **Changing requirements for employability:** People are faced with the daunting task of adapting to a changing job market because the requirements for their own employability are changing rapidly. They need to develop strategies with which they can solve problems, take action within their working environment, enhance social competencies, manage good decision making, and design their lives accordingly.
- (iii) **Non-linear dynamics:** Aptitudes and interests are no longer sufficient to guarantee success in a given career. Co-construction needs to be accompanied by a more holistic life design that uses many different tools and methods. The "dynamics within the client's eco-system have to be identified, working hypotheses have to be formulated, tested and evaluated, and this process must be repeated in an iterative way to formulate sustainable and satisfying solutions" (Savickas, 2009, p. 243).
- (iv) **Narrative realities:** Scientific methods on which counsellors have been relying until now may provide a false sense of security, as they are not a holistic representation of clients' unique career dilemmas. Savickas's work showed that an analysis of clients' narratives reveals the true nature and an understanding of their realities and actual situations (Savickas et al., 2009).
- (v) **Modelling:** Previous interpretations merely relied on test scores and general profiles. This framework makes use of client stories to validate client-specific outcomes, thereby showing increasingly effective predictive validities rather than any single outcome variable (Savickas et al., 2009). These five presuppositions provide a framework for life design counselling that needs to be kept in mind, as it contributes to the sufficiency for the development of a new paradigm to benefit career counselling.

Life design counselling is a narrative approach towards career counselling that emphasises the support of clients or other individuals as they construct their life worlds by means of a story that provides a sense of continuity and coherence. Life design re-authors the narrative identity and provides an opportunity and new possibilities for self-construction, as narrative techniques can provide opportunities for people to realise their values and life purpose. Life design counselling empowers people to actively participate in their own career development (Setlhare-Meltor & Wood, 2016).

The life design counselling framework (Savickas et al., 2009) aims to increase individuals' adaptability and addresses change and narratability, which in turn emphasises continuity. Enhancement of adaptability and narratability enables individuals to engage in meaningful activities where they can flourish in knowledge societies (Savickas et al., 2009). Life design counselling is based on social constructionism, which is used as a meta-theory for reconceptualising vocational personality and establishing subjective careers and career identity (Savickas, 2005). In my study, the life design framework was utilised as the 'umbrella' theory to guide this research intervention, and life-design-based methods were utilised to achieve the research objectives. Life-design counselling involves six steps, as summarised in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The six steps of life design counselling

The six steps of life design counselling	
Steps	Description
Step 1	Defining the problem and establishing goals that the client hopes to achieve.
Step 2	The client exploring his/her current system of subjective identity forms. Reflection and shaping of the subjective story.
Step 3	Opening perspectives by narrating the stories to be more objectifying.
Step 4	Putting the problem in a new perspective by placing the problem in a new story.
Step 5	Crafting out a plan of activities to try and actualise this identity.
Step 6	Long- and short-term follow-up.

(Adapted from Maree (2009) and Savickas et al. (2009))

Table 2.1 communicates the basic steps of life design counselling.⁷ As this study was based on a life-design-based counselling intervention, the activities and techniques were adapted slightly to suit the specific needs of Grade 7 learners. The aim of the life-design-based counselling intervention was to empower the learners to become aware of who they are by clearly constructing their subjective identities, to determine what their future goals and aspirations are, and lastly, to become active constructors in establishing a means to achieve their aspired goals as related to their current learning and scholastic activities.

⁷ What each of these steps entails, is elaborated on and thoroughly discussed under the Methodology section in Chapter 3.

Research by Savickas (2005), Maree (2013) and others point out that life design provides a holistic framework where individuals can construct their own identities, as they analyse their subjective narratives. This enables individuals to interpret their own, unique life experiences and to use their life stories to empower them to make significant changes in their career lives. These narratives can provide new insights and perspectives, which can be regarded as assets that may also benefit their futures (Savickas et al., 2009).

Life design counselling methods allow for multiple and alternative ways of interpreting life experiences. They provide numerous opportunities for the client to gain new insights and perspectives that can be utilised to re-construct their lives (Savickas et al., 2009).

2.7.2.1 Career Construction Theory

As discussed previously⁸, career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2011) maintains that “career counsellors and clients work collaboratively to reflectively construct, deconstruct, reconstruct and co-construct preferred career and life stories” (Maree, 2010, p. 27). Career construction theory emphasises how people interpret their experiences and use them to provide meaning and direction to their careers. Career construction also argues that individuals’ careers develop over time as they attribute specific meaning to their work experiences. During career construction counselling, questions such as how and why people construct their careers are considered, but also how responses to these questions shed light on aspired career goals. Life themes, vocational identity, and career adaptability are highlighted as the meta-competencies of career construction.

Career construction theory was applied in my study, as I used a narrative approach to determine how the learners perceive the world of work, based on their current realities and stories. When learners use narratives and stories to ascribe meaning to personal experiences, their sense of self is expected to develop, which can contribute to their academic self-construction and enhance their career-related ambitions.

2.7.2.2 Self-Construction Theory

Self-construction theory can be understood as the construction of the self-identity that develops as individuals interpret personal experiences and the meaning they ascribe to these experiences. Individuals actively construct themselves through discourse in social interactions. Self-construction theory maintains that knowledge and identity formation

⁸ Refer to Section 2.6 for a thorough discussion on and sub-headings related to Career Construction.

develop through dialogue in a variety of contexts, as individuals participate in different activities where the self-concept subsequently develops in relation to the individuals' experiences (Savickas et al., 2009). The focus of the self-construction model in intervention strategies is to support individuals as they design and redesign their lives by integrating past, present and future perspectives.

For the purposes of my study, learners' academic and personal experiences were analysed during career and self-construction to find out what meaning they ascribe to these experiences and how these meanings affect their personal and academic self-construction. Self- and career construction theory was used as a frame of reference to analyse how Grade 7 learners academically construct themselves and thus, potentially, proactively construct their careers.

2.7.3 Social Cognitive Theory

As previously stated,⁹ the social cognitive theory relies on the principle of triadic reciprocal determinism, where cognition and other personal factors, behaviour and environmental influences affect one another bidirectionally. There is an interplay between thought, affect and action, as what people believe, think and feel, affect their behaviour in a given situation (Bandura, 1986). Inversely, the effects of their actions can determine individuals' thoughts and emotions. Personal characteristics and environmental influences also have an interactive causation (i.e. change to or effect on the one has an effect on the other). This is because the social environment can have an effect on the individual, and Bandura (2011, p. 3) therefore rightly argues that "human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents, and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modelling, instruction, and social persuasion".

Social cognitive theory is relevant for this study as young learners' career choices, aspirations and academic self-construction are affected by everything in their surroundings, their own personal factors and behaviour – on a daily basis. How learners perceive themselves and their abilities, the messages they receive from the environment and other role players, as well as social factors, all contribute to career development and future aspirations.

⁹ Please refer to Section 1.7.2.

2.7.3.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory

The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) was adapted from Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, with the aim to elaborate on the aspects of career selection, interest formation, and performance. The SCCT, which was developed by Brown, Lent and Hackett in 1994, embraces the constructivists' assumption that individuals have the capacity to influence their surroundings and their own development. The SCCT thus links to and builds on other career theories that focus on career development and its social cognitive aspects. The aim of this theory is "to provide a unifying framework for understanding, explaining, and predicting the processes through which people develop educational and vocational interests, make academic and occupational choices, and achieve varying levels of success and stability in their educational and work pursuits" (Brown, Lent, Telander & Tramayne, 2011, p. 81).

Three interrelated aspects of career development that are highlighted according to the SCCT model, examine the following: how career and academic interests develop; how individuals make career and academic choices; and how individuals ultimately obtain academic and career success (Lent et al., 1994; 2000). The SCCT also draws specific attention to the overlap between academic and career development processes (Arbona, 2000), as they interrelate with and affect one another. The interrelated aspects concern the research questions posed in this study, where the researcher attempted to determine *how*, *what* (aspects of), and *why* life design counselling can improve the academic self-construction of learners.

A further important construct of both social cognitive theory and social cognitive career theory is self-efficacy, and it is discussed next.

2.7.3.2 Self-efficacy

Academic motivation is one of the most important concepts in education, because learning, performance and many other outcomes are related to the motivation of a learner (Vallerand et al., 1992). Learners should be encouraged to set certain goals for themselves and it is important that they be adequately motivated to achieve these goals. However, and more importantly, they have to believe that they will be able to achieve these goals when planning and aspiring towards future careers. As shown in Figure 2.1, self-efficacy is regarded as an important construct that relates to the improvement of academic self-construction.

Several research studies indicate that individuals who display high levels of self-efficacy will make sufficient effort to perform a task that will lead to a successful outcome

(Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Self-efficacy is seen as an accurate predictor of learners' persistence and performance, and also as a major base for action (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1990; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). The findings of Pajares (1995, 2006) explain how self-efficacy contributes to academic self-regulation and motivation. Learners with higher levels of self-efficacy display more self-regulated and motivated learning when they perform academic tasks. They set appropriate goals, monitor their progress, evaluate their own performance and then adjust their learning accordingly. Figure 2.2 illustrates the mentioned interplay between self-efficacy, motivation and self-regulated learning.

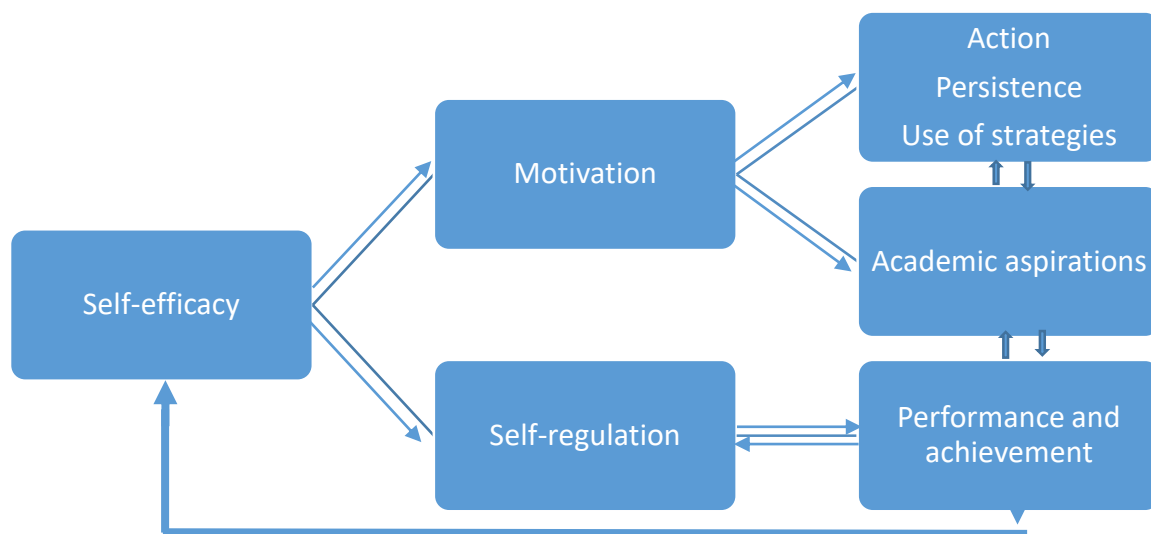


Figure 2.2: Effect of self-efficacy on the achievement, self-regulation and performance of learners

Source: Adapted from Pintrich and Schunk (1996)

As shown in Figure 2.2, the interplay between different factors relating to self-efficacy suggests that learners who are task orientated and driven should take charge of their own learning. Pajares's (2009) findings emphasise how self-efficacious learners are able to adjust their efforts and learning to reach desired outcomes. Self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic performance, as these 'beliefs' about one's abilities to thrive mediate a strong relationship between knowledge and action. Pintrich and Garcia (1991) found that learners tend to make use of metacognitive strategies as their self-efficacy increases. They also argue that in order to fully understand learning, it is fundamental to integrate cognitive as well as motivational components in the learning process. As learners' self-efficacy increases, they become inspired to accomplish and achieve more (Caprara et al., 2008). Usher and Pajares (2006) contend that once students acquire confidence in their academic proficiency, they are

inclined to involve themselves in stimulating activities that enhance their levels of competence. These authors believe that learners who are faced with a difficult academic task, but who believe that they are able to complete the task with success, tend to put in much effort and strive hard to ensure favourable results.

The latter finding is also reported in the studies by Joo, Bong and Choi (2000), who found that self-efficacy correlates positively with better grades, strategy use and learner performance. A similar positive correlation was found to apply to primary school learners. In the study of Barkley (2006), a positive correlation emerged between the self-efficacy and outcome performance of Grade 6, 7 and 8 learners, and self-efficacy was found to be an important predictor of overall academic achievement. Evidence furthermore suggests that young learners who are supported and guided towards becoming self-efficacious individuals, overcome other problems that they may face in future educational stages of their lives (Arslan, 2012). Kaya and Bozdag (2016) report comparable results and show in their study that there is a strong correlation between academic achievement, belief in skills and self-efficacy. They argue that whenever learners experience a sense of achievement and acquire new skills, their self-efficacy is enhanced and they become more engaged in their learning. Learners with high levels of self-efficacy display characteristics such as persistence, diligence and active participation, which are in turn associated with better achievement (Zimmerman, 2000).

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy results from four main types of learning experiences and/or sources of information:

- (i) Personal performance accomplishments
- (ii) Vicarious learning
- (iii) Social persuasion
- (iv) Physiological and affective states

The above highlights the importance of personal learning experiences and their relationship with self-efficacy. Learners' perception of their own academic efficacy has a direct effect on their perceived occupational capabilities, through its impact on their academic aspirations. This is because learners "ground their sense of occupational efficacy in their *beliefs* about their academic capabilities" (Bandura et al., 2001, p. 197). As the self-efficacy of learners improves, we encounter an increasing number of self-efficacious learners who are inspired to achieve more. These pursuits to achieve and to realise specified goals give rise to

learners who are able to make better career choices, as “young people’s self-beliefs are critical forces in their motivation and achievement in all areas of life” (Pajares, 2006, p. 342).

2.7.4 Super’s life-span, life-space approach

Donald Super’s theory is one of the most influential vocational theories (Borgen, 1991). It regards career development and choice as a process, and states that central constructs associated with career development are considered essential in any individual’s life (Swanson & Fouad, 2010). Super defines the term ‘career’ as “the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a lifetime” (Super, 1980, p. 282). The life-span life-space theory of Donald Super is a developmental vocational theory that emphasises the construct of self-concept (objective and subjective), implemented through age-appropriate developmental tasks, in a sequence of life stages. Individual awareness comes about as a result of experiences and is enriched through developmental periods that develop the self-concept.

Super (1980) suggests that a work identity is developed within the individual’s social context, where their vocational choices drive a developmental process involving the career-self and the world of work. The social context of individuals has a direct influence on their subjective views of the self, and they construct their careers during a process of continuous self-evaluation. Super’s theory encompasses the *life-span*, because individuals’ careers are considered a lifelong developmental process; it also adopts a *life-space* approach where individuals’ intrapersonal aspects (values, self-concept and life themes) are considered. Individuals and their work roles are viewed within their larger societal and environmental contexts, as the latter shape and contribute to individual working identities.

Super proposes the following five distinct linear and predictable career development life stages:

- (i) Growth (ages 4-14: fantasy, interests, curiosity)
- (ii) Exploration (ages 15-24: crystallising, specifying, implementing)
- (iii) Establishment (ages 25-44: stabilising, consolidating, frustration, advancing)
- (iv) Maintenance (ages 45-65: holding, updating, stagnation, innovating)
- (v) Decline (over age 65: decelerating, retirement planning, retirement living)

Within each stage, characteristic developmental tasks are noted. However, these stages are not fixed, as everyone does not progress through them in the same manner. The stages also have approximate age ranges that stipulate when most individuals encounter each stage. As

individuals successfully master the tasks stipulated by each stage, they are prepared for the next stage and its developmental tasks.

Turner and Lapan (2005) argue that Super's developmental theory has been a major influence in American school-based career counselling activities that are aimed at helping students prepare for the world of work. Learners are supported by means of these counselling activities as they learn more about themselves, about careers, and also how to make informed decisions about potential future vocations. During the course of this research, Super's life-space, life-span development career theory was used as a lens, while special emphasis was placed on his 'growth' stage, where a group life-design-based intervention was implemented to discover the influence of such an intervention on the academic self-construction of young learners.

The growth stage is the first/initial stage of Super's career theory, and for the purpose of this study, it was the primary focus, as the particular stage agreed with the ages of the study population. During the growth stage, individuals shape their self-concept, they develop their unique needs, curiosity, capacities, interests, and they form a general understanding of the world of work. The learners who participated in this intervention strategy were between the ages of 13 and 14 (Super's growth stage), as is highlighted in the following graphic representation (Figure 2.3) of a ladder model of life career stages and development tasks:

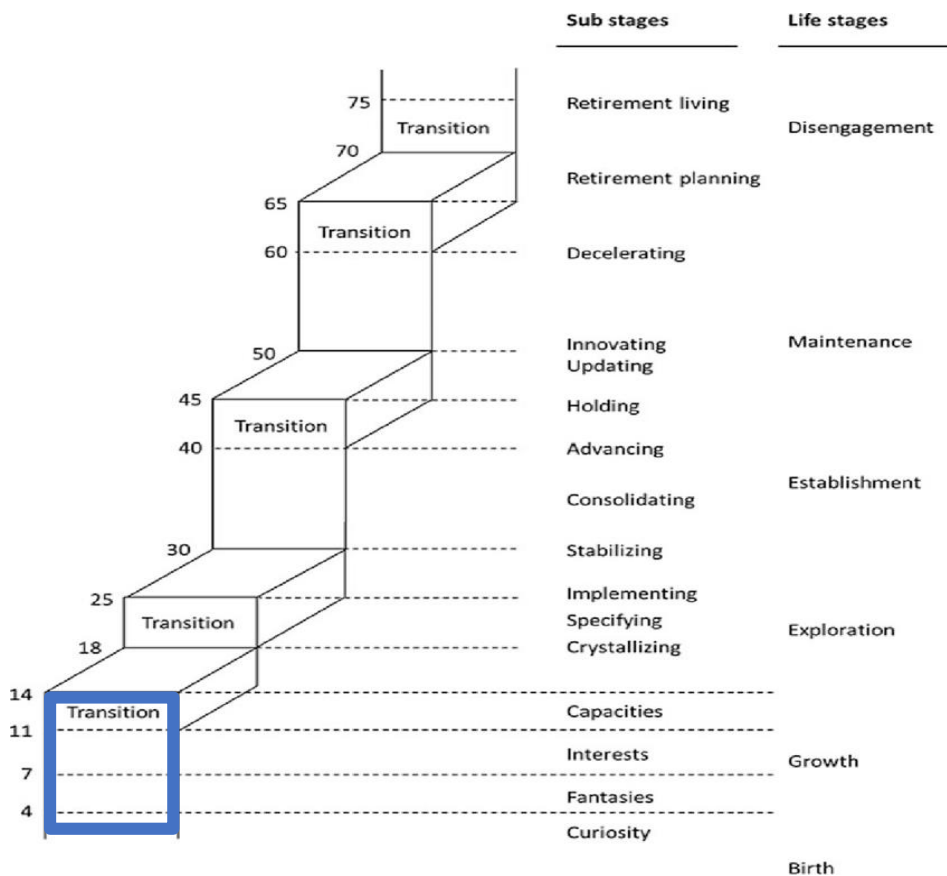


Figure 2.3: The ladder model of life career stages and development tasks: A life-space, life-span approach to career development

Source: Super (1990, p. 214)

The growth stage includes four major developmental tasks: curiosity, interests, and concern about the future; building a capacity to achieve in school and at work; acquiring competent work habits and attitudes; and increasing personal control over one's own life. As children become curious about the world around them, they explore and experience different occupations, which lead to the development of interests. By developing and exploring these future perspectives, they develop the capacity for forward planning. Super (1990) views learning processes as the cement that binds interaction, the environment and the individual as determinants of career development. Also, the provision of essential information about careers leads to young people developing into adults who pursue successful careers. During childhood, learners grow in their capacity to be productive, make their own decisions, work hard, take responsibility for their learning, become aware of their relationships with those around them, and “near the end of the growth stage, [to] become more aware of, and concerned about, the long-term future” (Super et al., 1996, pp. 131-132).

During this growth stage, Super (1994) also identified nine concepts that form part of the awareness process of future possible careers and the decision-making process:

- (i) *Curiosity*. Children's curiosity and need to learn during the growth phase is very evident during early childhood career development.
- (ii) *Exploration*. This includes behaviours where children gather information about their surroundings, and they explore to satisfy their curiosity needs.
- (iii) *Information*. Children learn how to gather and use vocational information. They become aware of such information and how it contributes to their understanding of careers.
- (iv) *Key figures*. Role models, adults and significant others have a major influence on children's career development. Key figures play an important part in how children develop their working world as well as form new concepts.
- (v) *Interests*. As children explore their worlds, they gradually develop and create their own fantasies about the world of work. New interests emerge as they realise their preferences.
- (vi) *Locus of control*. In the context of Super's construct, locus of control refers to the perceived control that children have over their future career aspirations, choices and goals. An internal locus of control thus denotes that a person has control over or is responsible for outcomes on aspired careers. However, when the locus of control is external, children believe that they have no control over their environment and that outcomes are the result of external forces.
- (vii) *Time perspective*. The child can distinguish between the past, the present and the future of their plans. As a time perspective develops, the child's sense of the future also develops.
- (viii) *Self-concept*. As children explore their environments, they become aware of individual attributes by which they then define their sense of self. Similarities and differences are defined, which have an impact on the self-concept.
- (ix) *Planning*. Children realise the importance of making plans to achieve their future career goals. As they gain sufficient information, develop interests and a time perspective, and gain a sense of control over their futures, they reach the last phase of planning and decision making.

Young learners need to develop a positive self-awareness as they become active explorers of professions and grow more knowledgeable about aspired careers – and ultimately about their futures. As they develop these crucial skills, attitudes, aspirations and values, they

may become more aware of the value of their current learning and how this influences their prospects of achieving desired goals. During these formative years, learners need to be supported in their journey of discovery, of ambitions and aspirations, and they need to learn what these may hold for them as they move to more advanced stages of career development.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to help the reader understand the relevant theories and available research in this specific field of study. The literature review commenced with career development processes, the aims of counselling, and interrelated aspects. This was followed by the theoretical framework of life-design-based counselling, which provided the foundation for this intervention study. Three main theories were discussed.

- (i) *Life design counselling*. This framework supports individuals as they author a narrative career identity whilst making meaning of different life experiences. The life design framework is a narrative approach that involves two main theories: career construction (Savickas, 2005) and self-construction (Guichard, 2005). The life design approach to career counselling empowers people to function successfully within their subjective contexts as it “provides an eloquent and viable explanation for the way in which people experience and construct their lives and their worlds” (Maree & Hancke, 2011, p. 479). Maree argues that supporting individuals as they are “negotiating career journeys and managing career-related transitions successfully, [...] should have a lasting and beneficial effect on them throughout their lives” (Maree, 2018, p. 434). This theory formed the basis of my theoretical framework as it presents a lifelong, holistic, preventative and contextual approach.
- (ii) *Social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory, and self-efficacy as an important construct*. Social cognitive theory (from which SCCT is derived) describes individuals as active agents in their own lives who actively shape, and get shaped by, their socio-cultural environments, largely determined by their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994). For the purposes of this study, career behaviour can be described as influenced by the interaction and causation between the person (self-efficacy), his/her behaviour (response) and the environment (social).
- (iii) *Super’s life-span, life-space approach*. Constructs such as self-concept, career choice, career development, maturity, values and life roles are developed during different life stages. As young learners develop a sense of self, together with a sense of future, they

become ready to make appropriate career decisions and plan for the future. Super's theory is especially relevant for addressing career development during the early childhood phase. It offers a large body of stimulated research (Brown, 2002), it has been widely examined in different cultures (Langley, 1999), and besides, it is acceptable and appropriate in the African context (Baloyi, 1996).

Career counselling traditionally focused on a positivist approach where objective assessment methods were favoured (Stead & Watson, 1998), but evidence suggests that "an approach that regards clients as the sole experts on their own lives appears to be a better basis for helping clients negotiate transitions, choose careers and design their lives" (Maree, 2010, p. 363). Post-modern career counselling approaches have been developed in response to the changing world of work and to address the challenges that individuals face in meeting the demands of their unique career contexts. Evidence presented by scholars like Maree (2018), Duarte et al. (2010), as well as Savickas (2012) and others suggests that previous approaches to career counselling is no longer sufficient in a rapidly changing world. "Rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives" (Flick, 2018, p. 12). A post-modern approach refers to a qualitative approach which includes stories, narratives and other post-modern techniques¹⁰ which focus on the subjective career needs of individuals (Maree, 2010).

It is important to note that the work environment no longer provides lifelong security in a single type of work for the duration of a lifetime. Instead, workers will to an ever-increasing extent face transition and uncertainty in their work-lives. They will increasingly have to draw on their unique life-stories for direction and guidance regarding how to cope and prosper in rapidly changing times. It has become key for workers to be more adaptable, employable and career resilient. The life design paradigm encourages these qualities and, as a holistic approach, caters for the unique career counselling demands that individuals face during times of change and uncertainty in the career world (Rossier, Ginevra, Bollmann & Nota, 2017). Interventions such as life design aim to help individuals to actively direct their own lives (Guichard, 2018).

As globalisation brings about unpredictable occupational shifts, a comprehensive model for career counselling is essential to take all contextual differences into account and to support individuals in a dynamically changing world (Duarte, 2018; Kukla & Nowacka,

¹⁰ Post-modern techniques are discussed on pages 58-59 and 62.

2018). It is important to address and respond to careers as active and constantly changing, and to accept the fact that careers have the potential to grow – as is the case for individuals. Post-modern approaches, specifically narrative approaches, appreciate career counselling as a collaborative, co-constructive process that enables individuals to be the experts in making meaning of their experiences and to be active change agents in their own lives (Maree & Ebersöhn, 2002; Maree, 2015; 2018). A narrative post-modern approach (as was utilised in this study) supports individuals to gain insight and understanding, and to make sense of career and life experiences (Hartung, 2010; Savickas et al., 2009; Maree, 2017). The above-mentioned approaches to and strategies for career intervention will enable people to make meaningful choices about their career journeys in the modern workplace.

In the next chapter, the research design and methodology used in this research study are discussed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to determine the influence of life-design-based counselling on the academic self-construction of Grade 7 learners. A detailed account follows of the methodology and processes used in this research and the reader is provided with a clear picture of the context within which the research took place. The research design is the plan and strategy used by the researcher, and it reflects the procedures applied in collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting on the research data (Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

The research processes applied are outlined according to the paradigm, approach and design of the qualitative perspective that was adopted. Detail is provided about the research participants, data generation and data analysis processes, whilst adherence to the necessary ethical considerations, as well as my role as the researcher in a qualitative intervention study, is demonstrated. Aspects that contribute to the trustworthiness of this research study are also discussed. Effective planning of the methodology proved to be crucial in adequately addressing the research questions and obtaining the desired outcomes.

3.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The research aimed to explore how group-based life design counselling influences Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction. A qualitative, group-based intervention methodology was used to address the research questions. Having gained insight into the learners' career goals and aspirations, I planned an intervention that would contribute to the overall career development of these learners. Furthermore, this research was intended to help the learners realise the relevance of their learning and academic self-construction in reaching their goals. The research also provided insight into the career development of young children and highlighted the importance of generally supporting primary school learners during these crucial developmental stages.

The research aimed to answer two descriptive questions as well as an exploratory question.

Descriptive questions:

- What are the essential aspects of the group-based academic self-construction programmes that are used to promote Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?
- What are the general aspects of group life design-based counselling aimed at enhancing Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

Exploratory question:

- How did Grade 7 learners experience the group life-design-based counselling intervention executed in my study?

3.3 OVERVIEW OF PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Constructivist (interpretive) paradigm

The research in hand was grounded in a constructivist or interpretive paradigm as I aimed to understand and explain social reality, and how individuals construct meaning from their own life worlds. According to the interpretive perspective, phenomena can be understood in terms of the meanings that individuals ascribe to them. Interpretive research can offer a perspective and analyse a situation to provide insight into how individuals ascribe meaning and make sense of a phenomenon that they encounter (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Constructivism involves an epistemological stance where individuals construct knowledge and meaning about the world around them, in relation to the interactions between everyday experiences (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivism provides for great insight into personal experiences that can be gathered and analysed during the research process.

To enable the researcher to uncover and interpret data obtained from life-design-based counselling, an interpretive research design was most appropriate. The research occurred in a natural setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), where the learners ascribed meaning to the world around them through different experiences and through reflecting on those experiences. According to Bhattacharjee (2012), the interpretive paradigm is appropriate for studying and exploring context-specific, unique or idiosyncratic events or processes. The participants' self-understanding, values, beliefs, intentions and reasons were all taken into consideration and together they added value to the processes and data obtained in this study.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design involves a comprehensive plan that the researcher used to collect data during the research process. An interpretive method was used, employing a qualitative design that aimed at answering specific research questions.

3.4.1 Qualitative research design and approach

Qualitative research is oriented towards analysing individuals' expressions and activities in their local contexts and therefore it offers a relevant research design for studying social

enquiries. Human experiences are unique, complex and diverse, and qualitative researchers need to develop designs that will yield rich, in-depth, meaningful and contextual data that will maximise the outcomes of the intended research. In a qualitative enquiry, the researcher can describe individuals' understanding and experiences within their unique contexts, as they interpret these by way of multiple sources. According to Flick (2018), qualitative research demonstrates a variety of perspectives as it considers the subjective viewpoints, expressions and practices of individuals who interpret and make meaning of different experiences and try to connect these meanings to the social world around them. Qualitative research is therefore uniquely suited to gain insight into personal life experiences that would otherwise be difficult to interpret with more structured quantitative research designs.

According to Flick (2018), qualitative research adheres to four essential features:

- (i) Methods and theories used are appropriate for studying complex issues.
- (ii) Perspectives of the participants and their diversity are taken into consideration.
- (iii) The research data is subjective and reflective of the researcher.
- (iv) A variety of approaches and methods characterise the research.

Qualitative methods are specifically embedded within the research process, based on specific understandings of phenomena. Qualitative research methods enable the researcher to thoroughly investigate life-design-based methods and intervention strategies to gather in-depth, subjective data. This can be analysed to reflect the interpretation, understanding and meaning that individuals ascribe to their experiences. The reason for choosing a qualitative design is grounded on the assumption that the life-design-based intervention that was used in this study can be researched in the context in which it occurred, and from the perspectives of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

3.4.2 Intervention research or narrative enquiry

Intervention research can be described as a systematic study of purposeful change strategies (Rothman & Thomas, 1994). Interventions are usually designed according to specific principles, goals and activities that guide the interactions between the researcher and the participants. The aim of intervention research is to create the means to improve some aspect of individuals' lives. During intervention research, principles and action strategies are created where participants engage in relatively structured activities as prescribed by the intervention model to achieve specific research goals. It is important for the current research to note that "the process of creating an intervention is generative and requires knowledge of change

strategies plus the ability to form learning activities that have a cultural and contextual metric” (Fraser & Gallinsky, 2010, p. 460).

The intervention research method followed in this study was based on the different phases of intervention research as originally proposed by Rothman and Thomas (1994), which included the following:

- Problem analysis and project planning
- Information gathering and synthesis
- Design of the intervention
- Early development and pilot testing
- Experimental evaluation and advanced development
- Dissemination of findings

The six phases outlined above were integrated with the life-design-based methods as intervention strategy, and the learners participated in various activities as stipulated by the Career Interest Profile (CIP).

Furthermore, three main facets of intervention research are interconnected activities that guide researchers to develop innovative interventions. These three facets (see Figure 3.1) often merged in practice as I applied the different phases to the research study.

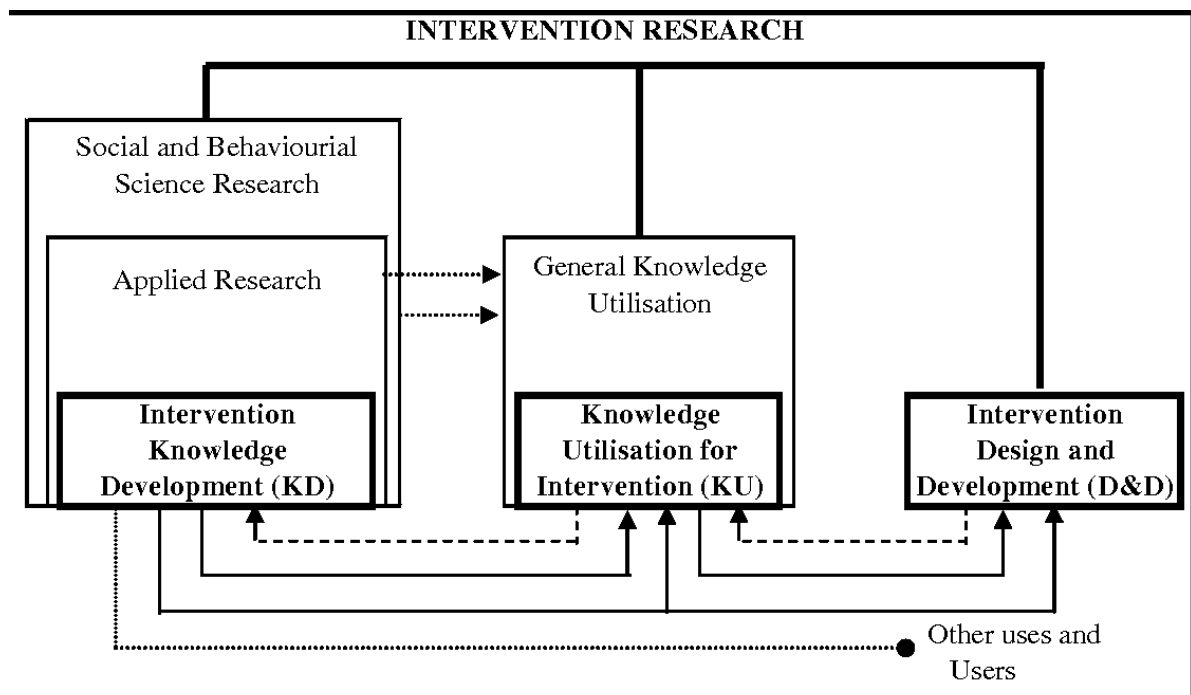


Figure 3.1: Facets of intervention research and their interrelationships

Source: Rothman and Thomas (1994, p. 5)

The interrelationship between the different activities as outlined provides a structure for researchers to develop, design and implement intervention research that may enable effective and positive change in problem situations. The objectives of intervention research (based on the above three facets) are to contribute to knowledge of human behaviour; to apply knowledge of human behaviour and, lastly; to evolve new human service technology, methods or programmes (Rothman & Thomas, 1994).

3.4.2.1 Life-design-based methods used during the intervention

This section focuses on the life-design-based methods that were utilised during the intervention as described by Maree (2009, 2017) and Savickas et al. (2009). This involved six steps¹¹, as summarised in Table 3.1.

¹¹ The basic steps were summarised in Chapter 2 where a detailed description appears of how the steps were implemented and what activities were used as part of the intervention strategy.

Table 3.1: The six steps in life-design-based counselling and the sequential activities and techniques that were used to achieve the intervention objectives

Steps	Description and objective	Activities and techniques	Outcomes
Step 1	Defining the problem and establishing goals which the client hoped to achieve.	<p>The specific counselling goals were co-constructed.</p> <p>A working alliance was established and a transition narrative was elicited.</p> <p>Pre-intervention focus group interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I be of use, help or value to you? • What are your goals? • What are your dreams? • What are you hoping to gain from these exercises? <p>Definition of participants' objectives.</p>	<p>Participants were regarded as the experts on their own experiences.</p> <p>Career aspirations and goals were identified. Hopes and dreams were explored.</p> <p>Goals and objectives were co-constructed.</p> <p>Self-exploration and career exploration were facilitated.</p> <p>Personal meanings were ascribed to prospective future professions.</p> <p>Critical thinking and reflections were noted.</p> <p>Reflection on planned activities and journal writing.</p>

Steps	Description and objective	Activities and techniques	Outcomes
Step 2	Exploring the current system of subjective identity forms. Reflection and shaping of the subjective story.	<p>The CIP (part 1 and 2) was administered.</p> <p>i Biographical information, ii. family influences, and ii. Occupational information (Career education)</p> <hr/> <p>The CIP (part 3 and 4) was administered.</p> <p>i. Five most and ii. least preferred career choices (Vocational guidance)</p> <p>Critical reflections and journal writing.</p>	<p>The CIP supported the participants as they progressed through self- and career construction.</p> <p>Numerous personal, career-related ambitions, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings were explored to conclude with a self-narrated story which guided participants' career aspirations and development.</p> <p>The participants next continued to narrate their subjective life stories (CIP).</p> <p>Establishment of a clear sense of self:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were asked to write your own life story, a) what would be the title of your book? b) what would be the headings of the various chapters? <p>By means of co-construction, participants' idiosyncratic (unique and personal) characteristics had to be reflected in their life stories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The major themes or patterns in your life story would be.... <p>Self-construction, academic self-construction, and career construction could be observed and was enhanced.</p>

Steps	Description and objective	Activities and techniques	Outcomes
Step 3	Opening the client's perspectives by narrating the stories to be more objectifying.	Portfolio activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a lifeline. Who am I? Empowering narrations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think you are learning about yourself? • What is important to you? • What do you enjoy? What are your interests?	Facilitation and discussions of subjective identity forms. What does your lifeline reveal about career? How are your current actions (daily life) already contributing to your career development?
Step 4	Putting the problem in a new perspective by placing it in a new story.	Life story: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What are the headings and sub-headings of my future life story?" Drawing on the information obtained during the previous steps/activities (CIP, interviews, lifelines),	Participants were helped to co-construct novel, respectful career-life stories and to make meaning of their stories. Identification of unique strengths. Realisation of desired identities and how these relate to newly defined career aspirations.

Steps	Description and objective	Activities and techniques	Outcomes
Step 5	Crafting out a plan of activities to try and actualise this identity.	<p>Telling the new story and specifying activities that could be converted into concrete action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A collage on the new actualised identity: “Who am I?” and “What shaped me?” <p>Interpretation of newly constructed career aspirations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we reach these goals? • What advice do you have for yourself? 	<p>Steps/action taken to promote academic self-construction: crystallisation, specification, and actualisation (Savickas et al., 2009). These ‘actions’ included finding meaning in their studies (e.g. understanding the relevance of what they are learning now); accepting the need to work harder; realising that their futures were created by what they were doing now (e.g. devoting themselves and persevering in daily scholastic activities). Participants needed to regulate their learning, work according to their true potential, and sustain effort in tasks at hand, such as homework. They also had to work towards aspired future careers. Participants were made aware of the interplay between self-efficacy, self-regulated learning, and outcomes/reaching their goals. They reflected on the effect of their subjective identity forms by considering factors such as helping others, etc.</p> <p>The purpose was to mobilise the participants to take the steps that are necessary to achieve stipulated life goals (as negotiated by them and the primary researcher).</p>

Steps	Description and objective	Activities and techniques	Outcomes
Step 6	Long-term and short-term follow-up.	Follow-up and closure and post-intervention interview	Summary and critical reflections on outcomes and findings. Reflection and answer on step 1 of the intervention: “How can I be of use for you today?”

Source: Adapted from Maree (2009, 2015) and Savickas et al. (2009)

During the analysis phase of the study, I recognised that a narrative research method had been incorporated (by means of the narrative methodology used in the *CIP*). As part of the intervention study, notice was taken of ‘the story’ of how young learners were making sense of their career development with regard to current schooling. Narrative enquiries provided me with information and data on the first-hand experiences of individuals, where the participants were the co-constructors and interpreters of their experiences, as narrative research represents “participants’ reality for analysis and confirmation of insights” (Khan & Austin, 2018, p. 4).

The research design described in this section involves some overlap between different qualitative methods to ensure that the study would yield data of the highest degree. Furthermore, any and all data could be taken into consideration, if relevant to this study.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 Sampling

A sample of 12 learners in Grade 7, aged 12 and 13, and attending a government school in Pretoria, was purposefully selected for the purpose of this study. All the learners in Grade 7 were invited to participate, and a suitable sample was selected. These learners, who constituted a diverse group based on their gender, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, abilities and demographics, were conveniently selected. The descriptive statistics can be found in Table 3.2. I chose the individuals that participated in my study because they were accessible and because working with them would afford me an opportunity to access information-rich cases that related to the topic of the influence of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners’ academic self-construction. (As mentioned earlier, I am a senior educator at the school where the research was conducted and the trusting relationship between participants and their parents and myself enhanced collaboration). Moreover, working at the school allowed me much additional time to gather rich data (information).

Table 3.2: Descriptive statistics of the participants

Participant	Descriptive			
Participant Descriptor	Age	Gender	Mother tongue	Ethnicity
Participant 1	12 years and 10 months	Male	Afrikaans	Coloured
Participant 2	13 years and 6 months	Male	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 3	13 years and one month	Male	English	Caucasian
Participant 4	12 years and 10 months	Male	English	Indian
Participant 5	13 years and 10 months	Male	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 6	13 years and 3 months	Male	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 7	13 years and 0 months	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 8	12 years and 6 months	Female	Xhosa/ Afrikaans	Black
Participant 9	13 years and 0 months	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 10	12 years and 11 months	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 11	12 years and 7 months	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian
Participant 12	12 years and 6 months	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian

The objective of the research was to determine the influence that life-design-based counselling had on the academic self-construction of Grade 7 learners – thus the deliberate selection. The sample size provided me with the opportunity to do an in-depth investigation, and data that was rich in detail was produced. The lived experiences of these learners and how each individual ascribed meaning to career development could be researched thoroughly.

3.5.2 Qualitative data generation techniques

A number of qualitative data-gathering techniques as discussed in Creswell (2014) were used and are discussed in the following subsections:

3.5.2.1 Interviews

All the sessions consisted of and relied on some form of interview or conversation. The interviews were both structured and unstructured, and open-ended questions were used to elicit the responses, views and opinions of the participants. Interviews and conversations were hoped to provide deep, meaningful information as provided by the participants themselves.

3.5.2.2 Observations

Field notes on the behaviour, mannerisms and activities of the participants were documented to enable me to have record of as much information as possible. Furthermore, a video recording was made of all the sessions to capture a true account of the activities as they presented themselves during each session.

3.5.2.3 Documents and other materials

Documents that included articles, policy documents, audio and visual material, were used and interpreted in terms of their relevance to the study. To provide an explicit example, the policies in the CAPS document were used as guideline for the Grade 7 learners' exposure to career guidance. Other materials, such as the 'career categories' of the *CIP*, also presented rich information to be used during data analysis. Collecting documents and visual material served as an un-intrusive method of gathering the desired information.

3.5.3 Post-modern qualitative data generation techniques used in this study

3.5.3.1 Career interest profile (*CIP*)

The Career Interest Profile (*CIP*) (Version 6) (Maree, 2017a) was developed from developmental and the storied approaches. It gathers information regarding career choice making in addition to 'traditional' (quantitative) information. It echoes Adler (1958), Hartung's (2015), Jung (1977), Savickas (2005), and other scholars' views on qualitative (career) counselling. The *CIP* was selected as qualitative method as it provides insight into how individuals interpret their interests, potential and career values, and because the respondents themselves identify their major life themes. It helped to familiarise the participants with different career categories. This exposure opened up the world of work to them, as most participants had had limited prior exposure. As they progressed through the different activities stipulated in the *CIP*, they constructed their career aspirations, identified potential career options, shaped their identities and designed their lives. Participants could reflect on how their current life stories, values and interests relate to their future aspirations

and career goals, as the *CIP* supports individuals to identify, discuss and analyse possible career-life themes and career-related problems while they reflect on their own stories (Maree, 2018). In this way, participants were enabled to become familiar with their own unique career interests and profiles.

The *CIP* comprises four parts designed to help people identify their a) central life themes, b) career interests, issues, and concerns, and c) their own advice from within as regards how to convert challenges (‘problems’) and concerns into themes of inspiration and hope that can bolster their individual life projects (see Table 3.3).

Maree’s Career Interest Profile is a qualitative instrument that helps to identify an individual’s career interests and life themes. The *CIP* was selected as qualitative method as it provides insight into how individuals interpret their interests, potential and career values, and because the respondents themselves identify their major life themes (*CIP*, Version 6) (Maree, 2017a). The *CIP* was used as an instrument to familiarise the learners with different career categories. This exposure opened up the world of work to them, as most learners had had limited prior exposure. As the learners progressed through the different activities stipulated in the *CIP*, they constructed their career aspirations, identified potential career options, shaped their identities and designed their lives. Learners could reflect on how their current life stories, values and interests relate to their future aspirations and career goals, as the *CIP* supports individuals to identify, discuss and analyse possible career-life themes and career-related problems while they reflect on their own stories (Maree, 2018). In this way, learners were enabled to become familiar with their own unique career interests and profiles.

Table 3.3: Description of the *CIP* (Maree, 2017)

Part	Information gathered	Related career counselling paradigm (Savickas, 2019)	Theoretical foundation
1	i. Biographical information, ii. family influences, and ii. Occupational information	Career education	Developmental
2	i. Five most and ii. least preferred career choices	Vocational guidance	Differential

Part	Information gathered	Related career counselling paradigm (Savickas, 2019)	Theoretical foundation
1	i. Biographical information, ii. family influences, and ii. Occupational information	Career education	Developmental
3	Six career-choice questions		Differential
4	15 narrative (life story) questions	Career counselling	Differential and Storied

Post-modern activities of the *CIP* used in this research study, included the following:

- Answering questions related to career choice, where the learners were presented with directed questions about their careers and future career aspirations.
- Career story narratives where learners completed numerous statements about themselves. These included preferences, talents, strengths and weaknesses, etc.
- Career categories were completed where a list of 19 careers were presented and the learners were asked to indicate preferences. This provided for an opportunity to elucidate and discuss relevant career profiles.

Summary of data generation and the group life-design-based intervention

The intervention consisted of 7 sessions where the duration of each session was approximately 40-60 minutes. The sessions were held in a classroom at the school. The intervention was

presented over the course of 6 weeks with one session a week, which started in May 2019 and concluded in June 2019.

Procedure

Table 3.4 reflects the sequential steps used to generate data, as well as the planned activities as set out in the qualitative intervention.

Table 3.4: Data generation plan

Data generation sequence	Planned activities/ techniques		Date and time of session
Step 1	Welcoming, orientation and informal pre-intervention group interview	Journal writing and critical reflections/ discussions	2 May 2019, 08:00
Step 2	Administer <i>CIP</i> (part 1 and 2)		7 May 2019, 08:00
	Administer <i>CIP</i> (part 3 and 4)		10 May 2019, 08:00
Step 3	Portfolio activities (lifelines)		16 May 2019, 08:00
Step 4	Narrating the life-story (revisit previous activities and different sections in the <i>CIP</i>)		24 May 2019, 08:00
Step 5	Portfolio activities (collages)		31 May 2019, 08:00
Step 6	Follow-up and closure ¹² and post-intervention interview		7 June 2019, 08:00

As previously mentioned, this was a group-based intervention. School-aged children are frequently exposed to group activities. As a consequence, my participants were willing to actively engage in the stipulated group-based activities.

3.5.3.2 Life design framework

As discussed previously¹³, the goals of life design (or life designing, as referred to by Savickas et al. (2009)) are to enable individuals to engage in meaningful activities that may support

them to reach their full potential. In the context of this study, life design intervention helped learners to increase their adaptability and narratability.

Life design counselling relies on different activities and stories. The latter forms part of six steps of an intervention model, where the counsellor and the client collaboratively construct the individual's life story. The life design counselling framework is a principle-driven intervention that assists individuals to make career transitions (Savickas, 2015). The core elements of life design counselling are relationship, reflection and sense making (Savickas, 2015).

Post-modern activities of the *life-design framework* used in this research study, included the following:

- The learners compiled **collages** for which they used pictures, phrases and words associated with their career aspirations and choices. Learners could thus discover, explore and reflect on their goals and unique characteristics.
- Learners and the researcher made use of **journal writing** to record their experiences as these unfolded during the life design counselling.
- Learners also completed **portfolio activities** such as the drawing of a lifeline about 'Who am I?' Facilitation and discussions of their subjective identity forms followed afterwards.

3.5.4 Data analysis techniques

According to Walliman (2017), qualitative data analysis is based predominantly on data collected from participants' words, descriptions, attitudes, opinions, behaviours and feelings. Data analysis is the scrutiny of data during the research process. It is not an isolated exercise, but rather an ongoing process throughout the course of the qualitative research study. Qualitative data analysis starts with the onset of the research study, and continues throughout, as it has a direct impact on the findings, how the study is designed, the generation of the data and, how the findings are reported (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative methods produce data that emphasise the participants' context and subjective experiences, and the researcher plays a crucial part during the data generation and data analysis processes. When qualitative data is

¹² During the follow-up participants were also given the opportunity to verify and comment on the interpretation of the information.

¹³ In Chapter 2, the goals of life design were discussed in great detail.

gathered, the researcher needs to take the responsibility to assure rigor and trustworthiness of such data.

The researcher who works with qualitative data needs to engage with and make sense of significant data, as this will allow for an analytic framework to communicate the findings (Patton, 2015) and answer the research questions. Qualitative researchers need to be explicit about what they are doing during data analysis, why they are doing it and also how they are doing it, so as to ensure that the trustworthiness of the research can be evaluated effectively (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). The findings of research need to be significant so that it may then also be used to contribute to or expand upon existing knowledge in the field of study. Information gained from the analysis of data leads to an understanding of the problem and provides answers to the research questions.

The data analysis method utilised in this study was Thematic Analysis, as discussed by Clarke and Braun (2013). Themes were developed to answer the research questions, and relationships, similarities and differences were noted in the data. By means of various processes, I actively developed and constructed numerous themes, guided by the research questions. Thematic data analysis is a highly flexible approach that provides core skills for conducting qualitative analysis and can produce trustworthy and insightful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5.4.1 Thematic Data Analysis

The following Table lists the steps and techniques of analysis that were followed:

Table 3.5: Thematic Analysis plan

Data analysis sequential steps		Activities or techniques used
Step 1	Becoming familiar with the data	I immersed myself in and became intimately familiar with the data by reading and re-reading all the written data. I also listened to the audio recordings on numerous times to record any observations that had initially been missed.
Step 2	Coding	Labels were generated for all important features of the data relevant to the research questions that guided the analysis process. Coding was implemented not only as a data reduction method, but also as part of the analytic process, where the codes captured the semantic and conceptual reading of data. Every data item was coded, after which this

		phase was completed by collating all the codes and relevant data extracts.
Step 3	Searching for themes	Themes were constructed as coherent and relevant patterns were discovered during the analysis phase. The search for themes proved to be an active process during which I identified similarities in the data. This phase was completed by collating all the coded data relevant to each theme.
Step 4	Reviewing the themes and identifying sub-themes	The nature of each theme and the relationship between themes were defined, and sub-themes specifically related to academic self-construction were identified.
Step 5	Defining and naming of themes	A detailed analysis was made of each theme and the most prominent and recurring themes were recorded. Next, the essence of each theme was identified and an informative name was constructed for each theme.
Step 6	Writing up a report	This phase involved the weaving together of the analytic narrative. The data was contextualised in relation to existing literature and the researcher's own research findings, after which final conclusions were written up.

Source: Adapted from Clarke and Braun (2013)

Although the Thematic Analysis approach has been presented here as a six-phase model with different steps, it is important to note that Thematic Analysis is not fixed or linear, but rather an interrelated process where the researcher can move forward and backwards, and also apply the different steps or phases simultaneously throughout the research process. Thematic Analysis was the most suitable qualitative analysis technique to use as “Thematic Analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). It is also an appropriate method to use to make the research results available to audiences. Numerous patterns within data sets could be identified and analysed to successfully answer the specific research questions, and enough data was gathered to justify the themes that were generated.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The strategies stipulated in Table 3.6 (as discussed by McMillan and Schumacher (2001), Nieuwenhuis (2007) and Thomas (2012)) were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study that was conducted.

As the researcher, I used life-design-based methods to design and implement an intervention. Thereafter, appropriate data was collected, and the findings were analysed by

means of thematic analysis. Bearing in mind the above, the trustworthiness elements of a study are outlined next.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings of the research are believable and trustworthy.

Transferability

Reference is made here to the extent to which the research findings can be generalised.

Dependability

Dependability involves the extent to which the researcher can replicate the research findings with similar participants and in a similar research context.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of interpretive research can independently be confirmed by others.

Table 3.6: Methods used to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative data obtained in this study

Trust-worthiness	Methods applied in this study	Description
Credibility	Participants' review	All observations and experiences pertaining to the interactions were written in a journal to allow the reader to comprehend the researcher's reasoning process (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Participants were given the opportunity to corroborate the results and inferences made by the researcher, to ensure that her perceptions were accurate.
	Verbatim accounts	Verbatim accounts of conversations and transcripts are highly valued as data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). By recording and then transcribing all conversations, a true account of the learners' responses could be captured as data. Detailed accounts of learners' experiences were recorded.
	Clear statement of limitations	A clear statement of the study's limitations was discussed beforehand to provide a better understanding of the research and everything this study would entail.

	Auditing and checking of coded data	The researcher ensured that the selected coded data would be a true representation of the raw data and selected themes.
Transferability	Inferences were only made once there was enough evidence to substantiate the arguments	The researcher ensured at all times that the coded data was able to support any inferences made about the research. Sufficient and detailed information was given about all aspects of the study and about the data collected and analysed in order to support the transferability of the findings.
Dependability	Verbatim reporting of responses Specialist checking Triangulation External coder	All the qualitative information that was collected was included in the study data. All the interactions and conversations were also recorded and transcribed in detail. The analysed data as well as the coded themes were checked by my supervisor (an internationally acclaimed researcher) to enhance critical interpretation. Multiple data instruments were used as discussed in Section 10.2. An external coder was used to re-check the data and be a safeguard against bias.
Confirmability	Journals Mechanically recorded data Expert evaluation Extended fieldwork	All the data gathered and interpreted was documented comprehensively. Tape recorders were used during all interventions and data-gathering sessions to ensure the detailed accounting of events. Since expert evaluation advocates and enhances the trustworthiness of research findings (Thomas, 2010), my supervisor, Professor J.G. Maree was consulted as an expert during all phases of the data gathering and interpretation. The study was conducted over a period of six weeks.

Source: Adapted from McMillan and Schumacher (2001), Trent (2001), Nieuwenhuis (2007) and Thomas (2010)

Stringer (2008) suggests a number of additional ways to establish trustworthiness. The researcher subsequently included these strategies to ensure rigor of the study:

- **Member checks:** Participants were given the opportunity to review the data to ensure it was a true representation of their participation in the study.
- **Prolonged engagement:** The researcher was engaged in the study for a minimum period of six weeks to ensure that sufficient data was collected. The learners were then also given sufficient opportunity to become familiar with the researcher, which had a positive effect on the data collected.

- **Audit trails:** The researcher maintained organised records of all the data and procedures, as well as of the availability of other important documentation.
- **Participant debriefing:** The researcher gave the participants the opportunity to clarify and interpret events. The last questions in the *CIP* also attributed to the debriefing process.
- **Triangulation:** The researcher included multiple sources of data for cross-validation.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations must be upheld to protect the welfare of the participants and to ensure the quality of the research (Wassenaar, 2006). It was therefore of utmost importance to adhere to the following ethical practices throughout the entire project, as discussed by Gitlin and Czaja (2016):

- **Informed consent:** An informed consent document was prepared and administered to participants. This document provided a clear indication of the goals of the intervention, the processes to be followed, advantages and possible disadvantages of participation, and the credibility of the researcher. All participants (assisted by their parents) signed this document prior to the start of my study.
- **Anonymity and confidentiality:** No participant's identity was revealed during any phase of the study. Codes and pseudonyms or descriptive 'names' were used to ensure confidentiality.
- **Verification:** The participants' results were communicated to them to allow them an opportunity to verify the truth of their accounts and to avoid any misinterpretation of research results.
- **Protection from harm:** As the researcher, I did all I could to fulfil my promise to avoid any possible harm to the participants in this study, and I took great care to promote their well-being. The best interest of the participants was served at all times and the necessary precautions were taken. A psychologist was made available for the necessary intervention, and all reasonable steps were taken to avoid, as far as possible, harm of any nature (Smythe & Murray, 2000).
- **Role differentiation:** A researcher who conducts qualitative research assumes various roles. My roles as researcher as well as school counsellor did not present a conflict of interest with the participants. By managing the different roles, I made every effort to conduct a qualitative study of a high standard.

- **Potential impact of the research on the participants:** The intervention process could well trigger emotions that would warrant intervention from a psychologist. In the event of learners presenting with any such emotional or behavioural changes, arrangements for counselling were made available to assist the learners. An educational psychologist agreed to offer this service during or after the intervention process, if necessary. However, the research did not warrant any intervention from the psychologist.

My own exclusive function during the intervention was that of researcher. The learners discussed ideas and opinions openly and during the course of discussions on personal issues, many mentioned that it was insightful to also talk about personal (not necessarily hurtful) feelings about their upbringing. They could reflect on events that took place in the past and that contributed to their own understanding of how these events shaped them to think, know, understand and act, when talking about their future.

- **Social value:** The researcher obtained results that benefited the social community as a whole. Learners began to discuss their experiences of the life-design-based counselling with their peers, parents, teachers and other members in society. These discussions gave rise to questioning, discussions and self-examination of numerous other or non-participating individuals. The participants would mention how their questioning, thoughts and opinions lead to self-discovery by their peers, class discussions with their teachers, and discussions about future aspirations and goals within their families.

3.8 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The researcher conducting a qualitative study plays a crucial role and assumes multiple responsibilities. The data collected in this study was mediated through interaction of the researcher with the participants in the research. In this study, the following tasks and responsibilities were important:

- Providing transparency by giving detailed explanations to promote the purpose of the research project and the processes followed.
- Obtaining informed consent and informing the participants and their parents that the sessions would be recorded.

- Creating a professional, comfortable atmosphere where participants could feel valued, safe and respected, and where interruptions were limited.
- Being well prepared and ensuring that a high standard was adhered to at all times (e.g. the use of quality working equipment).
- Analysing and interpreting the data according to the prescribed methods and with care, while being aware of my own biases as researcher.
- Providing sufficient opportunities for the participants to review the data to ensure correct interpretation and clear up any possible misunderstandings.
- Storing all the data in a safe space. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured at all times.
- Adhering to the ethical guidelines specified in the Ethics and Research Statement of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter was devoted to a discussion of the methodology used in this research project. A qualitative research design and methodology was used to appropriately address the research objectives, answer the research questions, and accomplish the research goals.

The researcher outlined and discussed the research design, methodology, data generation and data analysis that were used to inform on and report this research. The researcher also presented the different strategies employed in an attempt to enhance the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the data. Lastly, the researcher briefly discussed the ethical considerations adhered to, as well as her own role as researcher in this study. Ultimately, this chapter served to provide the audience with a framework of *what* methods were used and *how* these methods were utilised in conducting this research. In the following chapter, the reader will be provided with a detailed critical analysis, as well as explanations of the findings of the research data derived from the study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in previous chapters, the research study was aimed at studying the effect of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction. A purposeful sample of 12 Grade 7 learners who display diversity in terms of race, gender and socio-economic background were selected to participate in the intervention study. The learners attended weekly sessions over the course of six weeks during which they participated in numerous activities. These activities included a pre-intervention focus group interview where learners could spontaneously discuss their goals, aspirations and career development. In the subsequent sessions the learners completed the online *CIP*, which exposed them to numerous questions relating to prospective careers, personal goals, career life stories and aspirations. The learners then proceeded with other life-design-based activities that included a collage, open discussions and a lifeline. We concluded with a post-intervention focus group interview to summarise their experiences, thoughts and reflections with regard to the group life-design-based counselling. The learners and the researcher kept a journal at hand to document ideas and experiences throughout the intervention.

The data collected during the course of the study was recorded and transcribed for qualitative data analysis purposes. The findings are presented in this chapter according to themes and subthemes that emerged during the different Thematic Analysis steps and phases. A brief overview of the data analysis process is presented next.

4.1.1 Overview of the process followed during data analysis

Post-modern qualitative data generation techniques were used to gather data to be analysed. The techniques included the *CIP*, portfolio activities (collages and lifelines), written reflections, journal entries, pre- and post-intervention group interviews and discussions. The data collected was analysed according to the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013), and numerous themes and subthemes were generated from the data, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Thematic analysis is a systematic method used to identify and organise data. It permits the researcher to gain insight into the patterns of meaning (in the form of themes) across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The approach yielded specific themes associated with the learners' lived experiences, their past and current career development, their future career aspirations and, ultimately, the influence this had on their academic self-construction. Thematic analysis was used, as this approach "can be used for both inductive

(data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) analyses, and capture both manifest (explicit) and latent (underlying) meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 298). Themes and patterns were identified primarily according to an inductive approach, as the themes identified were strongly linked with the data themselves. The aim of the data analysis phase was to describe, evaluate and interpret the effect of group life-design-based counselling on these learners’ academic self-construction.

Four general or main themes consistently emerged, including subthemes in each category. Reference is made to all the different data sets, as each provided meaningful information. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to ensure that only the most relevant data was used to guide the analysis process.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF THE THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

The main themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis are outlined and summarised in Figure 4.1.

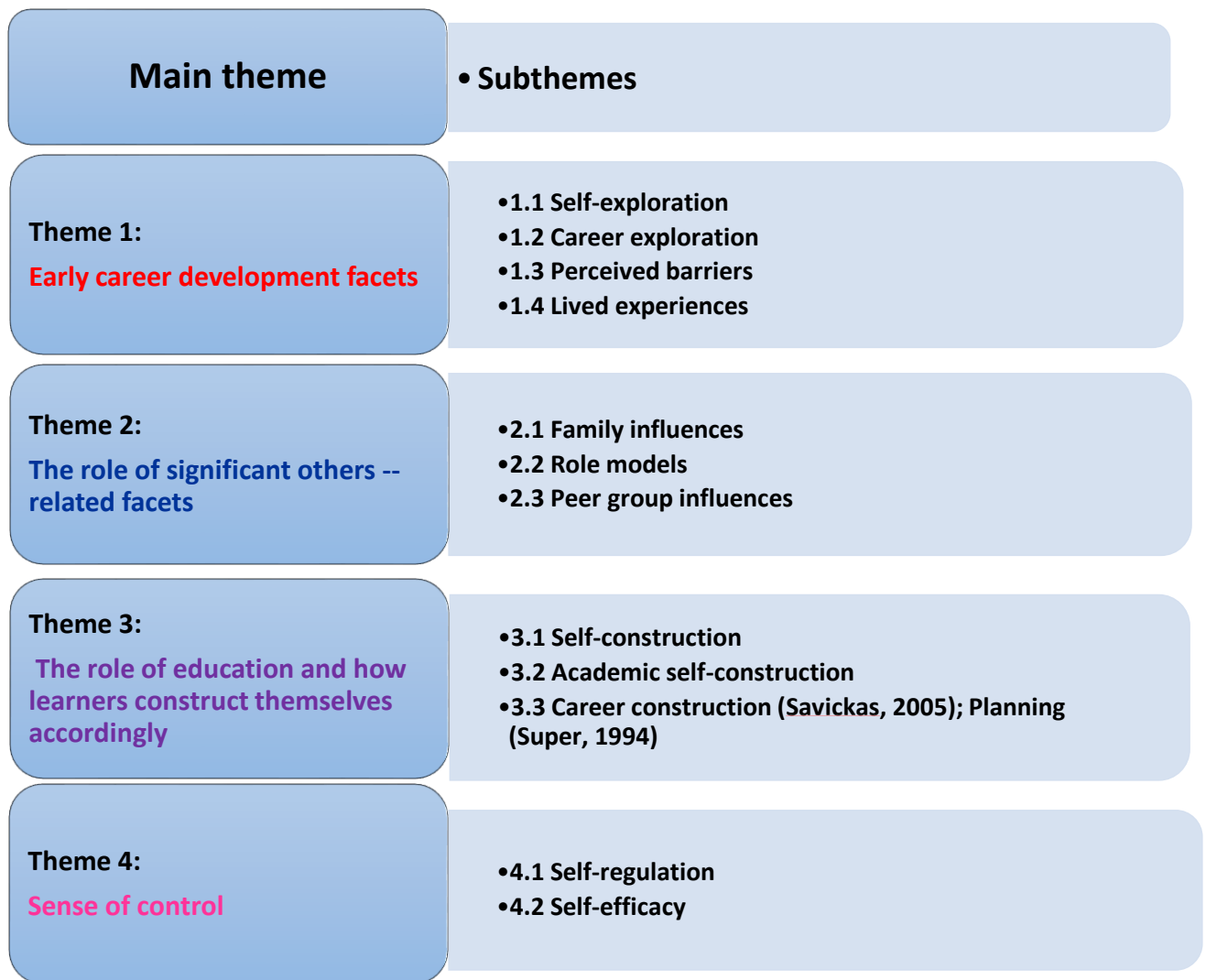


Figure 4.1: Main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis

Source: Compiled by the author

4.3 PROCEDURE FOR IDENTIFYING THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

The goal of data analysis was to summarise the data obtained according to meaningful themes and subthemes. Thematic analysis offers insight into patterns of meaning and allows the researcher to make sense of these meanings as they present themselves within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The analysis involved a constant moving back and forth between the entire data set and the coded extracts of data used for analysis. According to the six steps of Thematic Analysis outlined in Chapter 3, the different codes were sorted into potential themes during data analysis, and the relevant coded data extracts were collated within the identified themes. The data was narrowed down to a few themes and correlating subthemes. Main themes were

derived from the codes that were most prominent and had the most evidence to support them. The themes identified could also relate directly with the literature reviewed. Triangulation was also important as some themes overlapped and had to be merged to avoid redundancy and duplication.

The themes were then reviewed to ensure that they form a coherent pattern. Lastly, the validity of individual themes was considered in relation to the data set, and afterwards, irrelevant data was disregarded.

4.4 IDENTIFIED THEMES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When identifying themes, it is important to bear in mind that it is much more than a mere description of data, but rather an attempt to make an argument in relation to the research questions. The analysis aimed to address the following research questions:

Primary research question:

What is the influence of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

Descriptive questions:

- What are the essential aspects of group-based academic self-construction programmes that are used to promote Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?
- What are the general aspects of group life design-based counselling aimed at enhancing Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

Exploratory question:

- How did Grade 7 learners experience the group life-design-based counselling intervention executed in my study?

As is evident from the outline provided above, the themes identified presented themselves as important facets that are vital in addressing the specified research questions. It was a challenge to match a specific theme to a specified research question as there was a definite interrelatedness and interconnectedness between the main themes, the subthemes and the research questions. Therefore, the researcher had to collapse many presenting subthemes carefully to ensure clear and identifiable distinctions between the themes, and to ensure that they adequately address the research questions.

4.5 IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF A QUOTE

The coding system described below will provide the reader with insight as to the source of data used and the corresponding participant response.

As numerous data sources were used to collect information-rich data, the researcher used seven data codes (A-G) to enable the reader to locate the particular data source.

- A The pre-intervention interview
- B The different *CIP* activities – respectively divided into the different sub-sections, as every section consisted of detailed information and responses of the learners, all relevant to the data analysis. The code included a number for the step/section description, e.g. Career life story, Step 1 is indicated by B1.
- C The post-modern techniques, including the collages
- D Life lines
- E Journal-writing activities
- F The post-intervention interview
- G The researcher also kept a reflective journal – Each learner’s response by way of any of the data sources is indicated by the number ascribed to the learner, e.g. 1-12. The page and line numbers are also indicated according to the outline in Table 4.1. A four-digit coding system was applied to the qualitative data-gathering techniques, while the qualitative post-modern data-gathering techniques only consist of the main data source and the learner or participant number.

Post-modern techniques such as the *CIP* and life-design-based activities that include journal writing, lifelines, reflections and collages were also used to collect data. Therefore, it is important to provide an explanatory example of the coding used to refer to these excerpts, e.g.: (B1;7; ;): “*I am really a lot more talented than I thought. I realised that I am actually good in things and that I too have talents and things I can pursue such as my writing.*” The first letter (B1) refers to data source B, step 1 (career life story) and the number 7 refers to participant 7. This specific excerpt forms part of a reflection activity within the *CIP*. The *CIP* consists of numerous steps and activities within a booklet, therefore it is not possible to refer to a specific line number, but rather to the sections as indicated by example of B1, where B indicates the specific life-design-based (*CIP*) activity, and 1 indicates step 1. Another example would be where reference is given to a participants’ lifeline. The lifeline is indicated by a D

and the participant's number, as it is not possible to provide a page and line number within a horizontal lifeline, e.g.: (D; 6; ;): “*I realised my love for music.*”

Table 4.1: Identifying sources of data and ascribed codes

Data source		Description	Participant number	Page number	Line number		
A	Pre-intervention interview	Discussions and reflections	1	1-3	1-90		
B	Life-design-based framework and <i>CIP</i> activities	Step 1: Career life story (B1)	3	Different pages	Different lines		
		Step 2: Making sense of the information (B2)	4				
		Step 3: Personal vision and mission statement (B3)	5				
		Step 4: Moving forward (B4)	6				
C	Collage		7				
			8				
D	Portfolio activities (lifeline)		9				
E	Journal writing (learners)		10				
F	Post-intervention interview	Discussions and reflections				1-5	1-104
						1-3	1-91
G	Researcher reflective journal/ diary		11				
			12				

Explanatory example of the four-digit coding system: (A;8;1;11): “I want to become a CEO or CA, but I am not completely sure.” The first letter refers to data source A (pre-intervention interview), the first number indicates learner 8, the number 1 indicates page 1, and the last number (11) refers to the line.

An explanatory example of the coding system used for the life-design-based activities: (B2;8; ;): “My teachers and parents said that I must follow my dreams.” The first letter refers to the data source (*CIP*, step 2) and the second number indicates that it is a response from learner 8.

4.6 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Table 4.2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria used in linking data to themes and subthemes

Theme 1: Early career development facets		
Subtheme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1.1 Self-exploration	Any comments ¹⁴ the learners made regarding their current interests, talents, etc. relating to prospective occupations.	Any comments made that are not related to or do not refer to their career interests, exploration and information.
1.2 Career exploration	Any comments made by learners relating to information regarding careers and how they explore different choices.	Any comments made by learners not relating to information regarding career exploration.
1.3 Perceived barriers	Any comments made by learners regarding perceived barriers and other determinants of career aspirations (e.g. external forces such as socio-economic barriers).	Any comments made by learners that are not considered relevant to perceived barriers.
1.4 Lived experiences	Any comments made by learners related to personal past and current experiences that had or may have an influence on early career development and aspirations.	Any comments made by learners that were not related to personal past or current experiences, and that had or may have an influence on early career development and aspirations.

Theme 2: The role of significant others and related facets		
Subtheme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
2.1 Family influences	Any comments made by learners related to the influence that family members had on prospective careers, choices and development.	Any comments made by learners not related to the influence that family members had on prospective careers, choices and development.
2.2 Role models	Any comments made by learners related to the influence that significant role models had on prospective careers, choices and development.	Any comments made by learners not related to the influence that role models had on prospective careers, choices and development.

¹⁴ Comments also refer to written reflections, discussions and other expressions of learners as presented in their portfolio activities.

2.3 Peer group influence	Any comments made by learners related to peer group influences on prospective careers, choices and development.	Any comments made by learners not related to peer group influences on prospective careers, choices and development.
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Theme 3: The role of education and how learners construct themselves accordingly

Subtheme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
3.1 Self-construction (Guichard, 2005)	Any comments made by learners related to self-construction. These include aspects such as self-concept and knowledge about the self.	Any comments made by learners not related to self-construction (see Section 2.5.1 for an explication of the term).
3.2 Academic self-construction	Any comments made by learners related to academic self-construction. These also include comments relating to crystallisation, specification and actualisation.	Any comments made by learners not related to academic self-construction (see Section 2.5.2.1 for an explication of the term).
3.3 Career construction (Savickas, 2005)	Any comments made by learners relating to career construction and planning (as referred to by Super (1994)).	Any comments made by learners not related to career construction.

Theme 4: Sense of control

Subtheme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
4.1 Self-regulation	Any comments made by learners related to self-regulation.	Any comments made by learners not related to self-regulation (for the purposes of this thesis, defined as the processes associated with taking control of one's own learning and behaviour).
4.2 Self-efficacy	Any comments made by learners related to self-efficacy.	Any comments made by learners not related to self-efficacy (see Section 2.7.3.3 for an explication of the term).

4.7 RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.7.1 Introduction to Theme 1

The first theme (*early career development facets*) clearly surfaced during the analysis phase and could be identified in all the different data sources. Grade 7 learners have not yet been exposed to many career-related activities and thus the learners were surprised and very excited to find how much they are learning about themselves as they were busy discovering their future career aspirations.

The learners expressed a sense of feeling un-informed during the initial activities regarding their prospective professions. They struggled to optimally express their ideas, insight and perceived information regarding different career types, e.g.: “*I want to become a CEO or CA, but I am not completely sure.*”¹⁵ (A;10;1;11) “*What career is that?*” (A;2;1;12) “*I think it is a boss.*” (A;5;1;13). But, during the final post-intervention activity, the progress could clearly be noted, as illustrated in the following comment from a learner:

“For the first time I actually believe in myself and I also came to believe that I really can, and will be able, to do this. As I thought about my future a lot more and talked to people about what they think, I am now excited.”
(F;6;1;9-12).

It was also worthwhile noting that learners aged twelve to thirteen years did not realise that their ‘selves’ were connected to their future career goals, or that their lived experiences and current exposure to the world around them were already influencing their aspired careers. It was as if they believed that it was something far away in the future and had nothing to do with the present.

The learners were amazed to find how much they were learning about their personal identities as they could ascribe personal meaning to various experiences.

The research findings from qualitative data analysis will now be presented:

¹⁵ The responses of the participants were reported verbatim and only very slightly edited in order to preserve the authenticity of the responses.

Table 4.3: Research findings relating to early career development (Theme 1)

Theme 1: Early career development facets	
Subtheme	Description
1.1 Self-exploration	Curiosity and interests are explored and form part of the decision-making process, as identified by Super (1994).
Comments and examples from learners depicting their self-exploration	
<p>(A;2;1;5-6): <i>“I want to dress like a president for the upcoming career day. I want to be able to make my own decisions when I grow up.”</i></p> <p>(A;9;1;14): <i>“I have no idea what I want to become.”</i></p> <p>(B2;2; ;): <i>“There are a lot of things I am good at”. I am very talented and I should appreciate that”. “Although I am not perfect, I don’t have to be, I can learn”.</i> (Taken from the reflection activities).</p> <p>(E;3; ;): <i>“Something between a chemical and mechanical engineer, because I once succeeded in taking a motor from another toy and building a remote control car on my own. I love experimenting with this stuff and it is really interesting.”</i></p> <p>(F;3;1;15-17): <i>“I learned a lot about my personal self. It is interesting to really get to know myself. All the things we did gave me clarity and also made me realise that this all is possible.”</i></p> <p>(B1;7; ;): <i>“I am really a lot more talented than I thought. I realised that I am actually good in things and that I too have talents and things I can pursue such as my writing.”</i></p> <p>(G;3;3;92-93): <i>“I think I am going to need some time to think about this. It is really difficult.”</i> An utterance made by a learner regarding his difficulty defining and ‘identifying’ himself.</p> <p>As the learners progressed through the different activities, they were able to gain insight and ascribe personal meaning to their various experiences. Based on their reflections and comments on the activities in which they had to reflect on personal talents, strengths, weaknesses and goals, and linking these to aspirations, it seems that the learners got to know themselves much better. They realised that they had unique capabilities and how these related to a prospective profession. Some learners were even surprised by their unique talents and how these were forming part of their subjective identity forms. Furthermore, the learners also gained a positive self-concept.</p>	
1.2 Career exploration	As learners explore and become aware of the world around them as they are exposed to different contexts and situations, where they realise their interests, talents and they are then able to start planning towards their goals.
Comments and examples from learners demonstrating their career exploration	

<p>(A;3;1;24-26): <i>“I want to become a mechanical or electric engineer, because I love to fix things. I also like programming and electricity fascinates me, as I like to discover exactly how it works.”</i></p> <p>(B1;6; ;): <i>“I learned that I am now really positive about my career-path and that all my dreams can be realised.”</i></p> <p>(B1;5; ;): <i>“I realised that I will be able to succeed in my career as I have the necessary information of what I need to make my dream become a reality.”</i></p> <p>(B1;3; ;): <i>“I think I will be very good in robotic engineering and programming as I am excellent in programming and building electronic devices.”</i></p> <p>(B1;12; ;): <i>“I am good in it (refers to cricket), I want to do it, it is my natural talent, and I enjoy it to play.”</i></p>	
<p>During the pre-intervention group discussions most learners had a vague idea (short answer) or interest in specific career options, but as they completed the <i>CIP</i> and came to know their likes, interests, talents, life goals, etc., they gave very assured, confident answers in their reflective journals. A definite development of a sense of self was evident already after Section 2 of the <i>CIP</i>, which also had an impact on their career exploration and information.</p>	
1.3 Perceived barriers	Barriers such as socio-economic status and other contextual factors can become a definite barrier in the realisation of career aspirations (Lent et al., 2000).
Comments and examples from learners exemplifying perceived barriers	
<p>(A;5;2;57-58): <i>“I want to get away. There are no chances or opportunities for us in this country anymore.”</i></p> <p>(A;7;1;8-9): <i>“But a singer does not make money in South Africa, so I must rather work with computers.”</i></p> <p>(A;2;2;49-52): <i>“Look at how corrupt our country is. I wanted to become the president of our country, but that will never be possible. It is too late, there is no saving of this country, it is too late. This country is unsalvageable. I want to start over, a new beginning for myself and others.”</i></p> <p>(B1;7; ;): <i>“They really want me to keep on singing and I want to, but I will have to practice a lot more. I can only get my first laptop in Grade 10.”</i> (The learner referred to the fact that she needs a laptop to pursue her singing, but cannot get one due to financial constraints, and that she thinks she is not actually good at singing, but everyone else says she is).</p>	
<p>The comments provided by learners indicated that even from such a young age they were quite aware of the current climate in South Africa and the issues young people were facing, such as job scarceness, a lack of career opportunities and financial issues.</p>	

1.4 Lived experiences	As the learners progressed through the different sections of the <i>CIP</i> , it was clear that their current experiences in life and at school were already forming their career identities and contributing to and shaping their career goals. The lifeline also provided insight into the effect of past and current experiences on prospective professions and goals.
Comments and examples from learners indicating by what means lived experiences contribute to career development	
<p>(A;6;2;80-82): <i>“I just realised that I am actually already working toward my career. I have already made a garden at home where I planted potatoes and tomatoes. My garden is flourishing with fruit.”</i></p> <p>(D;7; ;): <i>“I realised my love for music.”</i></p> <p>(G;2;1;13-15): <i>“It is actually interesting how things currently around us already influences our future. How everything from friends, academics, sport and life aspirations guides you towards your future goals.”</i></p> <p>(B1;10; ;): <i>“I have really good leadership abilities.” I am very good at analysing things. I help and initiate improvement in activities. I get along with any type of person.</i>” (reflection of a learner on her strengths and how this may contribute to her career aspirations).</p> <p>(D;4; ;): <i>“Want to start with rugby practice. Played rugby throughout primary-school. Os du Randt inspired me. Won Gray tour. 1st team. Received a bursary”</i> (to play rugby for a specific high school). This learner was surprised to find that his entire lifeline only reflected his passion for rugby.</p>	
As the learners completed the respective activities such as the <i>CIP</i> , the lifeline and collages, they started to realise how everyday activities, challenges and experiences, correspond with their aspirations, goals and dreams.	

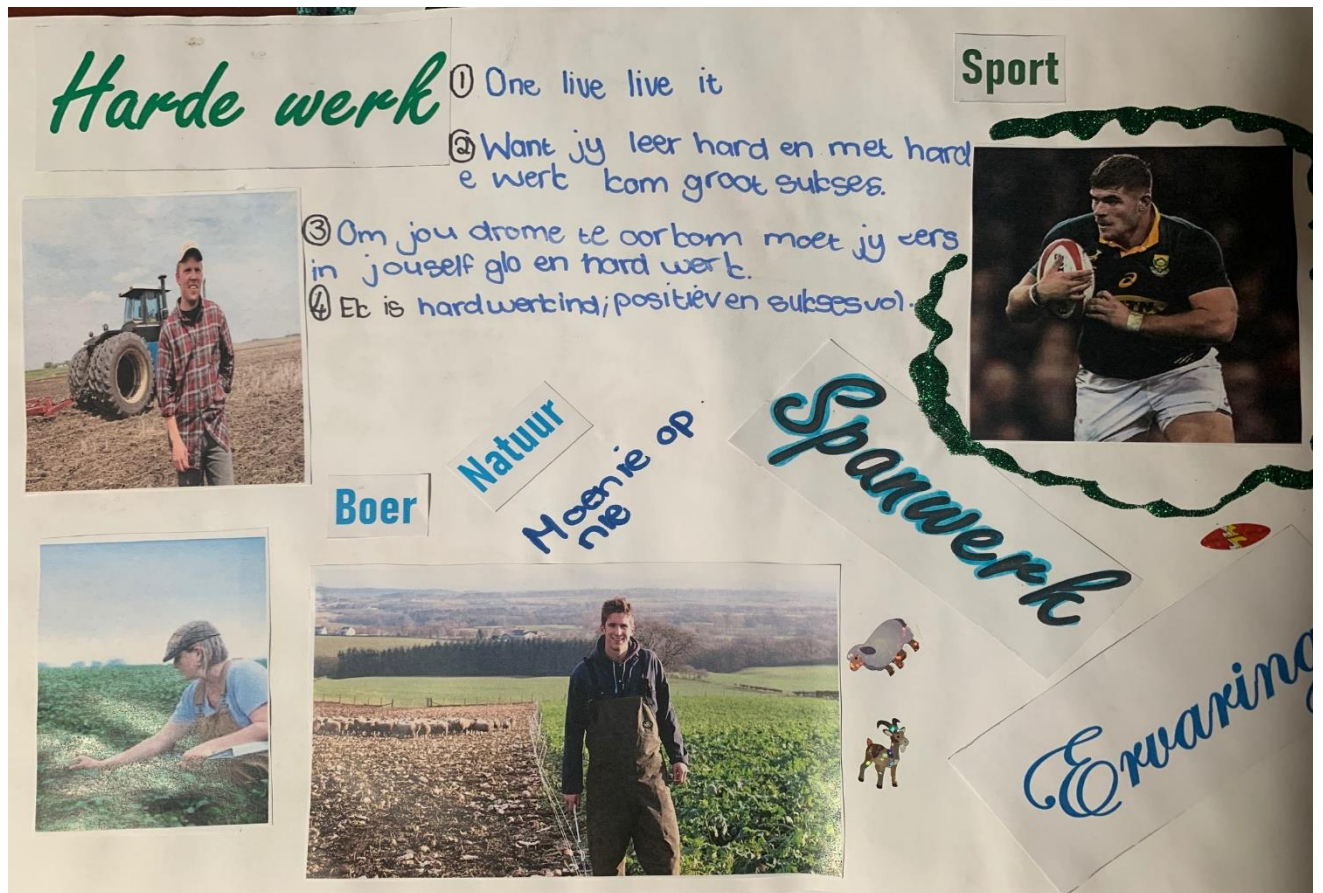


Figure 4.2: An example of a collage portraying a learner’s self-exploration and its relevance to early career development

A brief summary explaining the contents of the collage:

This learner wants to become a farmer as he was inspired by a family member. He loves nature and the outdoors and he has always been busy in the garden.

He used catchphrases such as “*you study hard and with hard work comes great success; To reach your dreams you must first believe in yourself and work hard; Do not give up; I am hardworking, positive and successful.*” Words which stood out included *hard work, nature, farmer, group work and experience.*

4.7.2 Introduction to Theme 2

Theme 2 (the role of significant others – related facets) emerged from social influences and the effect of significant others on these learners’ career development. Numerous activities and discussions about life goals and aspirations indicated that learners were shaped and guided by the daily interactions they had with others. As we are social beings, our attitudes and behaviour are influenced by others, and this was evident during the analysis of this data. As

the learners talked about role models, family members and friends (identified subthemes), they mentioned how these significant others contributed to decisions, perceptions and career-related facets.

Family members, especially parents, are part of the process during which certain behaviours, beliefs and norms are formed. These have a direct effect on early career development as parents assist children in interpreting information about the world (Hall, Kelly, Hansen & Gutwein, 1996). Most of the learners considered their parents to be their biggest role models and influencers of career choice and aspirations. This can be seen in the responses from most of the learners where they stated the following: *“the biggest influences in my life are my parents”* (B1;10; ;).

Role models are another contributing factor when learners think about the world of work. Learners create ideas about their future according to people that they admire and look up to. They identify specific characteristics in role models with whom they want to associate themselves, and these then influence their aspired careers. To provide an example where a learner talked about his role model: *“I really admire him and he achieved so much.”* (B1;2; ;). This learner stated that he admired people who change the world and succeed in achieving their goals through hard work. It makes him want to do the same, daily.

Learners’ peers play a big role in career-related facets as adolescents are influenced by views, opinions and perceptions of their peer group. The social context they find themselves in shapes their identities and beliefs, which then influences how they ascribe meaning to the world around them.

Table 4.4: Research findings relating to the role of significant others – related facets (Theme 2)

Theme 2: The role of significant others – related facets	
Subtheme	Description
2.1 Family influences	Family members, especially children’s parents, strongly influence their career options, ideas and conceptualisations (Hartung et al., 2005; Whiston & Keller, 2004).
Comments and examples from learners demonstrating the significant influence of family members	

<p>(E;5 ; ;): <i>“I want to become a Swedish fighter pilot My father is a major in the South African air force.”</i></p> <p>(B1;2; ;): <i>“My parents and also my brother. The challenge me to become better. My mother provides me with hope and an aspired future that I can look forward to.”</i></p> <p>(E;1; ;): <i>“My dad inspired me to go into the business world. He works hard and never gives up. The reason why I want to become that is because my dad inspired me and he is already proceeding towards his next business degree.”</i></p> <p>(B1;2; ;): <i>“My father teaches me about a lot of different skills and he is extremely smart.”</i> (This learner referred to his father who has a major influence on his daily life and aspired career.)</p> <p>(B1;1; ;): <i>“My parents inspire me as they believe in me and provide for all opportunities. I look up at how extremely hard they work and all that they have achieved. They inspire me to become successful and achieve my hopes.”</i></p>	
<p>At such a young age, these learner’s career aspirations are strongly influenced by parental advice, support and guidance. Most of the learners stated that after they had discussed their career aspirations with their parents, most of them either re-considered their choices, or they felt even more satisfied about their aspirations. Some of the learners even mentioned that it was the first time they had a discussion with a parent/ parents about their future career aspirations, and that this elicited thorough discussions and even led to research on prospective professions.</p>	
2.2 Role models	<p>Role models are considered key figures who may have a significant impact on career choice, aspirations and life goals. Role models are people to whom we look up to for guidance and advice, and people who we aspire to become or become similar to.</p>
<p>Comments and examples from learners demonstrating the significance of role models</p>	
<p>(A;10;2;72-73): <i>“Come to think of it. I want to become a CEO as my father’s boss is a CEO and he really inspires me.”</i></p> <p>(B1;12; ;): <i>“My admirations when I was young and my current role model, is: Mignon du Preez, she is an amazing cricket player and sports star. I look up at sport stars and strive to reach the same goals.”</i></p> <p>(B1;7; ;): <i>“People who write and sing fascinates me.”</i> (This learner referred to numerous writers and singers.)</p> <p>(B1;10; ;): <i>“He inspires me because of the work that he does and the contribution he made to his company, while still caring about the people working for him, and he is also humble.”</i> (This learner referred to her father’s boss as her biggest role model.)</p>	

<p>(B1;4; ;): <i>“I look up at him and he is so good in rugby, even better than I am.”</i> (This learner referred to a teacher at his school.)</p> <p>(B1;2; ;): <i>“He gets hold of a specific idea and then he does everything in his power to achieve his goals.”</i> (This learner referred to Elon Musk as his biggest role model.)</p>	
<p>The learners identified and referred to different people they regard as role models. Learners mentioned teachers, sport stars, actors, singers, and business people such as Bill Gates and Elon Musk. These are all people that they feel they can look up to and people they consider as being successful. Some learners even felt that they can relate to these role models, as they can ascribe certain personal meaning to these role models’ personal characteristics.</p>	
<p>2.3 Peer group influences</p>	<p>Peer groups are regarded as extremely important during the adolescent development stage, which means that social influence plays a major role in how and why learners make certain choices (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). For the purpose of this study, peer group refers to learners of the same age group and especially learners who participated in this study, as they formed part of the interactions.</p>
<p>Comments and examples from learners demonstrating peer group influences</p>	
<p>(A;2;2;62-64): <i>“You are able to become absolutely anything on this earth. You are the cleverest person that I have ever known. You get like 100% for everything.”</i></p> <p><i>“You excel in academics and everything else.”</i></p> <p>(B1;8; ;): <i>“The head girl at our school. She is good in a lot of things.”</i> The learner elaborated in private conversation that this peer she is referring to <i>“inspires her every day to achieve more and has a significant influence on her own aspirations.”</i> (G;8;1;29-30).</p> <p>(G;12;2;44-48): <i>“What about you also widen your horizon by looking into travelling to different countries to source your exclusive materials... you know, for your couches and curtains, and pillows?”</i> Remember you said that you also used to consider becoming a travel agent in order to see the world?”</p> <p>(G;11;2;49-50): <i>“Yes, that is an amazing idea, then it is ‘two flies with one blow’, and that way I can achieve all my dreams simultaneously.”</i> (She then passed her a picture resembling ‘travelling’, where after she herself then also added a picture of an aeroplane.)</p>	
<p>This intervention was a group life-design-based intervention that had an effect on the discussions and contributions made by the learners. The learners easily interacted with each other and provided input and comments about the others’ expressions. The learners shared ideas with one another, asked questions and made recommendations that reflected peer group influence. Peer group</p>	

influence was not only limited to the intervention interactions, but also expanded to other peers, as the learners mentioned that they had career discussions with other friends who then influenced their perceptions and career information.



Figure 4.3: An example of a collage where a learner integrated numerous life goals, as a result of peer influence

A brief summary explaining the contents of the collage:

The learner illustrated with the pictures that her prospective career will be aimed at becoming an interior designer, whilst she will be incorporating her love for animals within the texture and colour schemes of her materials, fabrics and house items. She will source her fabrics from different parts of the world, so as to also incorporate her desire for travelling.

She wrote slogans and catchphrases that symbolised the need to work hard; focus on academics and aim for happiness. Words that stood out included *passion*, *skills*, *creativity*, *interests*, *entrepreneur* and *rewards*.

4.7.3 Introduction to Theme 3

The third theme (the role of education) emerged from feedback from participants as they started to realise that education and current academic endeavours can and will have a profound impact on their future career goals and aspirations. As the learners found themselves in an education context most of the time, much of their current experiences related to the influence of education on their daily lives.

The first subtheme that was identified, considered how the learners' self-construction is influenced as they make sense of the world around them. The learners were given an opportunity to reflect on their unique, personal characteristics and examine their self-concept. The responses indicated that the learners were learning a lot about their personal selves – as can be observed in the examples quoted.

The second subtheme is regarded as the essence of this study as it focuses on the influence of this intervention on the academic self-construction of Grade 7 learners. The learners came to realise that their current academic performance, perceptions and efforts can hold major benefits for future career goals and that the hard work they put in today is already linked to achieving their dreams for the future.

“I decided that I definitely want to become a CA. I want to do even better this term and have set my goals.” (F;10;2;51-53).

The third subtheme, career construction, emerged as the learners started to interpret various experiences and make meaning of the processes that underlie their occupational choices. As the learners reflected on numerous activities, they found that numerous factors influence the way in which they are already in the process of developing a prospective career.

Table 4.5: Research findings relating to the role of education and how learners construct themselves in terms of it (Theme 3)

Theme 3: The role of education and how learners construct themselves in terms of it	
Subtheme	Description
3.1 Self-construction	Self-construction emphasises that as the self-concept develops in relation to a given context, these subjective identity forms influence how individuals make sense of the world around them (Guichard, 2005).
Comments and examples from learners demonstrating their perceptions of self-concept	

<p>(B2;2; ;): <i>“I am a hardworking, friendly person... I prefer working on my own, as I am not that good with other people, although I can communicate extremely well.”</i></p> <p>(E;3; ;): <i>“I believe we as a human race can do better. I will become president to be that change. I know I can achieve this.”</i></p> <p>(B2;1; ;): <i>“I have perseverance. I do not take days off and I perform extremely well in everything I do. ...I am intelligent.”</i></p> <p>(B1;11; ;): <i>“I realised I have leadership qualities and a strong personality.”</i></p> <p>(G;11;2;83-84): <i>“The personal qualities I see in myself, makes me realise that I will be very good in my career as I will constantly be working with people.”</i></p> <p>(B2;9; ;): <i>“I don’t give up easily. I sometimes get irritated with people if they don’t work hard. “I believe in Jesus. I always give my best in everything I do. I stress easily over small things.”</i></p>	
<p>The learners found it insightful writing personal identity statements (a subsection within the CIP). Initially some of the learners paused and had to think for a while. They said it was difficult writing about the self, but there was a sense of satisfaction as they made sense of and realised attributes that contributed to their subjective identity forms.</p>	
3.2 Academic self-construction	<p>Academic self-construction refers to the means by which individuals construct their subjective identity forms according to their <i>academic</i> perceptions, attributes, motivation, attitudes, skills, knowledge and achievements.</p>
<p>Comments and examples from learners demonstrating the influence of a group life-design-based intervention on academic self-construction</p>	
<p>(F;8;1;30): <i>“I will have to achieve a little better to become a teacher.”</i></p> <p>(B4;9; ;): <i>“This month I will have to work very hard in preparation for my final examination, to obtain good marks for high school.”</i></p> <p>(F;11;1;31-33): <i>“I will have to work very hard in my languages as I will need to be efficient in language for communication, advertisement and other retail issues.”</i></p> <p>(B4;3; ;): <i>“This year I will have to increase my marks to enable me to reach my dreams.”</i> This was a learner’s comment in one of his actions steps in the CIP. He started with how he needs to plan how he is going to reach his career goals, then how he will start testing his ideas, after which he needs to plan his academic journey in primary school, then high school, and finally university, which will then end of with him achieving his career goals.</p> <p><i>“I need to work harder to achieve better results by the end of this year. I will have to increase my marks from this year on if I want to be accepted for engineering. Today I will have to work</i></p>	

<p><i>harder and study more. I must make a plan to increase my mathematics marks. I will give it all my effort this week and next month during examinations.</i>”</p> <p>(F;1;1;34-36): <i>“Teacher, the future is important, but not only the far future. We have to plan today for the future. It will be too late if you wait for one day.”</i> This was a learner’s reaction after a discussion on why school is important.</p> <p>(B1;4; ;): <i>“Through hard work and dedication, I will be able to achieve my lifelong hopes and dreams.”</i></p>	
<p>Numerous responses indicated that the learners came to realise that to achieve their goals in the future, they need to plan for them today. Some learners were actually surprised to find that their academic achievements, readiness to learn and attitudes towards certain subjects, have implications for future career choices, as there were responses like <i>“... I am going to actually need Mathematics to become a farmer”</i> (F;6;1;28-29). The learners were able to see the link between their current educational progress and their future career goals. The steps or actions taken for academic self-construction could be identified. Crystallisation, specification and actualisation as discussed by Savickas (2011; 2018), were identifiable in the respective responses¹⁶.</p>	
3.3 Career construction	<p>The career construction theory maintains that careers are actively constructed by means of interpretive processes where social processes and meaning making guide occupational choices and development (Savickas, 2005). Career construction theory promotes the notion of individuals’ co-construction of careers through interpersonal processes, where career choices are constructed to shape a subjective career that holds meaning for the individual.</p>
<p>Comments and examples from learners demonstrating career construction</p>	
<p>(G;3;2;62-64): <i>“Yes, I think so as well.” “After finding these pictures and actually ‘seeing’ what it is all about and what it entails, I wish I could start today.”</i></p> <p>(A;11;1;17-18): <i>“I want to go in the line of sport science. I want to become an outstanding coach and I want to become a cricket player for the Protea’s.”</i> This was a response from a learner who exclaimed her sincere passion for her sport. In her lifeline, collage and other reflective activities she holds the same passion and provides a clear outline for the meaning this has always held, and still holds for her, and how she will be living out her dream in the future.</p> <p>(F;6;1;11-12): <i>“As I thought about my future a lot more and talked to people about what they think, I am now excited.”</i> A learner stating how – by means of career exploration and information</p>	

¹⁶ A thorough, in-depth discussion will be provided in Chapter 5.

gathering – he is now looking forward to his prospective career, as he has found that his dreams could actually be realised.

(B1;3; ;): *“My dream career is to become a business owner of a large company. I can become that because I will do anything in my power to get there.”* This learner referred to how assured he is that he will reach his career goals and dreams, as he feels the preceding activities and interpersonal processes indicated that he indeed can.

By means of the different steps in the intervention strategy, the learners had a chance to examine active strategies to achieve their career goals and how they can start to plan or prepare for a future career. Most learners were excited to link their subjective identities, their hopes and dreams, with their aspired career. All the learners’ aspirations indicated that their future careers were subjective as they held specific meaning.

4.7.4 Introduction to Theme 4

The fourth theme represented demonstrations of learners’ perception and sense of control over their given contexts. The learners expressed a belief that they were capable to control and shape their own lives. Personal reflections displayed their realisation that certain behaviours and actions can enable them to master their environments, which may lead to the attainment of specific goals.

The subtheme ‘self-regulated learning’ was identified as learners realised that their actions and behaviours were crucial in the attainment of personal learning goals. Some learners felt driven and inspired to really focus on their learning from here on forward and to really give their personal best as they have control over their learning outcomes.

The second subtheme, ‘self-efficacy’, is regarded as an important construct as learners reflected on their perceived capabilities around succeeding in specific situations. It was noted that after the learners had completed all the life-design-based activities, they felt more assured about the possible realisation of their goals and that they indeed can control the outcome of future aspirations.

“I will be extremely good in robotics and programming as I have always been able to do it.” (B2;1; ;).

Table 4.6: Research findings relating to sense of control (theme 4)

Theme 4: Sense of control	
Subtheme	Description
4.1 Self-regulation	<p>Self-regulation pertains to aspects of emotions, behaviours, attention, and thoughts as to how individuals react to contextual events (Trommsdorff, 2012). Ultimately, self-regulation can be defined as “the ability to flexibly activate, monitor, inhibit, persevere and/or adapt one's behaviour, attention, emotions and cognitive strategies in response to directions from internal cues, environmental stimuli and feedback from others, in an attempt to attain personally relevant goals” (Moilanen 2007, p. 835).</p> <p>For the purpose of this study, self-regulation will focus on self-regulated learning where learners’ behaviours and actions are orientated towards the attainment of learning goals.</p>
Comments and examples from learners demonstrating self-regulation	
<p>(F;5;2;46-48): <i>“My father said I just have to keep on getting my Mathematics marks up, which I have been doing.”</i> The learner elaborated that he has been working so hard the last couple of months and his marks have gone up.</p> <p>(F;2;1;25-27): <i>“I will really have to pay attention to my English subject, because I will need to be able to communicate extremely effectively with people from overseas.”</i></p> <p>(E;1; ;): <i>“I will take all my classwork seriously, concentrate, don’t take so many days off and stay focused on my long-term goals.”</i> This learner mentioned that he gives his best in class most of the time, but he is honest to say, not every day.</p> <p>(B4;2; ;): <i>“This month I will learn hard for my examinations.”</i> A reflection of a learner indicating that he needs to do things ‘now’ to ensure that his marks go up. He also mentioned that he needs to take school a little bit more seriously, as he is inclined to joke about everything, even his performance in schoolwork.</p>	
Self-regulated practices were enhanced as the participants realised the benefits for their future career and life aspirations.	
4.2 Self-efficacy	<p>Self-efficacy can be summarised as an individual’s perceived capabilities¹⁷. Self-efficacy emphasises individuals’ beliefs that they are capable to attain desired outcomes by employing the necessary actions and applying the skills to reach their goals.</p>

¹⁷ Self-efficacy is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2.

Comments and examples from learners demonstrating self-efficacy

(F;6;1;9-10): *“For the first time I actually believe in myself and I also came to believe that I really can, and will be able, to do this.”*

(G;5;1;10-12): *“I will become that, I want to become that.... because of the preceding activities I feel enabled and positive that I can actually achieve my dreams and goals.”*

(B4;7; ;): *“In five-years’ time I will be able to sing in front of millions of people.”* This is a reflection of a learner who in the initial stages of the intervention indicated that she will never be able to really sing in front of people.

(C;12; ;): *“I am awesome.” “I am talented.” “I have potential.”*

The learner completed her collage and then she looked at the product, where after she said: *“This can be true.”* (G;12;2;87).

(B1;12; ;): *“I am an all-rounder on the sportsgrounds. I believe in myself and I will one day become what I have always wanted to become.”*

The learners portrayed their perceived beliefs and felt that they were able to achieve their hopes and dreams, as well as exercise control over their environments. It was noted that the learners realised that by putting in the correct amount of effort they do have control over the outcomes of their futures.



Figure 4.4: An example of a collage portraying a learner’s beliefs around her prospective career goals

A brief summary explaining the contents of the collage:

This learner wants to become a cricket player for South-Africa’s national team. Furthermore, she wants to also coach school children, especially children with disabilities.

She used catchphrases such as “*I am awesome and I am talented, with a lot of potential*”. Words which stood out included *teamwork, dreams, and passion*.

4.8 DISCUSSION OF QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The process of data analysis was aimed at understanding how the learners made sense of their experiences, by studying their interpretation of their participation in the intervention. Four themes with their respective subthemes (12 in total) surfaced following a process of Thematic Analysis. The identified themes, as well as the subthemes that emerged, are discussed next.

4.8.1 Early career development facets

Self-exploration: During the pre-intervention group interview, the learners were asked to think about their unique talents, likes, dislikes, preferences and so forth. This provided an

opportunity where they could reflect on what they want out of life and/or where they were seeing themselves in a couple of years. Some of the learners had immediate responses where they expressed definite career choices and could provide thorough thought-through reasons and idealistic explanations of how they would achieve their dreams. For instance, *“But, I have to help save the world, so I need to stick to becoming the president”* (A;2;1;86-87), whereas other learners reacted with uncertainty or vague ideas: *“I think I want to become a pre-school teacher as I like working with little-ones.”* (A;8;1;10). Some learners said they were not actually sure what they wanted to become when grown up, as they had not really thought about it: *“I have no idea what I want to become.”* (A;9;1;14). By challenging the learners to think about the future whilst exploring the self, the intervention made them realise that their unique characteristics were directly related to their career development.

Career exploration: The learners engaged in career exploration by identifying their unique career preferences which agreed with their interests, values and perceived skills. Initially, some students were faced with uncertainty and several comments were made such as *“I want to go into the business world, or otherwise I want to become a dr.”* (A;1;1;19). The learners were intrigued to learn more about different occupations, and via the subsequent activities they were able to gather the necessary information that was relevant to their individual unique aspirations. Consistent with Vondracek (1995), individuals find self-actualisation in their chosen career when they carefully plan their career choices according to their abilities and talents. As learners commenced with the different life-design-based activities, they were enthusiastic to embark on a journey where they could learn about the world of work that resonates with their identities.

Perceived barriers: Perceived barriers are regarded as environmental conditions encountered by learners, which can impede or facilitate progress (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Although such barriers are not necessarily based on actual reality or real conditions, individuals often tend to act on the basis of those perceptions (Klein, Noe & Wang, 2006), which affects their motivation and efforts towards progress and attaining goals. The learners discussed different perceived barriers, which included socio-economic-related facets such as financial and academic achievement barriers (especially in the field of mathematics), and perceptions regarding the current climate in South-Africa where the youth is faced with employment uncertainty and scarce job opportunities. Some learners touched on how they thought that there were no desirable job opportunities in this country for the youth, and a learner commented by saying: *“I want to get away. There are no chances or opportunities for*

us in this country anymore.” (A;5;2;57-58). This comment evoked a number of similar responses, and another learner mentioned that the only way he would be able to become a pilot was to go overseas and that he and his family had already done the necessary research to enable him to reach these goals. An example of perceived barriers relating to academic functioning is the comment: *“Oh my goodness, I am going to actually need Mathematics”* (F;6;1;28). This learner mentioned that maths was his least favourite subject as he found it very difficult to pass and thus, he was ‘afraid’ what the implications might be for his prospective profession. Ultimately, it was evident that most of the learners experienced some sense of perceived barrier which they worried might have negative consequences for their future aspirations. These barriers could be related to early career development as they might affect long-term choices, motivation and how learners act in their environments.

Lived experiences: Everyday experiences shape the course of lives, since we are shaped by how we interpret the world around us. This could be clearly identified in numerous expressions made by the learners during this intervention. At first the learners did not realise the effect of lived experiences until after they had completed the *CIP*. Then, most of them mentioned how current successes and failures, hobbies, interests, talents, etc., actually have an influence on how their career aspirations. In the *CIP*, the learners reflected on the themes, patterns and trends identified in Section 4 (their dream career), where examples included: *“I have always been good in it, I want to do it for the rest of my life as it is my passion and definitely a talent. I absolutely love playing cricket.”* (B1;12; ;). This learner’s dream is to become an excellent cricket player as she has been doing it since she can remember. The learners’ lived experiences and their influence on their career development could also be clearly identified in events on their lifelines. *“I built my first model house”* (at age 9); *“I fixed a broken remote control car”* (at age 10); *“I built my own working car”* (at age 13) (D;3 ; ;). *“I am very smart and receive excellent marks. I am great at designing things. I can realise and solve problems easily”* (B1;3; ;). This learner is confident that one day he will become an engineer as he has always succeeded in critical thinking, problem solving, and in building, making, designing and fixing things independently. Learners’ past and current experiences, interests, talents and strengths could be linked directly to their career goals.

4.8.2 The role of significant others – related facets

Family influences: As previously discussed, families have a significant influence on the career development of their children. Parental norms, preferences as well as personal

perceptions and expectations play a role in the career path that their children choose. Learners stated that they feel inspired by their parents and that they feel they can achieve their career goals after discussing the latter with them. It was noteworthy to find that learners also mentioned how they were not only encouraged by their parents' professions, but they were also inspired by specific traits and characteristics their parents displayed towards their own professions. *"I look up at people who work really hard. He made a business out of nothing."* (B1;9; ;). This learner referred to how her father's perseverance and determination were influencing how she thought about work. Another learner emphasised how he wanted to do exactly the same as his father (and mother): *"I admire how hard he works and how far he came in life. They inspire me to become successful."* (B1;1; ;).

Role models: When it comes to role models, a number of learners mentioned their parents, whereas other learners could identify with several other people in life whom they were admiring for different reasons. Some learners referred to the specific talents of this person, such as singing or playing sports, while others looked at what their role model had achieved in life. There was even a learner who felt inspired by his role model as this person facilitated advancements in the world, which affected humanity as a whole: *"People around the world who achieves great things. Especially those who influence everyone, e.g., moon landings and advancements in technology. I really admire him and feel proud that he achieved so much."* (B1;2; ;). This learner referred to Elon Musk as his true inspiration and stated that he wished he could one day also reach the same outcomes. Learners also regarded personality traits as important when considering role models, as can be observed in the following comment: *".....while still caring for the people who work for him, he is so humble."* (B1;10; ;). The learner emphasised that she felt that achievements in life were not worth much without considering the people around you, and she hoped that one day she would be a similar employer.

Peer group influences: Social and peer group influences have a significant impact on choices relating to careers. A recent study by Koech et al. (2016) concluded that peers have a definite influence on career choice and peers regard a friend's advice relevant when considering decisions on careers. In my study, this could especially be noticed when the learners completed their collages and fellow learners commented on and complemented each other with their final products. As the learners were searching for collage pictures, phrases, quotes, words, etc., they started having spontaneous conversations about their goals, aspirations, prospective professions and so forth. These conversations had "accidental" effects on

numerous learners as they started sharing advice, suggestions and ideas surrounding their and others' aspirations. Some learners even helped others in searching for things that they thought would suit the others' identity and career – this also helped these learners to make decisions and even small alterations to their career goals. They gave advice, alternatives and complemented each other's career aspirations. The observations led a situation where peers also considered each other as role models and motivators in achieving desired goals.

4.8.3 The role of education and how learners construct themselves in terms of it

Self-construction: The self is constructed through meaning-making processes and our reflection on interpersonal experiences. As learners partake in daily activities and make sense of the world around them, their experiences are used to develop their self-concept. Self-construction theory denotes that “individuals actively construct themselves through narration or storytelling in social interaction” (Cook & Maree, 2016, p. 2). Learners obviously have a multitude of daily experiences, especially whilst at school, and thus they actively shape their identities as they make sense of these experiences. Self-construction development was prevalent in all the participants' expressions and they reflected on personal meaning making throughout the respective activities. Initially some responses started off with reactions such as, *“It is really so difficult to write about myself and my identity, I really need to think about this...”* (G;12;2;85-86). This is because some learners found it challenging to think about who they are and what constitutes the definition of their selves. This was also true for when they were asked to identify their unique strengths, as some learners hesitated at and took longer to complete specific sections. But gradually, as they proceeded through the different sections, all the learners were able to narrate ‘who they are’. Examples include: *“I am a person with talents and I have a very small, sensitive heart. I am very different from others and I prefer being in my own company”* (B2;7; ;). *“I am a social extrovert and I love communicating with people. I am intelligent, calm and I am always respectful towards others.”* (B4;1; ;). One learner remarked the following about the patterns he identified after completing his life story: *“...what I have gone through, what I have achieved and where I am going now.”* As the learners reflected on their responses, they were intrigued by how much they were learning about their identities. It was noteworthy to find how many learners found it quite easy to identify weaknesses but had difficulty in identifying strengths.

Academic self-construction: As previously mentioned, academic self-construction refers to the means by which individuals construct themselves academically. As self-construction

develops, learners are likely to feel more inclined towards academic performance and align their attitudes, motivation and efforts towards academic attainment. During the intervention, the learners became aware of and realised the importance of current academic behaviours and the influence that these behaviours had on future career-related aspects. Learners were able to link their current educational accomplishments and effort towards academic-related activities to future career prospects. After the post-intervention group interview, the learners mentioned the importance of having to work hard throughout schooling years. *“Yes, and if you plan well and focus on your future now, you will have more options and you will be able to achieve more.”* (F;2;1;37-38). *“You need to be driven and work hard every day, even now, to achieve your goals. Excuses will not bring you anywhere. Take actions and you will do what you want to do.”* (B1;3; ;). These statements emerged from a discussion on why academics and/or education was important for one’s future aspirations. Elaborations on this response indicated that the learners were becoming aware of the fact that a prospective career cannot be built in the future only, as the ‘building’ is shaped by current actions. Academic self-construction is vital to early career development and future aspirations.

Career construction: During the life-design-based intervention, learners narrated their life stories where meaning making occurred in accordance with their subjective identities, which guided the learners’ occupational choices and development. Career choices were explored within the framework of a life story, while the learners ascribed meaning to past, current and future experiences. As they explored numerous options, realised their aspirations and gathered career information, career construction was facilitated by learners who expressed more definite career prospects that corresponded with their core selves *“...how everything from friends, academics, sport and life aspirations guides you towards your future goals.”* This expression emerged from a learner’s themes/patterns in his life story. Another learner gave the following self-assured answer about her future career after narrating her life story: *“I want to become the CEO of a large, international company similar to Amazon”* (E;1; ;). Answers and responses progressed from ‘something like’ and ‘I think’, to clear, descriptive career choices. Final reflections indicated that their career choices were shaped as subjective careers that held specific meaning for each of the learners. *“...to become an engineer, to design things which will make life easier for people”* (B1;3; ;). *“I’ve learned that different people want to become different things, by means of different methods. I mean there is different ways to become and do almost similar occupations. It all depends on what it means for you.”* (G;2;1;18-22).

4.8.4 Sense of control

Self-regulation: People who guide their thoughts and behaviours to reach desired goals are exercising self-regulation. Individuals need to realise that they are the main contributors to their motivation, behaviour and development so as to reach desired goals in life. Numerous scholars indicate that self-regulated learning involves metacognition, strategic action and motivation. It is a process where individuals take control of, and constantly evaluate their learning and behaviour with respect to learning (Ormrod, 2009). *“I need to improve my language marks, and also improve on my mathematics”* (B1;7; ;) indicates a short-term action step identified by a learner when she came to notice that in order to exercise control over future aspirations, she needs to regulate specific actions (current) to attain learning goals. *“This month I will read more”* (B4;6; ;). This remark was made by a learner who became aware that her reading needed improvement as it was something that affected her performance in all other subject areas as well. She realised that she was indeed capable of changing the current situation by putting in more effort, although previously she preferred to avoid the situation altogether. She also announced her intrapersonal motivation, *“This year I will do my best to enjoy scholastic-related activities such as learning, classwork, etc.”* (B4;6; ;).

“Overall I perform very well in academics, but there is one subject I regard as a failure as I know I could have done much better. I will focus on achieving success in that subject as well.” (B2;6; ;). This learner reflected on his marks in different subjects and felt urged to align all his subjects within the same symbol/mark range. He regarded this statement as his short-term goal for one term. The way in which learners interpreted various activities of the life-design-based intervention revealed their positive change in perception of self-regulated behaviours and its influence on their sense of control over learning.

Self-efficacy: Most learners displayed high levels of self-efficacy after concluding the intervention. There was a definite increase in most learners’ sense of efficacy as displayed in their written responses and reflections. One of the responses included: *“I will be waving for you from France”* (F;5;2;46). During the post-intervention interview, one of the learners expressed his belief in reaching his career goals, as he has been working hard, and his belief that he will succeed. *“As I learned a lot about myself and had a chance to reflect on my leadership achievements, I know that I am good in (it) and I can do it.”* (B1;1; ;). This learner reflected on his leadership skills and abilities and how these related to his prospective profession, after completing Section 2 of the *CIP*. According to Lent et al. (1994), an

important predictor of goal achievement is for individuals to have confidence in achieving their goals, and Stringer, Kerpelman and Skorikov (2011) argue that having confidence in achieving career goals are a primary task during adolescence. One learner mentioned that these activities “*take everything together*” (G;10;2;89). He reflected on how many aspects were revealed during the intervention and how it all got put into perspective – which made him realise that he had the potential to reach his goals.

4.9 SUMMARISED COMMENTS: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

As can be observed from this data analysis, four main themes and numerous subthemes could be related to the objective of this study. The themes that emerged from the numerous data sources indicated that constructs such as identity, self-regulation, self-efficacy, career-construction and so forth, strongly related to the development of academic self-construction during the course of the intervention. Scrutiny of the data that had been obtained revealed that this life-design-based intervention resulted in major benefits for Grade 7 learners, as they had the opportunity to make use of different techniques to develop a true sense of self. This amounted to opportunities for positive facets of early career development, which supported their academic self-construction.

The following Table provides a summary and examples of the outcomes of the life-design-based intervention based on the discussion above.

Table 4.7: Summary of themes and sub-themes of the life-design-based intervention

		Pre-intervention theme	Post-intervention theme
Main theme	Subtheme	Pre-intervention status¹⁸	Emerged theme
Early career development facets	Self-exploration	Learners found it difficult to talk about themselves. Personal characteristics, preferences, etc. were sections that they found difficult to answer. Introspection led to uncertainty and hesitation. (Evidence in Table 4.3, theme 1, code: G;3;3;92-93.)	An increased sense of self. (Evidence in Table 4.3, theme 1, code: F;3;1;15-17.)

¹⁸ The information described in the pre-intervention status was obtained through the pre-intervention interview, the learners’ first entries in their journals, as well as the initial section (step 1) of the CIP. Descriptions that were relevant to most participants were captured and summarised.

The role of significant others- related facets	Career exploration	Learners shared ideas around possible careers they thought they would be interested in or good at. It was evident that learners were not sure and needed to explore further. (Evidence in Section 4.7.1, code: A;10;1;11.)	Clear, descriptive expressions on career aspirations and confirmation of effective career exploration. (Evidence in Table 4.3, theme 1, code: B1;5; ; .)
	Perceived barriers	Learners' expressions on barriers indicated that they may feel that these barriers can't be overcome. (Evidence in Table 4.3, theme 1, code: B1;7; ; .)	A realisation that possible barriers can be overcome by identifying and exploring them. (Evidence in Table 4.6, code: B4;7; ; .)
	Lived experiences	The learners weren't really aware of the effect of current experiences on future career aspirations. (Evidence in Table 4.3, theme 1, code: A;6;2;80-82.)	A definite realisation that current, lived experiences already have an impact on future career aspirations. (Evidence in Table 4.3, theme 1, code: G;2;1;13-15.)
	Family influences	Most learners indicated that they regard their parents' input regarding careers fundamental, although they did not really have constructive discussions regarding careers with their parents. (Evidence in learners' journal activities, e.g. E;10; ; .)	Learners indicated that after having directed discussions on careers with their parents, they felt much more assured, orientated and motivated. (Evidence in Table 4.5, theme 3, code: F;6;1;11-12.)
	Role models	Learners needed to determine their own unique aspirations and recognise the specific characteristics they were striving for in order to be able to identify with role models. (Evidence in Table 4.4, theme 2, code: A;10;2;72.)	An increase in the identification of and association with specific role models. (Evidence in Table 4.4 and all learners' reflection activities.)
	Peer group influences	Learners did not realise the influence of peers on their aspired careers, although they were aware of how they felt inspired by others' achievements. (Evidence in Table 4.4, theme 2, code: B1;8; ; .)	Learners appreciated and considered positive input from peers. (Evidence in Table 4.4, theme 2, code: G;12;2;44-48.)

The role of education and how learners construct themselves accordingly	Self-construction	Learners found it challenging to realise and/or express their unique sense of self and had to really engage in defining the self. (Evidence in Section 4.8.3, code: G;12;2;85-86.)	An increase in sense of self. (Evidence in numerous examples provided in Table 4.5, sub-theme 3.1.)
	Academic self-construction	Learners weren't completely aware that academic self-construction have profound implications for their futures. They needed to realise the personal meaning of current educational perceptions and attitudes and how it can shape aspired careers. (Evidence in Table 4.5, sub-theme 3.2.)	Increased academic self-construction. (Evidence in Table 4.5, theme 3, code: F;1;1;34-36.)
	Career-construction	Initially, learners weren't able to link their subjective identities, their hopes and dreams, and their aspired careers with each other as they did not grasp the interrelatedness. (Observations made during the pre-intervention group interview and initial stages of the <i>CIP</i> .)	Co-construction of subjective careers was evident. (Reference in Section 4.8.3, codes: B1;3; ; , and G;2;1;18-22.)
Sense of control	Self-regulation	A need for learners to realise that they have to self-regulate their behaviours and attitudes to reach their goals, were necessary. (Evidence in Section 4.8.4, code: B1;7; ; , and B4;6; ; .)	A definite realisation on the importance of self-regulation. Learners identified definite actions to be taken. (Evidence in Table 4.6, theme 4, code: F;5;2;46-48.)
	Self-efficacy	Some learners expressed negative beliefs about their capabilities and some did not realise the effect of self-efficacy in the attainment of desired outcomes. (Evidence in Table 4.6, theme 4, code: F;6;1;9-10 and Section 4.8.4, code: G;10;2;89.)	An increase in beliefs in perceived capabilities. (Numerous examples in Table 4.6, theme 4.)

Table 4.7 displays and summarises the themes and subthemes that emerged during the intervention, based on a comparison of the findings following the analysis of pre-intervention

and post-intervention data. The information presented is based on summaries of the most prevalent descriptions received from the participants and also relevance to the themes. The findings demonstrate definite progress during the course of the intervention, as learners were able to express growth with regard to early career development facets.

4.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reported on the qualitative data obtained during my research by means of analysing the numerous data sources. The data sources included the pre-intervention group interview, the *CIP*, the various post-modern intervention techniques (lifelines, journal writing and collages), the post-intervention group interview and my reflective journal/diary. I attempted to illustrate what the possible gains were for the learners as interpreted by them. In view of the responses from learners, a discussion on the influence of the intervention followed, based on the respective themes that were identified and bearing in mind the aim to answer the research questions.

In Chapter 5, the qualitative data is linked in an effort to critically relate them to the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed in previous chapters.

CHAPTER 5: RELATING MY FINDINGS TO EXISTING LITERATURE ON THE INFLUENCE THAT GROUP LIFE-DESIGN-BASED COUNSELLING HAD ON GRADE 7 LEARNERS' ACADEMIC SELF-CONSTRUCTION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research tends to generate knowledge grounded in human experience, with the purpose to yield meaningful and useful results (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The purpose of this thesis was to report on generating trustworthy qualitative research within the theoretical framework as set out in the preceding chapters. More particularly, the purpose was to investigate what the influence of group life-design-based counselling was on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction. In this chapter I compare, link and interpret the research findings within the literature framework, whilst attempting to transparently communicate trustworthy, rigorous qualitative research results.

The themes identified in Chapter 4 are discussed and triangulated in an attempt to answer the respective research questions. The outcomes and results found are related to existing literature. I focused on objectively assessing the findings and relating the outcomes of my study to current literature (critiquing the outcomes) by using the following fourfold lens:

- (i) Do previous findings concur with the findings of my study?
- (ii) Which of the findings do not concur with previous findings?
- (iii) Are there findings in my study that have never been reported before?
- (iv) Did specific trends emerge from the findings of my study?

It should be stated upfront that limited research has previously been conducted on career counselling with regard to primary school children as discussed by authors such as Hartung (2013); Maree (2017b) and Patton (2017), as most studies focus on secondary school children, from fifteen years of age and upwards. Patton (2017) also emphasises the need for more research on the career development of young individuals as it is important to realise the influence this will have on young learners' future working lives. Similar viewpoints are held by Anderson and Vandehey (2012), and Watson, Nota and McMahon (2015), who emphasise the importance of career developmental tasks in the early years and therefore the need for research on early career counselling and development.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS IN RELATION TO PREVIOUS STUDIES

In this section I discuss the results obtained from data analysis. Seven qualitative data sources were utilised to identify themes and subthemes by means of which to investigate the influence of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction. Life-design-based counselling strategies and principles were used to guide the intervention when learners participated in a six-step career counselling intervention¹⁹. In discussing the qualitative results, the themes that emerged from the respective activities will be linked to ascertain the influence of the group intervention.

The discussion that follows are based on the themes and sub-themes discussed in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Facets of early career development

During this study, the emphasis was on the *early* career development phase where young learners were exposed to a career-related intervention that allowed them to explore many facets relating to career development. My research thus represents an attempt to answer calls by experts in the field of career counselling for more research on the topic. They argue that learners need to be supported during early childhood as they explore careers, become curious about the world around them, and develop their thinking and adaptability (Hartung et al., 2005; Watson & McMahan, 2005). In today's society, young learners are faced with the demands of a fast-paced, ever-changing world; therefore, there is a need to equip them with the necessary career knowledge and skills, and to make them realise the importance of lifelong learning to support them in reaching their career goals.

As learners in my study explored their inner selves and careers, mentioned what barriers they perceived to be obstacles in reaching goals, and expressed experiences that could later be linked to prospective, anticipated careers, the theme 'facets of early career development' surfaced. Below, I elaborate on this matter.

5.2.1.1 Self-exploration

The first sub-theme under 'facets early career development' refers to self-exploration where learners explored their personal interests and curiosities, and gained knowledge about themselves.

¹⁹ Please refer to the thorough discussion on these six steps as provided in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.4.1.

Children's curiosities are evident during Super's (1994) growth phase when they are keen to learn about the world around them as they explore their surroundings and gather information. They get to really know themselves and apply this newly acquired knowledge about themselves to their career aspirations, something that significantly contributes to their early career development. The sub-theme under discussion here (i.e. self-exploration) is compatible with the theory of Super (1994) and was evidenced by the enthusiasm of the Grade 7 learners to learn more about the world around them. They enjoyed exploring their surroundings and gathering work-related information, which became increasingly more evident as they progressed through the different phases and steps outlined in the intervention. The learners who participated in my study gained insights into themselves and then used this knowledge to inform their career-related decisions. They explored their talents, unique strengths and interests during the different steps as set out in the life-design intervention. Their exploration clearly had a positive effect on how they personally related to aspired careers. These findings concur with those of Flum and Kaplan (2006) who wrote that as individuals start to explore the self, they learn about themselves and their environments, which enables them to make important life decisions. Assertions made by participants in my study indicated that their thinking regarding careers were guided by how they made sense of their environments in relation to their sense of self. My findings also resonate positively with the views expressed by Ungar (2012), who views career resilience as certain behaviours that reflect the interactions between individuals and their environments, and that lead to the availability of opportunities for personal growth. The learners in my study were provided opportunities where they could reflect on their personal selves and their reaction in their environments – all of which contributed to their career development.

As my research proceeded, it was evident that as the learners' sense of self developed, so did their self-concept and awareness, whilst they participated in the activities generated by the *CIP*. The learners reflected on, listened to their personal strengths and talents being recounted, and crafted their personal life stories. These young learners became more assertive and could express their positive traits and capabilities as they progressed through the different sections. During the post-intervention stage, one could observe that the learners were aware that they were exploring their inner selves and gaining self-knowledge. This finding confirms the finding of Maree (2018, p. 428) who found that "people's sense of self thus strongly influences (and is influenced by) their idiosyncratic life stories and promotes the formation, sustainability, and continuance of their life scripts". This perspective on an enhanced sense of

self and self-awareness is supported by the findings that emerged during the post-intervention interview where the learners who participated in my study indicated how much they gained personally upon completion of the intervention activities.²⁰ The participants' responses in my study also resonated with Super's (1996) career development model in which he stresses the importance for young children to develop a positive self-awareness that will have a significant influence on their future professions. The Grade 7 learners in my study were able to relate to future professions and aspirations as they explored and became aware of their own behaviours, dreams, feelings and motivations, which corresponded with their true selves.

As the self-concept develops, one can consider its influence on identity formation in young children and how this relates to early career development. While the learners were exploring different career goals, many comments made by the participants reflected different aspects related to their identities.²¹ As mentioned earlier, their sense of self was also reinforced, which underlies many career counselling theories (Maree, 2018). The aforementioned is in line with the studies done by Stringer et al. (2011) who found that an important component in the development of people's identity during childhood is their exploration of an aspired career.

My findings on self-exploration concur with the findings and views of Flum and Blustein (2000) as well as Super (1957), namely that the identity-exploration process can be regarded as one of the key elements in children's career development processes. The process holds numerous benefits for young learners who are afforded the opportunity to get to know themselves and relate their enhanced self-knowledge to career development. Such findings emphasise the importance to provide learners with appropriate opportunities for self- and career exploration to enable them to acquire the necessary competencies to "make informed decisions about career pathways, plan how to achieve their career goals, and manage their chosen career throughout life" (Thomas, Larson, Solberg, & Martin, 2017, p. 2). This view is also supported by authors such as Peila-Shuster (2017) who stress the need for children to be supported by career counsellors as they face their career life-trajectories (Maree, 2018).

5.2.1.2 Career exploration

The need to introduce learners to career-related activities early on is becoming increasingly important because of the influence these activities have on lifelong career trajectories

²⁰ These findings are elaborated on in Chapter 4, Table 4.3.

²¹ Examples and discussions can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.3, Section 1.1.

(Helwig, 2004; Nota, Ginevra, & Santilli, 2015; Savickas et al., 2009). Young learners need to be supported with the necessary opportunities where they are exposed to a variety of career options, information, choices and possibilities – at the elementary level. This assertion is supported by authors who call for “renewed examination of the developmental tasks that need to be mastered in the strategic early years, and how these tasks can best be mastered to promote self- and career construction” (Maree, 2018, p. 438). As learners are exposed to different situations and experiences, they learn about the world around them and start planning towards their goals. The learners in my research study participated in various activities that clearly sparked their interests to explore different careers and gain detailed career information²². The afore-mentioned observations made in my research study agree with the findings of Gottfredson (2002) who stated that we can assist children in their career development as they gain broad career-related experiences, which in turn can identify unique career interests. As learners participate in various experiences, key early career development facets are addressed (Collin & Guichard, 2011; Guichard, 2005, 2009). The need to explore career information was noticed already after the first sessions of my career intervention, as learners returned with detailed explanations of what they want to achieve, as well as a better understanding of what certain career categories entail. Many scholars have long suggested that the career development process begins in early childhood and is a lifelong process (Gottfredson, 1981; Roe, 1956; Super, 1957; Trice et al., 1995). More recent studies confirm that childhood indeed marks the dawn of career development when young individuals make career decisions, explore the self and different vocational options, and acquire the rudiments of career adaptability (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2008; Briddick, Sensoy-Briddick, & Savickas, 2018). This supposition was also confirmed in my research, as these Grade 7 learners were fascinated to delve into information regarding their aspired careers. As they explored different career options, they gained knowledge on the self as well, which ultimately contributed to their career adaptability and development. To summarise, the learners who participated in my research/intervention expressed career curiosities that related to career development. Given Maree (2018) and others’ insistence that young learners need to be(come) curious about key facets of their future career lives and gain confidence about what they want to achieve in their career lives, this finding appears to bode well for their future.

²² Examples of where learners’ interest to gain career information was sparked can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, the third entry.

5.2.1.3 Perceived barriers

Barriers and a lack of opportunities can have a severe impact on future occupational goals and aspirations, as well as on overall career development (Bauer, Anderson, Hirko, & Wendling, 2019). During the pre- and post-intervention interviews, the learners who participated in my study mentioned numerous facets that they regarded (or perceived) as barriers to reaching their aspired career goals. Views and expressions that learners mentioned included job scarceness, a lack of career opportunities in South Africa, academic attainments, and financial constraints²³. As the participants in my study gained career information and explored numerous career goals, some of them were concerned that they would not be able to pursue their dream careers as these came with (perceived) constraints. Nevertheless, as they progressed through the different steps in the intervention, many of the learners realised that these barriers could be overcome and they could have control over their futures. This finding substantiates the findings of a study by Hirschi (2009) that as career adaptability (specifically career concern) increases, there may also be an increase in a sense of power. It also resonates with the statement of Peila-Shuster (2018) who argues that by increasing career adaptability we can support learners to overcome perceived (career) barriers as they navigate this ever-changing world.

My participants' responses suggested that there was an increase in their confidence and that they felt empowered to overcome the obstacles they face. This finding corresponds with a study done by Hartung et al. (2008) who suggested that as individuals' career confidence increased, they were able to overcome barriers and reach desired goals. The intervention as outlined in my study provided opportunities where learners could discuss and reflect on feelings, emotions and personal perceptions regarding aspired careers. The insight and information they gained during this intervention contributed to and had a positive influence on their career resilience and confidence. These findings are in accordance with findings by Maree (2017c, 2018b), which confirm that individuals can be supported to turn areas of growth into strengths. The learners in my research study, too, provided evidence of having changed their subjective beliefs and perceptions as they felt empowered to turn their areas of growth into strengths, which ultimately enhanced their career resilience. To provide an example: *“For the first time I actually believe in myself and I also came to believe that I really can, and will be able, to do this”* (F;6;1;9-10). *“Is it correct to say that I have learned*

²³ An explanation of perceived barriers can be found in Table 4.3, Section 1.3.

that I am actually now very positive about my future?” (F;6;1;6-7). These comments were made by a learner who in the beginning of the intervention expressed some insecurities regarding his future goals.²⁴ A study done by Hartung and Cadaret (2017) also confirms that life-design-related counselling can enhance individuals’ awareness of the future and positively influence behaviours that increase career resilience. The learners in my study showed increased self-efficacy and confidence, which implies that understanding and addressing perceived barriers are likely to help to improve self-efficacious beliefs and support learners in reaching their career goals. This finding supports existing research that individuals are more likely to aim for high career aspirations and goals, as perceived barriers are addressed (Robinson, Douglas-Vail, Bryce, & van Zyl, 2017).

Other factors such as job scarceness and opportunities for the youth in South Africa were also factors that influenced the learners’ career choices and goals. Learners mentioned that they felt they that this was a barrier in reaching desired career outcomes. Statements reflected insecurities around the current economic climate in South Africa where many young people may not be able to fulfil their dreams. The afore-mentioned aspects could also be addressed with activities relating to career resilience.

5.2.1.4 Lived experiences

Previous and current experiences have a significant influence on how we interpret and react to the world around us. Learners’ academic achievement, extracurricular activities, leadership roles, overall successes and failures, perceived capacities and abilities, hobbies, and talents influence how they make meaning of the world around them, how they think about careers, and how they make decisions regarding future careers. The determining impact of surrounding systems on students’ future aspirations have long ago been documented in Bronfenbrenner’s (1986) bio-ecological model. Recent studies also suggest that as individuals pursue certain goals, they continuously interact with their environments, which provide learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994; Schaub & Tokar, 2005; Ireland & Lent, 2018).

During this life-design-based intervention that I conducted and am describing in this thesis, the learners navigated through numerous activities where they reflected on daily experiences. This gave rise to a realisation that certain events contribute to how these learners reason about their occupational prospects. The learners were already able to link their past

²⁴ Other examples can be found in Table 4.6, Section 4.2.

and current achievements to the likelihood of achieving certain goals, which indicated the influence of these experiences and perceptions on career development. Their career goals and aspirations were closely intertwined with their academic attainments and school-related experiences²⁵. This finding is supported by Negru (2012), Negru, Pop and Opre (2013) and Widlund, Tuominen, Tapola and Korhonen (2020) who conducted studies on the interconnected influence of achievements on prospective career goals. The remarks made by the learners in my life-design-based intervention are supported by existing research (such as that done by Negru-Subtirica and Pop (2016)), which points out that the occupational journeys taken by young people are strongly influenced by academic achievement and experiences they have at school. The findings in my study also resonate with those of Clements and Kamau (2018), who found that motivational processes such as achievement and current successes and failures, influence students' proactive career behaviours. The post-modern techniques used in my study²⁶ displayed and addressed personal perceptions of learners (which resulted from certain experiences), and their connection with their prospective careers²⁷. The Grade 7 learners were also intrigued when they realised how their everyday lives are already preparing them for and shaping their future career objectives. This finding confirms the findings in a study done by Turner and Albro (2017) and Redecker et al. (2011), where they examined the importance of daily experiences within the school, family and the community in shaping individuals' future careers. The learners in my study came to realise that the experiences they are confronted with, influence how they make meaning of their lives and also navigate how they think about the world of work.

As the learners in my study linked past and current experiences to their aspirations, their self-confidence and efficacy improved, which also had a positive influence on their sense of self. This finding is supported by prominent authors such as Maree, Fletcher and Pienaar (2018), as well as Savickas (2019), who found that as individuals make meaning of past experiences, they gradually develop a coherent sense of self. The findings on lived experiences in my study furthermore indicate that exploring past experiences and reflecting on everyday experiences have led to increased career development competencies, which are in line with the study done by Park, Rojewski and Lee (2018). These authors found that

²⁵ Numerous examples can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1, under the heading: *lived experiences*.

²⁶ The techniques referred to includes, lifelines, collages, reflections and life stories.

²⁷ Multiple examples can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.8.1.

student participation in career education significantly increases career competency and development outcomes.

The lived-experiences-related findings reported on in this section suggest that it is necessary to guide learners in their everyday lives and support them in pursuing career goals. According to studies (e.g. by Yang, Yaung, Noh, Jang, & Lee, 2017), individuals who have high career aspirations are more likely to actively pursue their career goals. Maree (2018) also mentions the need to help children master career developmental tasks, as the career traits that they acquire and display early on may “to a large extent be those they will exhibit later in their career lives” (p. 439).

5.2.2 Theme 2: The role of significant others – related facets

Career choice and development are significant issues in young people’s lives, as career development persists well beyond youth, into adult life (Bubić & Ivanišević, 2016; Robertson, 2014). As young individuals engage in career exploration, many authors have found that “career development learning occurs through recursive interaction between individuals and the influences in their lives” (McMahon & Rixon, 2007, p. 40). The learners in my study discussed the influential role of significant others in their career development as they investigated future career aspirations. Family members, teachers and learners’ social environment provide valuable experiences that influence career choice and options (Schultheiss, Palma & Manzi, 2005).

The learners in my study expressed how they could identify with parents, teachers, role models and other key figures as significant influences in their career choices and aspirations. Below, I elaborate on the sub-themes that emerged in this category.

5.2.2.1 Family influences

Parents provide the necessary support and guidance for their children’s career development when they expose them to various career-related experiences (Turner et al., 2004). They are in the position to stimulate their children’s interests, exploration and aspirations in respect of a career (Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Hartung et al., 2005; Watson & McMahon, 2005), and they help them to interpret information about the world of work (Hall et al., 1996).

The learners in my study participated in various activities when they discussed their biggest influences and the role models that shaped their career options and goals. Most of the learners indicated that their parents had the biggest influence on their prospective

professions²⁸. These findings in my study agree with those of McMahon, Carroll and Gillies (2001) and McMahon and Rixon (2007) whose research indicates that parents play a vital role in their children's occupational goals. The effect parents have on their children's career aspirations is stronger than the influence of peers, the school and the social environment. Some learners in my study also indicated that significant others, such as siblings and extended family members (uncles, aunts) contributed to their career development, but their parents were still considered their main source of career information. My study participants felt inspired by their parents' occupations as they wanted to pursue similar goals. They wished to gain relevant career information on jobs that correlated positively with the jobs of their parents. This finding in my study resonates with the findings of Buzzanell et al. (2011) and Paugh (2005), who found that the agency to learn about careers is facilitated by a child's parents. The learners in my study were strongly influenced by their parent's ideas and conceptualisations regarding careers – a finding that also agrees with the findings of Whiston and Keller (2004) and Archer, De Witt and Wong (2014). These researchers found that the support provided during the career development of children, influence a child's perceptions regarding career options, career choice and aspirations. Children ask questions, observe their parents in their career context, and make sense of career information as provided by their parents.

The learners in my study further indicated that they were motivated by personal characteristics that their parents displayed regarding work, such as dedication, hard work and persistence²⁹. These findings from my life-design-based intervention concur with the findings of Jungen (2008) who found that parental work ethic and values greatly influence career decisions in their children. The learners in my study mentioned that their parents displayed good work ethic, values, orientation and attitudes – all of which they admired. The aforementioned also corresponds with the findings of Leenders, Buunk and Henkens (2017) namely that a constructive set of parental beliefs and attitudes regarding work has a positive influence on their child's career perceptions, aspirations and development.

Parents evidently play a major role in supporting their children throughout their career development, as young learners are often influenced by their parents when making decisions related to their education and career (Ikonen, Leinonen, Asikainen, & Hirvonen, 2018).

²⁸ Excerpts can be found in Chapter 4, Section 4.7.2 and Table 4.4.

²⁹ Examples of these expressions from learners can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.4.

5.2.2.2 Role models

Role models are regarded as individuals with whom people can identify, as role models possess certain qualities or properties that other people aspire to have. Role models play a pivotal role in influencing children's career plans, as learners are more likely to engage in proactive career behaviours that concur with their role models' behaviours (Buunk, Griffioen & Peiro, 2007). Role models can provide the necessary guidance and inspiration to promote young persons' academic and career development (Nauta & Kokaly, 2001). Furthermore, role models also provide valuable information on how young people can pursue their career goals (Valero, Keller & Hirschi, 2019). Role models have been identified as important in envisioning future aspirations and promoting young individuals' career development. As indicated in my study, role models can have several potential benefits and should therefore be regarded as a valuable asset in career intervention (Ronkainen, Ryba & Selänne, 2019).

The learners in my research study identified key figures that they regard as role models. These included but are not limited to business magnates, famous sports stars, parents, actors, writers and teachers, who they believe have an impact on their aspirations, career choices and life goals³⁰. The learners mentioned that personal attributes, characteristics, skills, and talents³¹ displayed by these role models serve as an inspiration and idealisation of what they want to achieve later in life. The findings in my research indicate that role models serve as important motivation for young learners. These findings confirm the findings of Garcia, Ocampo, Restubog, Tang and Wang (2019) and Herrmann et al. (2016) who found that individuals wish to increase their similarity with and find inspiration in the achievements, skills and characteristics of their role models.

Four participants in my study referred to specific key figures (Bill Gates, Elon Musk) as role models because the role models are ambitious, successful, goal-directed and innovative. The learners in my study mentioned that they also wish for this perceived excellence as they want to find themselves in top leadership positions, e.g. CEOs and CFOs, and to make major contributions within the business and/or technology world. The aforementioned findings in my study agree with the research conducted by Bandura (1989), who stated that although role models do not necessarily personally engage with individuals, they are still in a position to be a significant career resource, and from a distance they create

³⁰ Excerpts of discussions on role models can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.4, Section 2.2.

³¹ Key characteristics are outlined in Chapter 4, Table 4.4.

opportunities for individuals to visualise their dreams. My findings in this regard concur with the findings by Flouri and Buchanan (2002) whose study also revealed that having a role model is an important predictor of career maturity in an adolescent, which positively influences overall career development.

Teachers are particularly influential when learners consider career options, as the former form part of the daily lives of these learners. Teachers are well aware of specific aptitudes and talents of learners and they are familiar with the scholastic abilities and personal characteristics of their learners. They also observe learners holistically – thus, they find themselves in a position of being well informed and sensible for guiding learners towards their career aspirations (Watters, 2010). I, too, agree that teachers' influence on learners' career development should be considered as indispensable and of great value, and should therefore not be disregarded. Five learners who participated in my life-design-based intervention indicated that they regard teachers as significant role models and a great source of career information. My findings are supported by the research done on the value of career learning experiences and opportunities that teachers provide for their learners. This includes supporting learners to acquire new skills (applicable and relevant to aspired careers) and also reinforcing specific talents that may have otherwise been overlooked (Schultheiss et al., 2005). Since school environments comprise excellent starting points for career guidance (Liu et al., 2015), learners should benefit from connecting their learning and school activities to potential careers (Gillies et al., 1998). In fact, the important impact of learners' current learning on their future aspirations cannot be overemphasised (Watson & McMahon, 2007). Teachers are especially significant career guidance facilitators during these formative years.

5.2.2.3 Peer group influences

Peer groups provide an important context for development and choices for their fellow students. Peers form part of social support or the 'social capital' that supports learners' career aspirations (Morton, Ramirez, Meece, Demetriou & Panter, 2018), as adolescents' hopes, dreams and expectations about the future are influenced by their peers (Raabe & Wölfer, 2019). Peers, especially peers within the school (or class) context, are known to become increasingly important to children throughout adolescence (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2010), as adolescents are influenced by the views, opinions and perceptions of their peer group.

The learners in my study participated in various interactions where they could observe, interpret and derive meaning from the inputs from their peers. These interactions included

discussions and activities as stipulated in the life-design-based intervention, as well as interactions that did not form part of the intervention but were facilitated as a response to the learners' increased curiosities regarding prospective careers³².

Most of the Grade 7 learners who participated in my study stated that the input of their peers had helped them to obtain greater clarity in respect of the value and personal meaning they could derive from the careers they were aspiring to at that stage.

The majority of the participants in my study felt motivated and inspired by their peers' behaviours (such as hard work and dedication towards their academics and extracurricular activities), motivation to reach certain goals, achievements and successes. The participants and their peers provided each other with advice, alternatives for, recommendations, encouragement and options. Some learners were uncertain if, and how, they would be able to achieve certain career goals, and then their peers would recommend alternatives, e.g. combining travelling with the sourcing of textiles for interior decorating/ designing, etc.³³. Lastly, the participants gathered career information from and obtained valuable insight through their interactions with their peers that they could then apply to their own aspirations. My findings concur with those of Ryan (2001) and Steinberg and Monahan (2007), who found that peers are important influencers of the achievement beliefs and behaviours of fellow students.

The interactions between the participants and their peers also contributed to participants' career resilience. Research indicates that career resilience is enhanced by a positive social identity due to interactions between learners (Giannoccaro, Massari, & Carbone, 2018). The comments of participants in my study about their interactions with their peers signified a degree of personal growth in them as they could identify personal characteristics and strengths in their peers, which were highlighted by their positive inputs. This finding concurs with the research done by Maree (2018b) on how individuals' career resilience is enhanced as they critically reflect on and adapt their subjective beliefs. Learners in my study felt inspired and capable to reach their future career goals (indicating career

³² In Section 4.8.2 details can be found on the 'spill over' effect this intervention had, when the participants in this study shared knowledge and gathered career information and advice from fellow peers (peers who did not participate in the study).

³³ Inputs from peers are summarised in Chapter 4, Table 4.4, as well as Section 4.8.2.

resilience) as they reflected on inputs from their peers. They also exhibited an increase in their sense of self and personal growth as they adapted their subjected beliefs³⁴.

5.2.3 Theme 3: The role of education and how learners construct themselves accordingly

Understandably, as my participants found themselves within an educational context and the research was aimed at an educational phenomenon, the theme ‘role of education’ emerged. The sub-themes of self-construction, academic self-construction and career construction were identified and will be elaborated on below.

5.2.3.1 Self-construction

During this life-design intervention, the learners participated in various activities during which they could reflect on daily experiences as they made sense of their lives. These processes of interpersonal reflection to which they were introduced in the course of the intervention, facilitated and contributed to their self-construction³⁵. As stated previously, self-construction emphasises how the self-concept develops in relation to various experiences within a social context. It also states that the way in which individuals’ subjective identities are formed influence how they make sense of the world around them (Guichard, 2005).

One such activity, as stipulated in the *CIP* (Maree, 2016), invited the learners to write a personal identity statement. An example includes: *“I am a person with many talents; someone with a very small, sensitive heart. I try to be myself and not to compare myself with others. I am different from others and I prefer being in my own company. I am inclined to be distrustful of people (don’t trust others readily). A lover of everything that has anything to do with music and writing, I put my trust in God.”* (Janeⁱ)³⁶. This learner realised that although she does not necessarily excel in academics or on the sport field, she possesses specific talents that resonate with her career goals. She also came to recognise that although she finds it difficult to fit in with others, this personal trait is also a good fit with her prospective profession. She came to appreciate that these specific characteristics and life experiences that influence her self-concept and how she makes sense of the world, could be utilised to

³⁴ Examples can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.4, Section 2.2.

³⁵ Remarks made by the learners that are indicative of self-construction can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.4, as well as Section 4.8.3.

³⁶ Pseudonyms are used in all the case studies. Written informed consent and assent (where applicable) were obtained from all stakeholders, confidentiality was guaranteed, and participants were invited to authorise or de-authorise all the information obtained during the intervention.

corroborate her life aspirations. Ultimately, this had a direct effect on her subjective identity forms, personal growth, and sense of self.

Another example of an identity-related statement: *“I am a person who works extremely hard and I will never give up on any challenge. I am very passionate about animals; I care for and love them so much, therefore the confusion about my career choice. I wanted to become a veterinarian, but it will be too difficult to assist an animal who got hurt as I would be too sensitive. I get extremely irritated when people do not work hard because I myself always give of my best in everything. I stress too much over the smallest things. I love participating in sport- and other outdoors-related activities and excel in such activities”* (Sarah). Currently, this learner is experiencing much confusion regarding her future career path. Her areas of growth included realising that she sometimes expects too much from people around her, especially those who do not work as hard as she does. This was seen in the Step 4 of the CIP when she made the following comment: *“One day I do not want to be unreasonable with other people as a leader, there needs to be happiness”*.

This activity inquired into the learners’ unique subjective beliefs – they could reflect on what they know about themselves, write about certain beliefs about their identities and how these beliefs relate to prospective professions. The learners in my study engaged in activities that aided them to validate who they are and what they regarded as important to them. These activities correspond with one of the goals of life design as stated by Savickas et al. (2009), namely that individuals should reduce indecisiveness and develop intentionality. The different life-design-based activities and processes in which the learners in my study participated helped them to articulate possible and positive career-life stories and possible future selves. The learners were supported to realise the importance of concentrating “on meaning making through intentional processes in the ongoing construction of [their] lives” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 246).

As the learners got to know themselves better and realised what they value in life, the self-knowledge that they acquired during the intervention ultimately helped them to clarify future goals and make informed decisions regarding prospective career choices. They were enabled to link their self-knowledge with suitable careers. My findings resonate with Chen (2011) who found that self-knowledge can be very useful to support individuals in clarifying future goals and making career choices.

Self-construction further relies on the premise that self-identity is constructed by means of discourse and social interaction (Guichard, 2005). The learners who participated in

this life-design-based intervention engaged in numerous social interactions where the learners shared knowledge, perceptions and ideas regarding their future career world. Learners shared personal ideas and feelings about aspirations as well as the personal meanings they ascribed to potential careers, which contributed to the development of their sense of self. Ultimately, these social interactions during which the learners could share personal experiences resulted in a situation that benefited the learners' self-construction. Social interaction furthermore brought about personal growth as well as career resilience in the learners. This finding concurs with the findings of and views expressed by Del Corso (2017) as well as Hartung and Cadaret (2017), who found that it is important for high school students to develop the necessary attitudes, beliefs and competencies as they make sense of their lives, which enhances career resilience. To narrow my finding down to be more relevant to younger learners, Maree's (2017) research with younger learners emphasises the importance of personal growth for enhancing career resilience and the development of a better sense of self. The findings in my study also revealed the positive influence of this intervention on the participants' sense self and overall personal development.

5.2.3.2 Academic self-construction

Academic self-construction refers to the means by which learners construct themselves academically. The study aimed to determine by which means group life-design-based counselling influences Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction. The purpose of the intervention was to empower learners to realise the connection between their current learning or schooling and future career development, as the efforts they put in now, the knowledge they acquire, and the skills they are developing, influence subsequent stages of career development and career choice and options.

During this research intervention, learners were supported to realise the relationship between their current educational efforts and accomplishments on the one hand and their aspired careers on the other hand. They became aware of how their current learning and achievements already influence how they think about the world of work, their aspired career choices, and also the relevance of academic achievement to future career-related aspects. An example includes where a learner realised the need to perform better in Mathematics in order to fulfil his desired career goals. Another example is where a learner made the following statement: *"The future is important, but not only the far future. We have to plan for the future,*

today. It will be too late if you wait for one day” (John)³⁷. My findings concur with those of Caspi et al. (1998) and Seligman and Watts (1996) who found that promoting career development programmes and providing opportunities for linking learners’ school curriculum and current learning correlated positively with their future career choice and aspirations during the primary school years. The learners who participated in my study were given an opportunity to participate in an intervention where they could link their future with their school and current learning. I found that participating in the intervention promoted their insight into the importance of linking their current activities with their future choices and aspirations. My findings also resonate with those of Gillies, McMahan and Carroll (1998) who found that “career education activities lead to a better understanding of and more interest in career information and a clearer perception of how school activities may relate to future work” (Watson & McMahan, 2007, p. 567). It seems clear that learners should benefit from being exposed to activities and/or programmes where they can enact their talents and interests. Likewise, they benefit from exploring issues about their future lives. They need to become aware of their present perceptions, activities and schooling and its relevance to their future lives. This finding confirms the findings of Nazli (2007), namely that learners as young as nine years old already make and benefit from a conscious attempt to plan their futures. Nazli underscored the importance of helping *younger* learners to address their need for support during these early career developmental stages. Watson and McMahan (2007) found that younger learners do not necessarily make a connection between their current learning and future career aspirations. They therefore emphasised the need to make young learners aware of how their learning provides opportunities for actualising their future career aspirations. Educational and career planning is clearly important to emphasise the connection between learning or schoolwork, and future successes.

To summarise, learners need to be made aware of, understand, and acknowledge the value of their learning with regard to constructing their academic sense of self satisfactorily. By becoming more aware of their career goals and of the importance of dedication and commitment towards attainment of these goals, they are more likely to actively engage in educational activities and tasks that are regarded as important in realising their aspirations and goals (Turner & Lapan, 2013).

³⁷ More examples can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.5 and Section 4.8.3.

The steps or actions taken for academic self-construction could be observed and identified during the course of this life design intervention³⁸. As the learners endeavoured to explore their future aspirations, crystallisation, specification and actualisation – as discussed by Savickas et al. (2009) and Savickas (2018) – were identifiable in the learners’ respective responses and expressions. These steps will be elaborated on below.

Crystallisation: Crystallisation refers to a cognitive process during which individuals articulate possible selves with regard to careers, which are consistent with their unique interests, skills and values, realising the fit between the self and the occupation (Savickas, 2018). As discussed in the previous sections, the Grade 7 learners who participated in this research intervention engaged in numerous activities where they explored different careers and career choices, and they gained information regarding aspired prospective careers that corresponded with their personal preferences. They regarded their academic interests and skills (and attainments or failures) as specific indicators, or pre-requisites for aspired careers. As these learners reflected on numerous activities, most learners mentioned that they now need to consider the fit between their current academic performance³⁹ and their career choices, as some of the learners were not really aware of this connection. Learners also recognised how certain academic subjects that they prefer, perform well in and are fond of, relate to their aspired careers⁴⁰. My findings concur with those of Savickas (2018, p. 137) where he spoke about how occupational choices should serve individuals’ purpose in life, while implementing their ‘success formulas’ by integrating their life experiences. Some learners realised that the subjects that they enjoy, and in which they perform well in, resonate with their aspired careers. To provide an example: *“I realised I will have to work very hard in my languages as I will need these to be efficient in language for communication, advertisement and other retail issues”* (Sammy). This learner listed her language subjects as the subjects in which she performs best at school. She then realised that these subjects will be crucial to develop her verbal and written communication skills, which she will need in the future to perform well in her aspired career. Under the sub-theme *career exploration*, this learner found that her most desired career choice was to become an internationally known interior designer, as above all, she wanted to bring beauty to people’s lives (life purpose). She expressed a wish to travel widely while sourcing textiles, art, furniture and other materials for her exclusive business, as

³⁸ A detailed outline and explanation of these intervention steps can be found in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.2.1.

³⁹ More examples and learner expressions can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.5, Section 3.2.

⁴⁰ Subjects referred to, and academic relevance to careers, can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.5, Section 3.2.

she wants to cater for unique decorating needs. By doing this she would also satisfy her desire to travel the entire world. Thus, this learner was now able to integrate her academic strengths with her occupational choice and fulfil her purpose in life.

Briefly summarised, most of the participants in my study realised how their past and current academic experiences could influence their career options and choices. They also mentioned that there were clear actions (regarding their academic behaviours and performance) that they needed to take to ensure that they would achieve their future goals and instil a sense of purpose in their prospective career lives.

Specification: Once individuals have gained more life experiences, an in-depth career exploration is necessary, which refers to specification (Savickas, 2018). Although this may not be completely applicable for the learners in my study, there were two learners who did have a need to make further distinctions or “advanced exploration” as referred to by Savickas (2018, p. 108), regarding their specific career choices. As indicated above (in Section 5.2.3.1), one learner experienced insecurities and inner conflict regarding her career choice. Her heart’s desire is to work with animals, but she specifically said she will never be able to see them suffer or be able to hurt them in any way, even if it was the only outcome in helping them. She then did find the need to do extensive research (where she had to comprehensively and critically re-consider previously gained career information) as to what other (similar) options may be available where she can work with, and care for animals, while practising an occupation that still agrees with her potential, interests, values, and aspirations. The aforementioned finding corresponds with the findings of Savickas (2018) who states that some individuals display a need for advanced exploration and for considering alternative preferences to gain specific information before making a career choice. This learner quoted in Section 5.2.3.1 felt motivated to find alternative options and possible solutions to her career choice insecurities, which also contributed to her career development.

Actualisation: By actualising a career choice, individuals turn their articulated occupational choices into active behaviours to realise their goals (Savickas, 2018). In the *CIP* (Maree, 2016), step 4 of the document outlines specific actions or steps that learners need to take. These steps are outlined in terms of short-, medium-, and long-term actions or steps for ‘moving forward’. Learners were supported to move forward by gathering work-related information, doing site visits, job shadowing, observing employers, etc. Academic self-construction was enhanced as learners realised that there are important academic-related steps

that they needed to take (and plan for) regarding their academic performance/outcomes. In Step 4 of the *CIP*, all the participants specified (in at least one of their steps) some aspect or other regarding their newly defined academic aims, objectives and plans⁴¹. These findings that emerged from my study agree with the findings of Savickas (2018), who maintains that clients enact their career goals once their behaviours (actions) have resulted in the actualisation of their dreams. Nine of the twelve learners who participated in my study discussed the actions or behaviours in which they engaged (or would engage in the near future) and that would put them in a position to reach their goals and to actualise their dreams. The afore-mentioned furthermore concurs with other writings by Savickas et al. (2009) where mention is made of [action] plans that should include methods for individuals to deal with current or potential barriers. The learners in my study identified specific barriers that they needed to address now, in order for them to solve current problems that may be an obstacle to reaching their desired outcomes. My findings also concur with the findings of Auger et al. (2005) and Flouri and Panourgia (2012), who found that as learners are exposed to the world of work (by participating in career development interventions), they are equipped to overcome potential career barriers. This can enable them to pursue their career goals with a renewed sense of hope for the future.

By supporting them by means of life-design-based counselling, the learners became active participants in their own development and had the opportunity to establish definite long-term career goals and aspirations. The learners' self-constructs (e.g. beliefs and perceptions) were positively influenced, which may have a lasting effect on their overall career development (Kelly, 1966). The participants in my study were supported as they constructed their subjective identity forms in accordance with their academic perceptions, attributes, motivation, attitudes, skills, knowledge, self-efficacy and achievements. They made meaning of different experiences and decided to bolster their academic functioning through self- and career construction counselling. As discussed by Guichard and Pouyaud (2019), the method of life design counselling aims to help individuals build their future perspectives to ultimately improve their lives. My study findings corresponded with these authors' findings as the processes of the construction of the self, which influenced the participants in my study's academic self-construction, could be observed in the remarks made by my Grade 7 learners.

⁴¹ Refer to Chapter 4, Table 4.5, Section 3.2 for detailed examples.

5.2.3.3 Career construction

Career construction theory maintains that careers are actively constructed by means of interpretive processes where social processes and meaning making guide occupational choices and development (Savickas, 2005; 2018). The life-design-based intervention reported on in my study captured the Grade 7 learners' subjective life stories (and experiences) and supported them as they constructed their narratives about the self and their aspired careers.

The learners were helped to make informed decisions regarding careers by means of collaborative life-design-based processes. They were helped to reflect carefully on their social worlds and ascribe meaning to their lives, and were also assisted to understand that they would need to take action to ultimately pursue the goals related to their career choice. In my study, the learners were enabled to make meaning of their life experiences. Ten participants gave evidence of having been empowered to construct (tentatively) a subjective career. They mentioned that they felt re-assured that they would eventually be able to attain their career goals and dreams. These ten learners stated that they felt that the life-design-based activities and interpersonal processes in which they participated had promoted their ability to pursue (and reach) unique life goals⁴². The finding resonates with Savickas (2012, p. 150) who stated that "individuals must construct a subjective career with which to impose meaning and direction on their vocational behaviour". My findings also concur with the findings of Setlhare-Meltor and Wood (2016) and Athanasou and Perera (2019) who stated that life-design counselling empowers people to actively participate in their own career development. As the learners participated in this intervention, the numerous activities empowered them to become active participants in their own career development⁴³, courtesy of having been exposed to a variety of career options, information, choices and possibilities. These developmental tasks also concur with the findings of Maree (2018) who emphasised the value of mastering developmental tasks to promote self- and career construction, already during the early years of a person's life. The Grade 7 learners who participated in this study were able to tentatively – though actively – construct their prospective careers, as they mastered various career developmental tasks.

The broad array of activities in my intervention aided participants' self- and career development, which is supported by Gottfredson (2002) who stated that as individuals gain

⁴² Examples can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.5.

⁴³ Refer to the examples as set out in Chapter 4, Tables 4.3 – 4.6.

broader career-related experiences and identify unique career interests, these positively influence their self- and career development. As the learners used stories to ascribe meaning to personal experiences, their sense of self developed, which contributed to their career construction.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Sense of control

A sense of control refers to the learners' perceptions and beliefs of their ability to have (or exercise) control over their environments to shape their lives. As the learners reflected on their lives, they realised that certain behaviours and/ or actions that they can control can help them to master their environments (to a certain extent). This experience may equip them to reach specified goals and fulfil career aspirations.

5.2.4.1 Self-regulation

Self-regulation is an active process whereby learners set goals for their learning, and then constructively attempt to monitor, regulate and evaluate their behaviours and motivation to control the outcome (Pintrich, 2000; Turner & Lapan, 2005). As children become able to regulate their actions, behaviours, thinking, and to make and follow plans, an increase in self-regulated practices influence how they go about their daily lives. These regulated actions can have a profound impact on young learners' future prospects, as self-regulation is regarded a developmental agency in human desires, needs, goals and purposes (Geldhof, Little & Colombo, 2010; Lerner, Freund, Stefanis & Habermas, 2001). Self-regulation is also considered a strength in adolescents as they use self-regulation to guide their daily behaviours so that they become increasingly intentional and purposeful (Damon, 2008; Larson, 2000). Self-regulation is also associated with identity development (Lerner et al., 2001).

As learners interpreted various ascribed activities in the life-design-based intervention outlined in this research study, they revealed a positive change in perception regarding self-regulated behaviours and the latter's influence on their sense of control over their learning⁴⁴. Five learners expressed a definite awareness that they felt they would need to change or adapt their learning behaviours now, to ensure that their academic performance (and outcomes) improve. This finding is supported by Lapan, Kardash and Turner (2002), Pintrich and de Groot (1990), and Schünemann, Spörer and Brunstein (2013), whose research has shown that self-regulated learning promotes lifelong learning and also plays a significant role in academic

⁴⁴ Examples can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.6, Section 4.1.

performance and achievement. Four learners also mentioned that they needed to take their classwork, homework, and overall academic cooperation a little bit more seriously, as they admitted that they were not always putting in enough effort, with the objective to excel. The afore-mentioned confirms the views of Boekaerts (1997) who found that as self-regulated learning increases, so does the amount of effort intensity and task performance an individual is willing to put in so as to reach intended goals. Furthermore, the learners in my study evaluated their behaviour regarding learning and school performance. Their findings concur with the views of Ormrod (2009), who stated that self-regulation is a process where individuals take control of, and constantly evaluate their learning and behaviour with respect to learning. The participants in my study felt motivated when they found that their self-regulation capabilities and behaviours could give them a sense of control in reaching their career aspirations. Similar results were found in studies done by McWhaw and Abrami (2001), who concluded that self-regulation practices in learners encourage goal motivation and direction. Individuals may feel more motivated to stay on course (directed) towards reaching their short- and long-term goals. Thus, the participants in my study realised that their own motivations, actions and behaviours (self-regulation) may ensure, and can direct them towards, reaching their future career goals and aspirations.

5.2.4.2 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their own capabilities and competencies in the successful accomplishment of tasks and the attainment of goals (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000a). The social cognitive perspective presumes that self-efficacy is context specific and influenced by the individuals' environment, personal experiences and outcomes (Bruning et al., 2013; Schunk, 2003; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

The learners in my study reflected on their unique skills, abilities, qualities and strengths which influenced their beliefs about their capacity to achieve goals and fulfil aspirations. They integrated the information as set out in the respective life-design-based activities, an increase in their self-efficacious beliefs could be facilitated and observed⁴⁵. The learners reflected on their strengths, successes and personal experiences, and subsequently exhibited an enhanced sense of self-efficacy, which corresponded with the findings of Bruning et al. (2013) who found that when learners evaluate and monitor the degree of their

⁴⁵ The learners displayed numerous belief perceptions that were positively influenced, as seen in the examples in Chapter 4, Table 4.6, Section 4.2.

successes, this can have a positive effect on their self-efficacy. Short statements/ utterances such as “*I now know that I am good in (it) and I will be able do it*” (James), “*This can be true*” (Peter), and “*I know I will achieve my dreams*” (Sarah), revealed how the participants’ perspectives were positively shaped/ altered, which contributed to their enhanced self-efficacy. Pajares (1995, 2006) and Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) maintained that learners who display higher levels of self-efficacy, as observed in my findings, will exert sufficient effort and persistence to perform a task and display higher levels of self-regulated learning – which will lead to a successful outcome in aspired goals. Similar, Bandura et al. (2001, p. 189) found that “self-appraisal of capabilities determines goal aspirations. Indeed, the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goal aspirations people adopt and the firmer is their commitment to them”. The participants in my study, too, felt more motivated to work harder towards their goals. They mentioned how they will be working harder and put in more effort (regulating their learning behaviour) to ensure that they reach their desired outcomes⁴⁶ (this concurs with the findings of Pajares (1995; 2006) and Stajkovic and Luthans (1998)). The afore-mentioned efforts should also influence my participants’ academic self-construction.

In the previous sections,⁴⁷ I indicated that, at the end of the intervention, the learners in my study articulated the necessary steps/actions that they planned to take to make sure that they realise their career objectives and fulfil their purpose in life. Their enhanced perceptions regarding efficacy beliefs provided the necessary impetus for enacting their goals further. This finding resonates with Caprara et al. (2008) who found that with increased self-efficacy, individuals become inspired to accomplish and achieve more. The learners in my study discussed definite actions that they would take following the change in their perceptions and their increased motivation.

Pajares (2005, p. 4) argues that “[r]esearchers have established that self-efficacy beliefs are correlated with other self-beliefs and with academic changes and outcomes and that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of related academic outcomes”. The participants in my study, too, realised the relationship between their self-efficacy beliefs and their academic self-construction (evidenced in their discussions during the post-intervention interview). They discussed the necessary steps to take to achieve their desired academic outcomes (improved academic performance) and to accomplish their ambitions. This finding concurs with the findings of Kaya and Bozdog (2016) who found that there is a strong correlation between

⁴⁶ Examples can be found in Chapter 4, Table 4.6.

⁴⁷ Section 5.2.1 – Section 5.2.4.1.

academic achievement, individuals' beliefs in their skills, and self-efficacy. They argue that whenever learners experience a sense of achievement and acquire new skills, their self-efficacy is enhanced and they become more engaged in their learning. Similar findings were reported by Barkley (2006) who established that self-efficacy is an important predictor of overall academic achievement in Grade 6-8 learners.

As these learners' perceptions about their academic efficacy increased, so did their beliefs about their career capabilities and their belief in being able to reach their career goals. This resonates with Bandura et al. (2001) who suggested that occupational efficacy is grounded in individuals' beliefs about their academic capability.

It is important to mention the studies done by Bai and Guo (2018) and Zimmerman (2000b) who found that individuals (and teachers) should be aware of the reciprocal relationship between active learning behaviours (such as in self-regulated learning) and self-efficacy, because an increase in either one of these constructs will increase the other – leading to positive outcomes in both. The interplay between these two constructs could also be observed in my study.

5.3 SUMMARY AND CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON CHAPTER 5

This chapter was devoted to discussing the results of my research study. The aim was to interpret, substantiate and compare the findings between my research and existing literature mentioned in the literature review.

First, I summarised and discussed my findings according to the main themes and sub-themes that had been derived from the qualitative data. Second, by comparing the themes with existing literature, I discovered that the characteristics of a number of participants in my study have been enhanced by this life-design-based intervention. After the intervention, the participants exhibited enhanced levels of self-construction. They got to know themselves on a deeper level as they reflected on unique factors that held personal meaning for them. Academic self-construction was positively influenced as the learners' academic self-perceptions showed meaningful improvement. The participants realised how their current learning practices and school performance could help them to reach their aspired career dreams and goals. Their career choice and career construction were addressed, too, as the participants' career choices were constructed in a way that shaped their subjective future careers. Participants also made personal meaning from the experience and explored different career options and choices that resonated with their personal selves. Their sense of self-

regulation was bolstered and an improvement in their perceived beliefs could be observed as they began to understand themselves and their response to contextual events better. The latter helped them to better direct their behaviour, actions and attention towards the attainment of personally relevant goals. The participants also realised that they are, to a degree, able to exercise control over their environment. I believe my research captured, and helped to identify, different important themes that formed part of the participants' lives. These themes were important for their career development in terms of their career attitudes, beliefs and competencies (Hartung, 2011) in general. Ultimately, I was able to relate the findings of my study to existing research to provide evidence of the overall influence of the life-design- based intervention on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction.

The findings of my research relate predominantly to existing literature and knowledge on life design counselling with younger children. I was able to relate all the findings in my study to existing research, thus proving the relevance of the research results, especially themes pertaining to children of primary-school age. More specifically, the current research highlights, albeit extremely limited, the opportunities for, and necessity to introduce life-design-based counselling interventions during formative years of schooling, by reporting on the impact of this influence on the learners' academic self-construction.

In Chapter 6, I review my research questions in the light of my research findings, and explore and discuss ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Recommendations for further research and final findings and reflections will conclude the chapter.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

I start the final chapter with my motivation for undertaking this study by quoting Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (2001, p. 187):

“The choices made during formative periods of development, shape the course of lives. Such choices determine which aspects of their potentialities people cultivate, and which they leave undeveloped.”

This quote inspired me greatly and fuelled my interest in the development of the youth. I believe that it is incredibly important to help young individuals reach their full potential and that this can be achieved by supporting them as they make meaning of their lives, to realise their competencies, and to plan and aim for future aspirations and goals. My research aimed to explore how group life-design-based methods could be utilised to influence the academic self-construction of young learners in Grade 7. As the study progressed, it was also established that this study’s intervention could enhance and have an impact on these young learners’ career-related experiences. Through the emergence of different constructs and themes, the potential benefits for these participants’ overall career development could also be observed.

When I commenced with my research, it soon became evident that this study wasn’t going to be easy as most studies focus on the career development of adolescents in secondary school, from Grade 9 onwards. My focus, in contrast, was on children who are relatively younger and still find themselves in primary school, which may affect the relevance and applicability of this study. My research also identified this as a shortcoming in similar (previous) research studies. However, the rationale and objective as indicated in the purpose statement, as well as the literature review of this study, revealed a definite need to support individuals already during early childhood. I continually strove to present my research findings as accurately as possible to provide as much insight as possible into the connection between life-design-based counselling and young individuals’ academic self-construction.

In this final chapter, I will attempt to connect and answer my research questions in the light of my findings. Furthermore, I will revisit the ethical considerations as outlined previously, after which I will reflect on the strengths and limitations of this study. Recommendations for further studies will follow before the conclusion of this thesis.

6.2 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My main research question was formulated as: *What is the influence of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?*

This question was divided into three sub-questions in an effort to answer the main research question as comprehensively as possible. The descriptive and exploratory questions were as follows:

Descriptive questions:

- What are the essential aspects of group-based academic self-construction programmes that are used to promote Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?
- What are the general aspects of group life design-based counselling aimed at enhancing Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

Exploratory question:

- How did Grade 7 learners experience the group life-design-based counselling intervention executed in my study?

The purpose of my study was to determine the extent to which group life-design-based counselling could benefit individuals' academic self-construction. I will now attempt to answer the above questions by drawing on the data obtained from my qualitative research study.

6.2.1 Descriptive questions

6.2.1.1 What are the essential aspects of group-based academic self-construction programmes that are used to promote Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

My initial motivation for doing this research was to support learners to realise the importance of lifelong learning and to become aware of how their academic self-construction would benefit their long-term career development. For a large part of individuals' lives, they are faced with the demands of education and learning. Thereafter, most people need to cope with the demands of their working lives. Whilst at school, individuals acquire new skills and gain knowledge that will equip them with the expertise needed to experience success in their future careers. I searched for different programmes and/or interventions that may already be in place in schools, or other initiatives where young learners are exposed to much needed resources,

information and guidance in this regard, but to no avail. I realised that this was a certain shortcoming in the field – there was a dire need for such programmes to assist learners in early childhood⁴⁸.

In attempting to address this need, I soon realised that many aspects and numerous variables come into play when investigating the different perceptions of children regarding their academic self-construction. The participants in my study held many different views, opinions and perceptions on their own academic functioning, as well as on the implications of this functioning (or performance) for future career prospects. Individuals interpreted experiences differently. Some participants regarded their academic achievements as the most important element of schooling and life experience, which urged them to put in the required effort, whereas other participants did not realise this importance. Some participants felt it was only necessary to focus on academic-related achievements after school (when at university) while others regarded current (personal) factors such as sports, friendships, enjoying life, etc. as more important. Furthermore, during the pre-intervention interview, only a few (three) participants could find the relevance or link between current academic self-construction and future career aspirations.

After introducing this group life-design-based intervention to the participants, its influence on academic self-construction could be observed⁴⁹. The participants were able to construct themselves more appropriately in terms of their academic behaviours, motivation, beliefs and achievements. As the discussions and activities as set out in the intervention progressed, all the participants gradually realised the impact of their academic self-construction on their future career prospects and development. Participants were subjected to activities during which they could reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, role models, daily experiences, career choices, values, self-efficacious beliefs and their subjective identities. All of these factors contributed to their early career development, and by means of a reciprocal relationship, also to their academic self-construction. This group intervention (or programme) provided for valuable insights where the participants came to recognise the connection between current lived experiences and future career goals. This understanding had a major impact on their (newly established) academic-related perceptions. The benefits of group life-

⁴⁸ Citations from various literature sources can be found in Chapters 1 and 2.

⁴⁹ Refer to examples as outlined in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3.

design-based intervention as portrayed in this study's findings call for much needed academic self-construction programmes within schools and communities.

6.2.1.2 What are the general aspects of group life design-based counselling aimed at enhancing Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction?

A detailed account of life design counselling was discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. To summarise, life design counselling can be regarded as a paradigm or intervention where the essence lies in critical reflection about the environment or context in which individuals find themselves. Such reflection provides for opportunities where individuals can construct themselves and their careers in a meaningful manner.

Based on the research discussed in my literature review, I designed an intervention guided by broad group life design counselling principles. While I followed the same generic principles, my intervention was tailored to fit the unique needs and objectives of this research study. The idiosyncratic rationale and objectives of my own research project required from me to inquire into a possible intervention that would benefit the academic self-construction of Grade 7 learners based on the life design framework, and this warranted a group life-design-based intervention. My intervention was tailored to support the participants as they identified and made sense of their life themes, to enhance their sense of selves, and to contribute to their early career development. Moreover, based on my literature review, I included life-design-based constructs relating to career aspirations and academic self-construction. The intervention involved different activities, comprising of six steps where the participants could reflect on their life experiences⁵⁰. Participants engaged in a pre-intervention interview, completed the *CIP*, compiled collages, drew lifelines, completed personal reflection activities, and lastly, concluded with the post-intervention interview, all within the framework of life design counselling.

6.2.2 Exploratory question

6.2.2.1 How did Grade 7 learners experience the group life-design-based counselling intervention executed in my study?

The above question will be discussed under two sub-headings:

- i) General experiences

⁵⁰ A thorough outline of the six steps of the intervention can be found in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.2.1.

The participants enjoyed all the activities and were able to effectively reflect after each activity, when they could once again gather all the information together and make meaning of their own personal interpretations. The learners all indicated that they had experienced personal growth as a result of the different activities that allowed them to better understand what they needed to work on and what was needed to actualise their dreams.

Participants enjoyed thinking about, and planning towards their future career aspirations. They expressed a heightened degree of motivation and optimism for their futures and enjoyed sharing these prospects in a group intervention with their peers. Valuable discussions brought about active self-construction and career construction, and these allowed most participants to construct better future career trajectories.

ii) Experiences related to academic self-construction

My research was intended to support participants to realise the relevance of their pro-active attitudes and engagement regarding academic learning and performance, so as to enable them to reach their future goals. As the learners were guided and motivated by means of the life-design-based counselling methods described in this study, the researcher observed an enhancement and favourable change in their academic self-construction.

Reference was made to the effectiveness of life-design-based activities during which participants expressed their excitement about and sincere appreciation for newly established career goals and aspirations. They came to realise that their life events were likely to contribute to and influence their career trajectories. The intervention widened their career horizons and enabled them to envision a subjective future career that resonated with their true selves. Furthermore, this intervention provided opportunities with which the participants could interact and that they could use to contribute to each other's future prospects. Participants commented on their peers' ideas and provided valuable opinions and alternatives that ultimately contributed to their career information and 'knowledge bases'.

The various life design activities facilitated discourse that proved to be of high value, as the participants could actively participate in it, as well as co-construct and evaluate their thoughts and perceptions. The various aspects of the intervention, pulled together in a unified whole, provided the learners with an opportunity to make sense of the life themes that were guiding their lives. Participants' responses (by means of discussions and reflections) to the intervention indicated an overall favourable experience. Participants were able to associate with and integrate the new information, which led to an increased sense of self as well as

enhanced career-related ambitions. Participants also revisited their personal values and realised how these concurred with career goals.

This life-design-based intervention helped the participants to identify more clearly the impact of their current learning on their future lives. They gained insight into their own behaviours regarding academic actions and perceptions, which was the highlighted objective of this intervention. Their thinking and perceptions were adjusted, and an improved sense of responsibility was brought about. Ultimately, the participants gained much, as they were supported and empowered to connect their academic ‘selves’ with their future aspirations and life goals. As they were able to make sense of the aforementioned, the participants were able to successfully plan the steps required to shape their future career trajectories.

Admittedly, some learners struggled with activities where they needed to visualise their next actions or the steps to take to actualise their goals. These activities required them to plan ahead in terms of a week, a month, five years, etc., which was a challenge for some learners, as they found it difficult to plan so far ahead in the future. This was mostly because they lacked information and knowledge regarding certain careers.

6.2.3 Revisiting the primary research question

It seems that the processes of my life-design-based counselling intervention influenced the Grade 7 learners’ academic self-construction quite meaningfully (educationally and psychologically). This led me to conclude that young learners’ academic self-construction can be positively influenced by life design counselling, since individuals are equipped with the necessary skills to connect their current academic experiences with future goals.

The participants in my study realised that the (school) context in which they find themselves has an impact on their perceptions and shapes their identities. It may also have a long-term effect on how they approach and pursue future prospects. They explored their interests and abilities (strengths and weaknesses) meticulously and, in doing so, strengthened the connection between their current academic endeavours and future occupations. The post-modern techniques utilised in this intervention allowed for activities during which participants could use various means of expression as they ventured through their new career-related discoveries. The participants benefited from these experiences, as they contributed to their personal development and helped them to gain in-depth knowledge on themselves, their life purpose, as well as their aspired career ambitions. Furthermore, the intervention affected participants’ motivation and self-efficacy, which enhanced their capability to actively pursue

future careers. Participants were motivated into purposeful action and guided towards actualising their hopes and dreams. They mentioned numerous options, goals and plans that they were going to utilise to ensure that they reach their future objectives, for example, working harder in school to improve academic performance.

Based on my observations and the participants' responses, it would appear that the life-design-based counselling intervention had a positive effect on the academic self-construction of the Grade 7 learners in my study. By engaging in the activities referred to, new academic and career choice-related horizons opened up to them and enabled them to envision a possible future that resonated with their true selves. Thus I reached the conclusion that participating in qualitative career counselling-related intervention of the kind explained in the current study could have a meaningful effect on how Grade 7 learners make sense of and perceive the world around them, and then also how they decide to act upon that world.

6.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I confirm that the following ethical considerations as referred to in Chapter 3 were adhered to in the course of my research:

- Informed consent documents were administered to and obtained from the participants' parents or legal guardians (Annexure A) and the headmaster of the school (Annexure B), while ethical consent (Annexure C) was obtained from the Department of Education as permission to conduct the research.
- Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by making sure that no individual's identity could be traced based on the data. This practice will also be maintained in the future when the results of this study are communicated.
- The best interests of the participants were served at all times and they were protected from harm. No adverse effects presented.
- Results were communicated to the participants for verification purposes and to ensure there were no misinterpretations.
- Voluntary participation was discussed with all the participants and they were made aware that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish to do so.

6.4 WHAT WOULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

Firstly, I regret that I could not follow up with the participants six months after the intervention to explore the influence and effects of the intervention over a longer period. Another thing I would have liked to do differently would be spending more time on information sharing so that I could support the learners more with career information, options and choices. Not enough time was spent on crucial information regarding different types of careers and it was evident that the participants' knowledge in this regard is limited. I would perhaps have liked to make use of a quantitative measure to measure participants' level of academic self-construction before and after the intervention and to report on the participants' overall experience of this life-design-based intervention. Lastly, I would also have liked to consider involving the learners' parents in the life-design-based counselling. The parents and caregivers likewise mentioned that they would have loved to be part of the process, as they regarded career guidance and counselling as an urgent matter in their children's lives. It would have been very beneficial to have had time to give proper individual feedback to each participant's parent.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the data obtained from this intervention, a number of recommendations can be made.

6.5.1 Recommendations for improvement of practice

The value of life-design-based counselling as a means of influencing the academic self-construction of learners should be acknowledged for its further application in career counselling practices. I offer the following recommendations in this regard:

- Early childhood development is crucial for success later in life and a child's learning and school-related experiences have a huge impact during this time. It would therefore be greatly beneficial to introduce life design counselling during formative years.
- Group-based interventions should also leave room for individualised sessions where learners are given the opportunity to ask particular questions and discuss personal thoughts. Although the participants were encouraged to do so, some only asked their questions and shared their ideas after the group sessions.

- When working with younger learners who take more time to integrate and make sense of new information, more time should be allowed to complete the life-design-based interventions. Learners would be allowed to plan for consecutive sessions as they would then have the opportunity or time to frame their ideas and thoughts.
- More follow-up interviews should be conducted with the participants as well as with their parents. By doing so, participants will be better engaged in their progress towards attaining their goals.

6.5.2 Recommendations for future research

- Future research initiatives should involve small and large groups of participants from across the diversity spectrum, so as to elaborate on the value and influence of life design counselling on learners' academic self-construction.
- Socioeconomic backgrounds should always be taken into consideration. I believe it is important to find a way to ensure that all participants are enabled to express themselves openly and honestly. I make this comment because, in my research, some participants were slightly averse to honestly expressing their feelings and sharing personal thoughts during the intervention. In those instances, to deal with the challenge, I went out of my way to motivate and encourage them to elaborate on their thoughts and ease them into the idea of sharing with others. What also seemed to help a lot was when the learners recognised that the feedback they received from their peers was supportive, positive and constructive. Their peers' observations contributed to a sense of calmness and willingness among participants who had initially been hesitant to express their feelings and take part in sharing their honest feelings.
- Research should be conducted to ensure that life-design-based activities can be adapted to be even more appropriate for younger participants.
- The factors that influence participants' expectations regarding career counselling initiatives should be ascertained. Participants expect different outcomes from career counselling initiatives, which may influence their personal experiences regarding the intervention.
- The way in which life orientation teachers perceive their role in providing career information and support to young learners should be explored.

- Transinstitutional, transnational, national, international, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research should be conducted on the topic.

6.5.3 Recommendations for theory building in Educational Psychology

As described in previous chapters, there is a need to investigate how younger learners can be supported to enhance their academic sense of self by means of life-design-based counselling initiatives. Younger individuals are faced with a rapidly changing world and therefore need to constantly rewrite their life stories in an effort to construct the ‘best version’ of themselves. Although I believe that my research provided valuable findings and results pertaining to life-design-based counselling in younger learners, there is a huge need to explore this phenomenon further. More attention should be given to early career development, too. The Grade 7 participants in my study attached great value to this life-design-based counselling intervention, but a clear need exists for further research to determine the long-term benefits of and promoting post-modern interventions.

When referring back to my theoretical framework, I appreciate the inter-relatedness and reciprocal relationship between the different theories and constructs. Existing research in the field of Educational Psychology can support further research on life-design-based counselling initiatives and programmes in schools, and this inter-relationship can be further explored to obtain a holistic perspective on career counselling with the youth.

Writing from a city at the southernmost tip of Africa, I realise that a great need exists to build on previous pioneering research endeavours. I have referred to these during the course of my thesis in an effort to promote the notion of contextualising theories and interventions developed elsewhere, before applying them in local contexts.

6.5.4 Recommendations for policy makers

The findings of this research as outlined in the preceding chapters, call for policy makers to consider implementing life-design-based counselling interventions within schools as they hold major benefits for individuals’ lives. Policy makers could also re-consider current curricular content and activities that address career-related themes during early childhood to support learners, as they endeavour to enhance learners’ academic self-construction as an integral facet of their self- and career construction efforts. I believe that there are numerous opportunities for career development within schools and that these should be utilised and enhanced.

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The following factors limited this study and need to be mentioned:

First, the sample consisted of a small group (12 participants) as my study comprised an in-depth investigation of my specific career counselling intervention. Second, the participants were selected as a purposive (non-random) sample. Third, the participants consisted of learners from a specific socioeconomic and cultural context, which asks the question what the results would have been if this study had been undertaken in a different environment. Fourth, some data sources, e.g. reflections, were subjective in nature. Fifth, as I am familiar with my participants due to my capacity as head of department at the school (as described in Chapter 1), I took every conceivable step to guard against the halo effect by avoiding to make biased judgements as far as possible, as this could be regarded a limitation of the study. Sixth, I made sure to verify all my interpretations with the participants themselves to limit this influence as much as possible. Seventh, I am acutely aware of the subjective nature of the data sources. Subjective data interpretation and analysis cast doubt on the validity of the views and opinions of participants (Darlington & Scott, 2003).

6.7 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH STUDY

In the following section I provide an overview of my personal reflections on this study. I will cover the findings that were anticipated, findings that surprised me, findings that disappointed me, and findings that were not expected.

6.7.1 Findings that were anticipated

The participants' responses confirmed my expectation that they would be excited to participate in this intervention as they expressed great enthusiasm during the introduction and at the onset of this intervention. I anticipated that self- and career construction would unfold and that most of these young learners would have much to gain from this experience. I expected the intervention to have more of an impact on some than on others. I also expected the participants to show some uncertainties associated with the world of work and knew that career information would be highly valued. I furthermore anticipated that parental influence would have a major impact on the participants' career choices and that their perceptions regarding certain careers would be adapted as we were progressing through the different steps of the life-design-based intervention.

6.7.2 Findings that surprised me

Regarding the group-based intervention, I was surprised to find that the participants engaged in it with such ease. The opportunity for discourse played a fundamental part in the participants' meaning-making processes, as it facilitated collaboration where different insights were shared. I was surprised by the participants' eagerness to support and provide valuable feedback in respect of each other's narratives. The participants freely shared their perceptions and views on different career-related thoughts and information, which ultimately contributed to the co-construction of careers. I was also surprised by the career 'learning' that occurred informally between the sessions. The life-design-based experiences sparked the participants' curiosity to investigate further and gain more knowledge and information on their personal career aspirations.

6.7.3 Disappointing findings

I was disappointed when one participant reported that she felt that the intervention had not helped her address her uncertainties regarding a career choice. Although I am of the opinion that she gained much on other levels, it would have been pleasing to have been able to effectively support her, too, in this endeavour.

6.7.4 Findings that I did not expect

I could not foresee the extent of the positive influence that life-design-based counselling would have on the participants' career development in the first place. Nor could I envision the influence of this intervention on their perspective on their future career lives. Another aspect that exceeded my expectations was the degree to which the participants embraced the life design intervention. Participants engaged optimistically in all the activities, even though some of them proved to be challenging. Furthermore, I was intrigued to find just how much personal growth, especially towards academic self-construction, was facilitated by means of the intervention. The responses and discussions indicated clearly defined and purposeful actions that will hopefully continue to contribute to participants' academic self-construction and ultimately empower them to reach their aspired goals.

6.7.5 What this study meant to me personally

As I come to the end of this study, I am overwhelmed to realise that this research could to some extent contribute to the future support (on a larger scale and in different contexts) of

young learners to allow them to construct the best possible versions of themselves; something that will hopefully have a lasting influence on their career lives.

Since childhood, my biggest desire has always been to positively change other people's lives, and I believe that, to some extent, this study actualised my own aspirations in this regard. The qualitative nature of the study also allowed me to connect with my participants in a very meaningful and rewarding manner, despite the fact that I went out of my way to prevent subjective feelings from influencing my research endeavours. The study contributed very much to my own personal development. I am a firm believer of lifelong learning, and hope that this notion will carry over to my participants and other learners who may in some way benefit from this research.

On a professional level, I have gained so much knowledge and grown enormously in my insight with regard to early career development. Furthermore, immersing myself in the theoretical and practical aspects of life design counselling added significant value to my own professional practice, as it has improved my understanding of how young learners' personal stories improve meaning making and contribute to how they react to the world.

In the past three years I have worked very hard to realise this dream and possibly contribute to the existing knowledge base on child development. There were times when I felt completely overwhelmed by the daunting research process, but I soon learned to embrace this academic challenge. I learned that it was shaping my own learning, and I also found fulfilment in the different research processes.

6.8 CONCLUSION

The potential benefits of life-design-based counselling are widely advocated in this thesis. The intervention introduced in my study resulted in enhanced academic self-construction of Grade 7 learners. As reported in the study, comprehensive career counselling initiatives are especially relevant for supporting young learners as they effectively construct successful future career trajectories.

The findings in my study reported the extent to which self- and career construction (life design counselling) can support learners in their current as well as future contexts. My findings confirm that during the intervention my participants got to know themselves and the world of work much better, which also contributed a great deal to their personal growth. The participants learned how to effectively reflect on their life worlds and, at the same time, they

realised how their current academic endeavours might influence their future career aspirations. This urged them to reconsider their self-regulation practices when it comes to schooling. I trust that this life-design-based intervention brought about a positive change in the participants' attitudes and learning behaviour, which may spill over into their future prospects.

I hope that this research study will ultimately contribute to the introduction of life design counselling in the school curriculum, and trust that it will lead to the reconsideration of the fundamental need for earlier career-related interventions, as were highlighted by the numerous benefits of early childhood career development. I conclude this report with a quote that came to mind at different stages during my research – more so when one considers the devastating impact that the coronavirus pandemic currently has on teaching and learning in our schools:

“You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself. That is something you have charge of.” (Jim Rohn)

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ANNEXURE A: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER



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INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I would like to invite your child to participate in a research project that I will undertake at Laerskool Rooihuiskraal. The project entitled *“The influence of group life-design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners’ academic self-construction”* will involve all the Grade 7 learners as they are already considered to be part of the senior phase of education. As such, they should be enabled and empowered to make informed decisions regarding their desired careers and future career goals.

My study will involve an intervention strategy that consists of numerous activities and observations. As the researcher, I will be an active participant in this intervention and video/audio recordings and field notes will be taken. The research will also involve semi-structured interviews with the learners.

I would like to reassure you that the information obtained from this study will be treated in the strictest confidentiality possible, and all data will be used for the purposes of this research only. Your name and your child’s name will not be revealed at any stage – instead, pseudonyms will be used.

I trust that the research findings will make a credible contribution towards identifying how learners construct themselves appropriately in terms of proposed occupations and career aspirations. Academic self-construction as well as self-efficacy will be developed, which may also lead to enhanced career-related ambitions.

If you are willing to allow your child to participate in this study, please complete slip A on page 2 as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that your child may participate in this project with your permission and that you understand that he/she may withdraw from the research project at any time. Under no circumstances will I reveal the identity of interview participants to any parties/organisations that may be involved in the research process. The learners will be identifiable in the video recordings, but I can assure you that only I as the researcher will have access to these video recordings.

Lastly, as this study is an intervention-based study (Life design counselling), it is possible that an unexpected fateful discovery may be made. In such an event, counselling and intervention will be made available by a qualified educational psychologist, Mr Jean Louw (0765742171). Relevant policies and procedures as stipulated by the school will also be adhered to at all times to ensure that the actions taken are in the best interest of your child as the learner. For your consent in this regard, please complete slip B on page 2.

Yours sincerely

Nastassja Maree

Consent A

I, parent of (child's full name and surname), give permission that my child may participate in this study.

Parent's signature/on behalf of the participant:

Date:

Researcher's signature

Date:

Consent B

I, parent of _____ (learner's full name and surname), give permission that my child may be debriefed by Mr Jean Louw (educational psychologist) should it be deemed necessary. I understand that this information will be brought to my attention immediately, as is stipulated in the policy and procedure documents of Laerskool Rooihuiskraal.

Parent's signature:

Date:

ANNEXURE B: REQUEST LETTER TO SCHOOL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

CONSENT LETTER FOR THE SCHOOL

The Principal
Laerskool Rooihuiskraal

Dear Mr Maree

I would hereby like to request your permission to conduct research at Laerskool Rooihuiskraal. The research forms part of my doctoral study in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, and my study leader is Prof. Kobus Maree. The research project, entitled "*The influence of group life-design based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction*", will involve all Grade 7 learners as they are already considered to be part of the senior phase of education. As such, they should be enabled and empowered to make informed decisions regarding their desired careers and future career goals.

My study will involve an intervention strategy that consists of numerous activities and observations. As the researcher, I will be an active participant in this intervention, and video/audio recordings and field notes will be taken. The research project will also involve semi-structured interviews with the learners.

The planned intervention will take place once a week, over a period of three months. During this period, I will interact with the learners to collaboratively enhance their academic self-construction and co-discover aspired careers.

The information obtained from these interventions will be treated in the strictest confidentiality and data will be used for the purposes of this research only. Under no circumstances will I reveal the identity of interview participants to others or to any parties or organisations that may be involved in the research process. I also accept that learners may withdraw from the research project at any time.

Before commencing with any data collection exercise, I plan to visit the school and explain the research and what each participant's role will be. I will also explain in detail how I intend to go about the research, conduct the interviews, and how the video and audio recordings will be made.

I trust that the research findings will make a creditable contribution towards identifying how learners construct themselves appropriately in terms of proposed occupations and career aspirations. Their academic self-construction as well as self-efficacy may be developed, which will also lead to enhanced career-related ambitions. I am confident that the information obtained

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from this research will benefit Laerskool Rooihuiskraal greatly, as it will assist us in identifying how to support learners in their academic self-construction by means of life design counselling.

Given the above, I would greatly appreciate it if you would agree to sign this letter as a declaration of your consent to allow me to conduct my research at Laerskool Rooihuiskraal.

Yours sincerely

Nastassja Maree

Consent by school principal

I, give permission that the research study *The influence of life design-related counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction* may be conducted at Laerskool Rooihuiskraal.

Signature of principal:

Date:

Researcher's signature

Date:

|

ANNEXURE C: REQUEST LETTER TO GDE TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN A GOVERNMENT SCHOOL



Faculty of Education

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH AT LAERSKOOL ROOIHUISKRAAL

I hereby wish to apply for permission to conduct research at Rooihuiskraal Primary School, D4, in Pretoria. My research project will involve Grade 7 learners, and the topic of the research is: ***"The influence of group life-design based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction"***.

This study will involve an intervention strategy that consists of numerous activities and observations. As the researcher, I will be an active participant in this intervention, and video and audio recordings and field notes will be taken. The research project will also involve semi-structured interviews with the Grade 7 learners.

The planned intervention will take place once a week, over a period of three months. During this period, I will interact with the learners to collaboratively enhance their academic self-construction and co-discover aspired careers.

The information obtained from these interventions will be treated in the strictest confidentiality and data will be used for the purposes of this research only.

I am confident that the research findings will make a creditable contribution towards identifying how learners construct themselves appropriately in terms of proposed occupations and career aspirations. The study is intended to develop their academic self-construction as well as self-efficacy, which will also lead to enhanced career-related ambitions.

Yours sincerely

Nastassja Maree

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Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

ANNEXURE D: PERMISSION LETTER FROM GDE



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	14 March 2019
Validity of Research Approval:	04 February 2019 – 30 September 2019 2018/424
Name of Researcher:	Maree N
Address of Researcher:	51 Kwastel Cresent Rooihuiskraal Centurion 0157
Telephone Number:	012 661 5568 / 083 305 5498
Email address:	nastassja@lsrhk.co.za
Research Topic:	The influence of life design-based counselling on Grade 7 learners' academic self-construction: A group based intervention
Type of qualification	PhD
Number and type of schools:	One Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane South

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the

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Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
4. A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
12. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Mr Gumani Enos Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 14/03/2019

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ANNEXURE E: EXEMPLAR PIECE OF CODED TEXT

Parti- cipant	Line number	Text: (Text highlighted according to theme colour).	Code:
6:	9 10 11 12	"For the first time I actually believe in myself and I also came to believe that I really can, and will be able, to do this". "As I thought about my future a lot more and talked to people about what they think, I am now excited".	(4.2) F;6;1;9-10 (3)
2:	13 14	"Can I write in my journal that Elon Musk is my true inspiration?".	(2.2)
3:	15 16 17	"I learned a lot about my personal self. It is interesting to really get to know myself". "All the things we did gave me clarity and also made me realise that this all is possible".	(1.1) F;3;1;15-17 (4.2)
2:	18 19 20 21 22	"I learned that different people want to become different things, by means of different methods". "I mean there is different ways to become and do almost similar occupations". "I also realised that there is numerous alternatives and options for different careers. "It all depends on what it means for you"	(3.3)
3:	23 24	"Teacher, I am going to need a lot of mathematics and I never knew that Geography is actually so important for my future".	(3.2)
2:	25 26 27	"I will really have to pay attention to my English subject, because I will need to be able to communicate extremely effectively with people from overseas".	(4.1)
6:	28 29	"Oh my goodness, I am going to actually need Mathematics to become a farmer".	(3.2) F;6;1;28-29
8:	30	"I will have to achieve a little better to become a teacher".	(3.2) F;8;1;30
11:	31 32 33	"I will have to work very hard in my languages as I will need to be efficient in language for communication, advertisement and other retail issues".	(3.2) F;11;1;31-33
1:	34 35 36	"Teacher, the future is important, but not only the far future. We have to plan today for the future. It will be too late if you wait for one day".	(3.2) F;1;1;34-36
2:	37 38	"Yes, and if you plan well and focus on your future now, you will have more options and you will be able to achieve more".	(3.2) F;2;1;37-38
9:	39 40 41	"I saw that you have to think wider". "There aren't only one or two options, but actually more and now I can look into new ideas".	(3.3)
7:	42 43 44 45	"I have changed my occupation choice after talking with my mother". She says I cannot become a singer". "I don't want to do what she does". "I am too weird to be working with people the whole day". "People don't understand me".	(2.1) (1.1)

ANNEXURE F: CD CONTAINING RELATIVE QUALITATIVE DATA

Relevant data were submitted to my supervisor.