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EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNERS FROM DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES REGARDING GROUP PSYCHOMETRIC AND NARRATIVE CAREER ASSESSMENT

By

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Abstract

South African career assessment and counselling has traditionally and problematically focused on the use of westernised and culturally biased psychometric instruments to assist learners with making career decisions. Psychologists and/or Psychometrists tend to provide 'expert opinions' on a career path for learners. Evidence suggests that in the constantly changing socio-economic and political situation of South Africa, there is a need for learners to be more actively involved in their own career decision-making. The central aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities regarding traditional and post-modern career assessment techniques in the South African context which are conducted on a group level. Quantitative data was collected through a traditional group psychometric career assessment and a group post-modern narrative career assessment. Subsequent to this, learners' were interviewed in a focus group interview. This data was transcribed and by using thematic content analysis, themes pertaining to the learners' perceptions of the two forms of assessment were discovered.

Evidence from the research suggests that learners' from disadvantaged communities prefer the structure and standardised conditions in which traditional psychometric career assessment takes place, over the unstructured and informal nature of a post-modern narrative career assessment. The research also uncovered problems inherent to South African psychometric testing with learners' from disadvantaged communities and the need for more culturally-appropriate career assessment. Reasons for these issues are discussed. The narrative career assessment as a potential solution to this problem was also discussed and indications are that it may provide a better and more appropriate alternative to career counselling and assessment among disadvantaged learners'.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology by Coursework and Research Report (Part-time) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other University.

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David Bischof

(November 2007)

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Chapter 1
Introduction

South African career assessment and counselling has traditionally focused on the use of psychometric instruments to identify potentially suitable career paths for learners' to consider after completing high school (Watson and Stead, 2002). These psychometric assessments have been conducted at both individual and group level by a Psychologist or Psychometrist who then scores the results and provides the learner with a report and feedback on potential career path opportunities (Maree and Beck, 2004). Psychologists and/or Psychometrists are subsequently in a position to provide 'expert opinions' on a career path for learners'. The learner generally has little actual input into the psychometric testing procedure and the final decision-making process. The psychometric results can have a significant impact on the learners' choice of career and as such, there is a need for learners' to be more actively involved in the process (Maree and Beck, 2004). Furthermore, the methods and tests traditionally used in career counselling and assessment have been considered problematic because very few psychometric tests have been specifically designed for a multi-cultural South African population (De Klerk, 1998, in Maree, Bester, Lubbe & Beck, 2001). The use of qualitative narrative career assessment is a potential opportunity to involve the learner in the career decision-making process and could prove to be useful, particularly in the South-African context. The aim of this research study will now be explored.

1. Aim

The central aim of this research is to explore the perceptions of learners' from disadvantaged communities regarding traditional and post-modern career assessment techniques in the South African context which are conducted on a group level. This will cover traditional career psychometric assessment techniques used in the South African pre-Apartheid and post-Apartheid Period, as well as post-modern career assessment approaches that have recently been developed and used. The secondary aim is to identify how learners perceive the similarities and differences between traditional psychometric and post-modern career assessment techniques. Furthermore, the research is aimed at establishing the perception of learners from disadvantaged communities as to the most effective and culturally appropriate career assessment techniques.

2. Rationale

Traditional approaches to career assessment and counselling have focused on the career assessor as the "expert", who did all the thinking and decision-making for the learner and according to Maree and Ebersohn (2002), this approach marginalises the client, who no longer makes his or her own decision about a future career. In addition to this, the client avoids taking any decisions about a future career, because he/she is overly reliant on the outcomes of the psychometric test. This degree of objectivity does not really allow for self-awareness and personal exploration by the client. These traditional career assessment and counselling shortcomings have particular significance in the South African context.

De Klerk (1998) in Maree et al. (2001), explains how the use of psychometric tests in the South African context is problematic since very few psychometric tests have been specifically designed for South Africa's multicultural population. Furthermore, Western-oriented psychometric tests do not validly or reliably represent South Africa's cultural diversity and they tend to rely on the traditional counsellor-centred approach.

Recent trends in career assessment and counselling, particularly in the South African context, have indicated that learners should be involved in the career assessment and decision-making process, so that they can accept responsibility for their own choices and development (Maree and Ebersohn, 2002). Furthermore, Stead (1996) argues that environmental factors play an important role in the career development of South Africans. Consequently, due to significant changes in the political, social and economic environments of South Africa over the past ten years, adolescents living in the current socio-political environment should be able to play a more interactive role in shaping their careers than was previously expected. This indicates the need for a shift from an objective approach to a more interpretive and personally engaging process that takes the contextual and environmental factors of adolescents into account. The post-modern career counselling and assessment approach addresses these concerns.

Recent research by Maree and Beck (2004) focuses on the juxtaposition between the traditional and post-modern approaches to career counselling and assessment, so as to identify shortcomings in the traditional approach and to indicate how the two approaches could enhance each other. Maree and Beck (2004) emphasise the necessity of using multiple approaches (traditional and post-modern) in the collection of career-decision making data. In conclusion to this research, the post-modern

approach identified a number of flaws in the traditional approach, particularly with regard to traditionally disadvantaged learners. Based on a case study, the research identified the need for further investigation into post-modern techniques which could be used for groups rather than individuals. Maree and Beck (2004) believe that post-modern approaches would lead to a more cost-effective career assessment process for learners from disadvantaged communities and could have a significant influence on career counselling. The current research will focus on learners' perceptions of traditional and post-modern approaches to career assessment as experienced in a group context.

3. Research Questions

The research is an empirical descriptive study which focuses on the central question:
How do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive traditional and post-modern career assessment techniques when the assessment takes place in a group setting?
In an attempt to answer this central question, the following secondary questions will be addressed:
1. What limitations and strengths do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive in the traditional psychometric group career assessment approach?
2. What limitations and strengths do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive in the post-modern group career assessment approach?

4. Methodology

Quantitative data was collected through a traditional group psychometric career assessment, administered to eleven Grade Eleven learners on a single school day during the second school term in 2006. These assessments were scored and the results interpreted in order to develop career recommendations. One month later, this was followed by the collection of qualitative data through post-modern narrative career assessment techniques with seven of the learners. This data was interpreted to uncover career recommendations. The learners then received two written reports and verbal feedback on the recommendations uncovered by the traditional and the post-modern assessments. A month later eleven learners were interviewed in a focus group interview where the data was collected with a tape recorder. This data was transcribed and by using thematic content analysis, themes pertaining to the learners' perceptions of the two forms of assessment were discovered. An interpretation and integration of these themes took place and conclusions were drawn. The focus of the research was not to compare the results or recommendations of the two sets of assessments, but rather to ascertain learner perceptions of the two different forms of group career assessment.

5. Outcome

Evidence suggests that learners from disadvantaged communities prefer the structure and standardised conditions in which traditional psychometric career assessment takes place, over the unstructured and informal nature of a post-modern narrative career assessment. Possible reasons for this may lie in the familiar standardized exam-like environment of the psychometric assessment and the expert position taken by the assessor in providing career recommendations. This environment may have led learners to avoid making independent career decisions as opposed to the engaging and empowering environment of the narrative career assessment situation. Furthermore, evidence suggests that this environment may cause demotivation and indecision on the part of learners in taking responsibility for their career decisions.

Career barriers and lack of parental support experienced by learners in a disadvantaged community setting were given as further reasons for the demotivation and indecision felt by the learners. The research also uncovered problems inherent to South African psychometric testing with learners from disadvantaged communities and the need for more culturally-appropriate career assessment. The narrative career assessment as a potential solution to this problem was discussed, particularly in terms of its applicability to a group of learners. Indications are that it may provide a better and more appropriate alternative to career counselling and assessment among disadvantaged learners. However, the research identified certain limitations to this approach, which could be addressed by means of suitably trained practitioners and further research in the field of group narrative career assessment.

6. Chapter Outline of the Research Report

This section presents an overview of the structure of the research report, giving a brief summary of the contents of each chapter.

Chapter one covers the aim, rationale and research questions applicable to the study. It also provides a brief description of the methodology used in the research and a brief description of the outcome of the research.

Chapter two includes the literature review. This section provides a rationale for the research in terms of the current problematic state of career counselling and assessment in the South African context. This chapter also defines the focus of the research in terms of career assessment and provides a historical theoretical background to quantitative and qualitative career assessment. This includes a description of the traditional career theories such as Super's lifespan-lifespace approach (Savickas, 1997) and social learning theory (Krumboltz, 1979) as well as Holland's type theory (Holland, 1985) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown and Hacket in Stead & Watson 2002). This is followed by an explanation of qualitative career assessment and narrative career assessment (Cochran, 1997; McMahon and Patton, 2002; Maree and Ebersohn, 2002).

Chapter three outlines the research design and methodology, including information on the sampling strategy and the biographical details of the research participants. Furthermore, the procedure used in the research and the psychometric and narrative career assessment instruments are discussed. The use of an interview schedule within the context of a focus group is examined together and the data-capturing technique in recording the focus group is explained. The data analysis methodology, namely, thematic content analysis, is explained in detail. This chapter also covers the ethical issues concerning the research.

Chapter four consists of the results and discussion of the research which is supported by the literature discussed in Chapter two. This discussion focuses on an exploration of the two traditional quantitative career assessment themes and the two qualitative narrative career assessment themes which emerged from the focus group interview. This is followed by an interpretation of these themes and an integration of these themes in terms of the career assessment preference themes revealed by the learners.

Chapter five examines the strengths and the limitations of the research and provides a conclusion to the main findings of the study. This is followed by recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the rationale behind this research, it is necessary to explore the literature pertinent to the area of career assessment, particularly in the South African context. This literature review will therefore focus on career assessment in South Africa and will include definitions of career counselling and assessment and the historical context of career assessment. Explanations of the various theories which support the use of career assessment will be critically examined. The review will also focus on various quantitative career assessment techniques and theories before finally exploring more recent qualitative methodologies.

1. The South African Situation

South Africa's employment situation is currently focusing on addressing the inequalities of the past, and providing people from disadvantaged backgrounds with educational and occupational opportunities. The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, Section 8 (Government Gazette, 1998 in Huysamen, 2002:26) maintains that psychological testing and assessment is not to be used unless the test or assessment being used – (a) has been scientifically shown to be valid and reliable, (b) can be applied fairly to all employees; and (c) is not biased against any employee or group. South African career psychology, and its attempt to "fit" a person to a job, has subsequently found itself in a challenging position.

Lamprecht (2002), in Maree and Beck (2004), is critical of the use of psychometric testing in a South African context, as very few of these tests have been designed for South Africa's multicultural population. Furthermore, these are predominately American and European-oriented tests which are not necessarily valid and reliable in the South African context. Tests and current career counselling models have until recently, only been available to white Afrikaans and English-speaking learners. These models are not seen to be suitable for all cultures, genders and socio-economic groups (Lamprecht, 2002 in Maree and Beck, 2004) and the reasons for this will now be explained.

Due to the fact that many of the career assessment methods used have not changed significantly over the past ten years, there is a need to research and develop more culturally appropriate methods to deal with a changing and complex socio-economic environment (Foxcroft, 2004; Van der Vijver & Rothmann, 2004). Hickson, Biesheuvel, Turton and Buhrmann (in Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo,

2006:55) argue that there is a need for ethnopsychology (or indigenous psychology) in a South African context. Stead and Watson (1999:215) define indigenous psychology as "local cultural traditions or frames of reference which are used to define career psychology concepts". This type of ethnopsychology is necessary as there are;

- Frequent communication breakdowns between clients and counsellors;
- Counsellors often make negative judgements about their clients;
- Counsellors often harm their clients instead of helping them;
- Both counsellors and clients experience the counselling as a frustrating and anxiety-provoking process; and
- Counsellors set inappropriate therapy and process goals.

Learners from previously disadvantaged backgrounds have been faced with various forms of discrimination in terms of psychological assessment which according to Van de Vijver and Rothmann (2004) include:

- Unfamiliarity with the material used;
- The fact that psychological tests measured constructs that are unfamiliar to learners from disadvantaged communities; and
- Indications that all groups in South Africa's multicultural society are not adequately represented in the standardised samples used to derive the norm tables.

This has clearly placed certain South African learners at a disadvantage, particularly in terms of the validity and reliability of their assessment results. Furthermore, recent research by Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux and Herbst (2004) indicates that the most common languages used by practitioners to administer and report on psychometric test findings is English and Afrikaans with a small percentage of African languages being used. This raises questions with regard to fair-testing practices in a country like South Africa, where most people are not as proficient in English and Afrikaans compared to other African languages. In addition to this, Foxcroft (2004) criticises a lack of development (nearly ten years after the demise of Apartheid in South Africa) of culturally relevant tests that can be applied to the diverse range of language and cultural groups.

Watson and Stead (2002) state that no career theory has been developed in South Africa that focuses primarily on the career development of South Africa's diverse population groups. Consequently, career theory in South Africa has and still is largely dependant on international, particularly, Western career theories. In order to understand the South African environment, the history of career theories and their extensive application in South Africa must be explored.

However, a distinction needs to be made between career counselling and career assessment, given that the research focused on career assessment techniques.

2. The Focus on Career Assessment

Career counselling and career assessment have often been confused as being a one-dimensional process. However, career assessment can be distinguished as a process that occurs independently of career counselling. According to Lamprecht and Lamprecht (2002), career counselling can broadly be defined as a procedure where a trained professional assists an individual or a group of individuals to make informed and effective career-related decisions. Crites (as cited in De Bruin, 2002) divides career counselling into three phases, namely a diagnosis of what the client wishes to achieve via career counselling; why the client requires help with his or her career decision; and what the client's work-related strengths and weaknesses and career preferences are.

Alternatively, psychological assessment can be seen as a process-oriented activity (Lamprecht and Lamprecht, 2002), where the assessor or counsellor makes use of assessment measures or tests, as well as information from other sources like interviews, personal history, and collateral sources. This information is then integrated and used to make a career decision. Psychological assessment techniques and tests are also used to help the career counsellor identify the client's specific vocational interests, personality traits and abilities and thereby recommend certain occupations. The psychometric component of career counselling is mainly a quantitative method of testing and assessment, which has formed the core of the career counselling process. Neubert (1985) and Leconte (1986) identified the following seven major uses of career assessment in career preparation and exploration:

1. Determining where the student is in the career development process;
2. Measuring abilities, interests, capabilities, strengths, needs, potentials and behaviours;
3. Matching interests and abilities with appropriate training or employment;
4. Recommending adaptive techniques and/or remedial strategies;
5. Exploring work-related tasks or activities and determining how interests match abilities;
6. Implementing techniques or strategies that will help a student explore career or work options; and;
7. Developing a career profile that identifies concrete ways to assist students in achieving their goals.

However, according to Maree and Beck (2004), a multiple-method approach combining psychometric testing and qualitative methods has proven to be more appropriate and useful in career

counselling. In order to understand the reasoning behind methods and techniques used in psychometric career assessment, it is necessary to investigate the various career theories proposed, particularly those relevant to the South African context and the purposes of this research.

3. The Historical Context of Career Theory

Brown (2002) explains how the history of career development theory stems from Frank Parson's conceptual framework for career decision making. This advanced three-step formula became the first guide for career counselling. Frank Parson's theory advances a three-step process in determining the vocational choices available. These include a personal understanding of the self, aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and knowledge of their causes (Brown, 2002). Secondly, knowledge of the requirements, conditions for success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities and prospects in different lines of work is required. Finally, true reasoning on the relationship of these two groups of facts must occur.

Explanations of the various theories proposed in this historical conceptual framework will explore the trait-and-factor theory first, as this developed from Parson's conceptual framework for career decision-making. This will be followed by an explanation of the evolution of the trait-and-factor theory in John Holland's person-environment fit theory. The development of psychological tests for career assessment has been widely based on both these theories.

Furthermore, Donald Super's career development theories will be explored as it has made use of psychological tests, and it has also been viewed as being more applicable to the South African context. The literature review will also cover Social Cognitive Career theory as a more holistic conceptualisation of career theory. Finally, the recent movement towards the research and the use of a more culturally appropriate post-modern narrative or "storied" career counselling and assessment approach in the South African context, will be explored. The trait-and-factor theories will be investigated first as an introduction to career theory.

3.1 The Trait and Factor Theories

The trait-and-factor or trait-and-type approach has been well used and researched over time and is still being used extensively world-wide and in South Africa. The importance of this approach lies in the fact that most of the traditional assessment measures used in the research study have been developed with the use of trait-and-factor theories. The South African Vocational Interest Inventory that was used to assess the learners' interest (du Toit, Prinsloo, Gevers & Harilall, 1993) is based on Holland's theory of types. In addition to this, the Differential Aptitude Test (Coetzee and Vosloo, 2000) and the High School Personality Questionnaire, developed by Raymond B. Cattell and Mary

D.L. Cattell (Visser, Garbers-Prinsloo & Strauss, 1995, 2000) were used in this research study. These psychometric instruments measure traits and are important for an understanding of how people's traits relate to the career choices and options.

According to Sharf (in Ireh, 1999, 2000), "trait" refers to the characteristic of a person that can be measured through testing and "factor" refers to a characteristic required for successful job performance. Lamprecht and Lamprecht (2002) believes that this approach places the career counsellor in an expert position and makes them the dominant protagonist in the career counselling process. The approach is also based on the positivist assumption that personal individual traits can be measured and quantified through the use of psychometric tests which are assumed to be valid and reliable. Additionally, the assessments are believed to portray an accurate picture of an individual's abilities (McMahon & Patton, 2002). Sharf (2006) explains that the trait-and-type approach helps the client to gain self-understanding and is made up of the following five basic traits that are assessed via psychometric testing: aptitudes; achievements; interests; values and personality, developed by Raymond Cattell who was a leader in the field of personality theory and measurement.

In the first trait, Cattell and Butcher (1968) explain how 'aptitude' measures the individual's probable future level of ability to perform a task. Aptitude tests therefore attempt to predict future success in either educational endeavours or occupational training. 'Achievement' refers to the events that individuals participate in, complete or achieve during the course of their lives. Achievement tests are used for certification or entry into a particular occupation. 'Interests' can be broadly defined as a relative constant, positive or negative directness towards a specific activity and is based on the whole personality (Sharf, 2006). Occupational as well as general interests are measured in interest tests and occupational level can actually be predicted more successfully from interest rather than aptitude. General 'values' and work-related values, are considered to be important values for career counselling. Values are often neglected by the Trait-and-Factor approach and are difficult to assess as they represent elusive concepts and cannot be easily predicted. 'Personality,' the fifth trait, refers to the unique organisation of characteristics that define an individual and determine that person's pattern of interaction with their environment (Sharf, 2006). It refers to an individual's entire constitution, that is, the type of person that he or she is. Personality profiles, inventories and tests have been widely developed to relate personality to occupational selection in the Trait-and-Factor approach.

John Holland's theory of types is an extension of the trait-and-type theory and the traits outlined above. In 1959, he developed a comprehensive trait-orientated explanation for career choice and he

viewed career choice and career adjustment as an extension of a person's personality (Holland, 1997). The assumption lay in the idea that people who work in similar occupations have similar interests and life histories. Holland (1997) put forward his theory by characterising people by their resemblance to each of six personality types; namely Realistic; Investigative; Artistic; Social; Enterprising and Conventional. The six dimensions are assumed to cover major kinds of work environments and to classify various data about self. Ireh (1999, 2000:6-7) provides brief explanations of these areas as follows:

- Realistic – person enjoying activities requiring strength, is aggressive, possesses good motor organisation, lacks interpersonal skills, prefers concrete to abstract problems and is unsociable.
- Investigative – person is task-oriented, thinks through problems and attempts to organise and understand the world.
- Social – person prefers teaching or therapeutic roles.
- Conventional – person performs structured verbal and numerical activities and subordinate roles, achieves goals through conformity.
- Enterprising – person prefers verbal skills in situations which provide opportunities for dominating, selling or leading others.
- Artistic – person prefers indirect relationship and dealing with environmental problems through self-expression in artistic media.

Holland's theory is based on the belief that the more closely a person resembles a particular type, the more likely he or she is to exhibit the personal trait and behaviours associated with this type. However, there are numerous criticisms of the trait-and-type approach which need to be explored.

Lamprecht and Lamprecht (2002) argues that clients are not viewed in totality and that the mass of assessment and psychometric information often confuses them. The approach is also seen as too rigid given the predictability of the testing technique and procedure. Lamprecht further argues that the relationship between the counsellor as expert and the client as a passive recipient is one-sided and does not empower the client to make further career decisions later on in life.

Holland's theory has been extensively applied, but has never been adapted to the South African environment. Research shows that the interest structure is a poor fit when applied to black South African adolescents (Du Toit & de Bruin, 2002; Watson and Stead, 2002), because traditional theories like the trait-and-type theory and Holland's theory are conservative rather than pro-active and they assume an a-political stance within a supposed value-free environment (Watson and Stead,

2002). This compromises the dynamic interface of the socio-historical, political and economic factors in an individual's life.

The Trait-Factor approach also relies on the assumption that an individual has self-awareness as well as an awareness of the process and context of the world of work. In addition to this, the theory assumes that this person has a vast array of careers from which to choose freely (De Bruin in Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001). However, in a developing country, or a country with a history similar to that of South Africa, job and career opportunities are scarce, particularly for disadvantaged populations (Momberg, 2005). Furthermore, many of the assessment measures developed from the Trait-Factor approach assume reliability and validity for the population group undertaking the test. Due to language, socio-economic, educational and religious backgrounds, these measures do not always tap into equivalent characteristics for different groups (de Bruin in Foxcroft & Roodt, 2001).

Donald Super's lifespan-lifespace theory, however, takes these factors into consideration and moves towards a more contextual approach. This theory was considered to be applicable in terms of locating the career development stage of the learners involved in the research. Furthermore, the Values Scale (Langley, du Toit and Herbst, 1992) used to identify the learners' values and needs, is based on the Work Values inventory developed by Donald Super in 1973, and is therefore important in order to understand the theory behind the psychometric instrument that was used.

3.2 Donald Super's Lifespan-Lifespace Approach

Donald Super developed his theory of career choice and development in 1953. It incorporates aspects of the trait-and-factor theory, developmental psychology and personal construct theory (Brown, 2002). Super identified five stages of career development during the course of a person's lifespan. These include the growth stage from birth to 15 years; the exploration stage from approximately 15 years to 25 years; the establishment stage from approximately 25 years to 45 years; the maintenance stage from approximately 45 years to 55 years and the declining stage from approximately 55 years onwards (Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998).

Within each of these stages, a person is said to fulfil different roles which are played out in different lifespaces such as the home, the community, educational institutions and the workplace. Success in coping with the burdens of each career developmental stage and the demands of the environment is, according to Super, dependent on how ready a person is to cope with these demands (Louw et al., 1998). This readiness can be termed career maturity and is defined as "the ability of an individual to accomplish developmentally appropriate vocational tasks" (Super, 1990 in Fouad and Consuelo, 1994:96). Career maturity therefore generally applies to the readiness of a learner or young adult to

a make a career decision. Super also emphasises the concept of career adaptability which occurs during adulthood, and which refers to the readiness of adults to cope with organisational and economic change which could lead to career uncertainty (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven and Prosser, 2004). Savickas (1997:248) explains how "the change from career maturity to career adaptability simplifies life-span, life-space theory by using a single construct to parsimoniously explain development in children, adolescents and adults".

As the learners in this research study occupied the exploration stage, this stage will be discussed in more detail. Schreuder and Theron (1997) explain that during the exploration stage, adolescents are starting to make tentative career choices and begin to explore their chosen fields in greater depth. These career choices are sometimes based on parental or adult expectations or inspirations. Inappropriate career choices during this stage may "result in career crises when individuals cannot cope with change, because they are accustomed to seeing a career as encompassing 'an occupation' rather than as different roles or directions" (Schreuder and Theron, 1997:68). This stage will be explored at greater length when discussing the research results. The three theoretical segments of the lifespan, lifespace theory will now be discussed.

According to Savickas (1997), the lifespan-lifespace theory consists of three theoretical segments. Super's first construction of careers, namely the "Career Development Theory", added a developmental perspective to the traditional trait-and-factor approach, but emphasised that the trait-and-factor approach remained the most important aspect of career counselling. This developmental theory segment looked at how individuals construct and negotiate their work lives as well as the predictable tasks and coping behaviour that they encounter as they develop their careers. The developmental perspective of this theoretical area combines the trait-and-factor tenet which focuses on differences among individuals and occupations, by focusing on the individual's life course. Consequently, this theory can also help the career counsellor to aid individuals in anticipating developmental tasks, form critical decisional attitudes and competencies, and then engage in realistic vocational coping behaviours.

The secondary construction of careers refers to the "Developmental Self-Concept Theory" and emphasises the role of self-concepts in career development. The original career development theoretical construct asserted that a person's self-concept is active in their occupational choice. Super (cited in Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey 2002:36) defined self-concept as "a picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships". The new addition to the construction of careers explicitly articulated the processes involved in the formation, translation, and implementation of a self-concept as well as how self-

concept affects vocational behaviour. Super proposed three elements of self-concept which include formation, translation and implementation (Stead and Schultheiss, 2003).

Finally, Super proposed the third theoretical construct is the lifespan-life-space theory, which added a contextual perspective that deals with social roles and broadens attention from concentration on the work role, to highlighting the constellation of all life roles. He explains that "this theory segment deals with how individuals situate the work role among their other life roles, and then use the resulting life structure to fulfil their personal values" (Savickas, 1997:247).

Donald Super refined his career development approach throughout the 1960's and 1970's and it was during this time that career theory started moving away from earlier conceptualisations of career choice as an event, towards an emphasis on the process of choice itself (Langley in Stead & Watson, 1999). The basic premise of his approach was therefore grounded in the principle that physiological aspects such as genetic predisposition, along with geographical aspects, have an impact upon other aspects of career development (Sharf, 2006).

Although Super's theory was originally heavily grounded in the trait-and-type approach, there was a shift towards qualitative vocational assessment and a holistic redefinition of career's (Krumboltz, 1998; Savickas, 1997, 2001). According to Langley in Watson and Stead (2002), this can be used within a macro-environment of unemployment and economic depression such as South Africa, as it incorporates cultural variables. Furthermore, the theory views career development as emerging from a dynamic interaction between individual factors and the environment, including the cultural context. Despite its relevance to the South African context, research using Super's theory has been predominantly focused on Caucasian middle-class individuals (de Bruin & Nel, 1996, cited in Watson and Stead, 2002). Sharf (2006:166) further explains how research by Torimiro, Dionco-Adetayo and Okorie (2003) provided "a broad cultural perspective of how children's views of work can be different, depending on the place of work or occupations in their culture. The research further serves to question how applicable Super's theory may be to children from different cultures".

Further criticism of the use of Super's theory (particularly in terms of developmental stages and career maturity) is that there has been a lack of research on developmental stages of ethnic groups (Leong and Brown as cited in Patton and McMahon, 1999) and that the concept of career maturity is inherently culturally biased because "the tasks measured by career maturity inventories may not be common to all ethnic groups" (Smith in Patton and Mcmahon, 1999:105).

Studies conducted in South Africa (Watson and Van Aarde, 1986) found that adolescents move through the same developmental stages, but at different rates to their Western counterparts. The studies also found that career maturity increased across grade level, although it differed according to gender (boys scoring higher than girls) and location (urban students scoring higher than rural students). Fouad (as cited in Fouad and Consuelo, 1994) concluded that research has generally supported the career maturity theories across cultures, although more research is needed to determine the variables that determine variation in rates of development.

Recent research on career maturity in the South African context (Pieterse, 2005) indicated that learners from advantaged schools, on average, seemed to score higher in career maturity than learners from disadvantaged schools. These findings indicate that improving career maturity amongst previously disadvantaged learners needs to be addressed in South Africa. However, Langley in Stead and Watson (1999) believe that improving learners' career adaptability may be more important than focusing on their career maturity in a rapidly changing South African environment. Career adaptability looks at whether an individual is ready to cope with a changing environment in terms of the job market and working conditions (Langley in Stead and Watson, 1999). The concept of career adaptability has primarily focused on how adults adapt to changing work environments in terms of career transitions. However, this concept could be very useful when applied to learners in a South African context. Another theory that was more grounded in a holistic conceptualisation of career development is the Social Cognitive Theory.

3.3 Social Cognitive Career Theory

The 1980's saw the growth and development of Super's and Holland's theories as well as the emergence of other theories that have focused on a more holistic conceptualisation of career development (Stead and Watson, 1999). Swanson and Fouad (1999) developed the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which was based on Bandura's social cognitive theory.

Swanson and Fouad (1999:125) asserted that "Bandura hypothesised that individual's conception of their confidence to perform tasks (self-efficacy) mediates between what they know and how they act and that people's belief in their ability to accomplish things help to determine the actions they will take". According to SCCT theory, self-efficacy develops from the previous performance and accomplishments of individuals when observing others, from verbal persuasion, physiological states and arousal (Swanson and Fouad, 1999). Langley in Stead and Watson (1999:92) add that there is "a triadic reciprocality between personal attributes (such as feelings, attitudes, gender and aptitude), the external environment and overt behaviour". In the same way as environmental factors influence

a person's behaviour, behaviour can influence the environment. People therefore actively shape their own environment or career related-goals and activities (Langley in Stead and Watson, 1999).

In explaining the central tenets of the SCCT theory, Isaacson and Brown (1997) expounded on the notion that people influence their environments and vice-versa, leading to a dynamic interaction between the two. A person's behaviour, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, goals, genetic factors and other indirect variables can therefore influence a person's career-related behaviour. Furthermore, direct variables such as discrimination, economic variables that influence supply and demand and the culture of the decision-maker and chance happenings may also influence career choice and development. Isaacson and Brown (1997) saw academic and job performance as a result of the direct and indirect variables as well as established goals. Consequently, people with high levels of self-efficacy beliefs and abilities should perform best in their chosen careers. However, SCCT theory posits that due to the dynamic interaction between a person and their environment, a person's outcome expectations and self-efficacy beliefs will continuously change and develop.

People are therefore likely to pursue careers in areas in which they express an interest. Furthermore, performance in these careers can be seen as learning experiences, which will influence their self-efficacy and outcome expectations for the activities in which they are involved. Lent and Brown (in Stead & Watson, 1999:95) support this view and state that: "Based on success or failure in these activities, self-efficacy expectations and outcome expectations are either strengthened or revised".

Nicholas, Pretorius and Naidoo (as cited in Watson and Stead, 2002:28) believe that "socio-political and economic factors have prescribed the field of career psychology in South Africa and that much ground needs to be covered in order to address the democratic political ideals of our transformation process". Advantages of SCCT theory in terms of the South African context are that it takes the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place into consideration and also allows for flexibility in terms of the pursuit of different developmental routes. Furthermore, this positive perception of an individual's ability to influence their environment can help career counsellors and their clients react positively to difficulties that may arise in the career counselling process. This is beneficial when used on previously disadvantaged populations in a South African context (de Bruin in Stead and Watson, 1999).

Stead and Watson (1999) explain how this model has been used to analyse changes and their impact on individual career development in South Africa. Stead (1996) applied the model to show career development in South Africa during the Apartheid era and suggest interventions that need to occur to aid meaningful career development among black adolescents. The usefulness of this approach

lies in its focus on the dynamic interaction between the environment and individuals (Stead and Watson, 1999). However, the model's usage has been explained, but extensive research to determine the applicability of SCCT to the South African context has, as yet, not been conducted.

4. Post-Modern Qualitative Approach to Career Assessment

An area that is being researched and is currently gaining prominence in South Africa, is the post-modern approach to career assessment. Traditional career theories such as Super's lifespan-lifespace approach (Savickas, 1997), the social learning theory (Krumboltz, 1998), Holland's type theory (Holland, 1997) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown and Hacket in Stead & Watson 2002), have taken contextual factors into consideration. However, these theories have not been adequately researched in South Africa (Stead, 2002). The social learning and social cognitive theories have been more successfully used to explain career behaviour in South Africa due to their contextual post-modern approach, but still require further research (de Bruin in Stead and Watson, 1999). However, the development of qualitative as opposed to quantitative career theories and assessment methods can be seen as a move towards developing a more culturally appropriate approach in the South African context.

Traditionally, little emphasis has been given to qualitative career assessment methods. Due to a changing work environment and cultural factors, there is a need to acknowledge the contextual and social influences upon an individual's career choices and concerns. Qualitative concepts define a constructivist approach that replaces the objectivity of logical positivism with a more subjective notion of the individual (McMahon and Patton, 2002). Constructivism enables us to locate individuals in terms of how they construct meaning, knowledge and experience through cognitive processes (Bujold, 2004; Young and Collin, 2004) and thus emphasises a client-centered personal approach.

Qualitative career assessment discards the concept of using information gained from tests and questionnaires, but rather "relies on continuous assessment by means of creative, non-testing techniques, with the aim of gaining in-depth insight into the unique personal profiles of clients" (Lamprecht in Maree & Ebersohn, 2002:124). The post-modern career counselling and assessment approach directly opposes the Trait-and-Factor approach in a number of areas. Firstly, the qualitative approach assumes that clients and not the counsellor are the experts on their lives, whereas the counsellor merely facilitates the career assessment process. The client becomes actively involved and empowered by the process and is trusted to make personal career decisions (Lamprecht in Maree & Ebersohn, 2002).

Secondly, innovative and creative qualitative techniques are developed to help the client in this process and the assessment takes place continuously, so that clients are never overwhelmed by test results and procedures. There is no specific procedure to the process and both client and counsellor continue until they believe that they have all the information that they need. This information is constantly triangulated with information that is already available and significant people in the client's lives are also involved in the process. The client's career values play an important role in the process in contrast to its rare emphasis in the Trait-and-Factor approach (Lamprecht in Maree & Ebersohn 2002).

Qualitative assessment utilises multiple methods to assist the client whereas a quantitative emphasises issues of reliability and validity. Qualitative methods place an emphasis on trustworthiness and the client's own ability to learn more about themselves (Lamprecht in Maree & Ebersohn, 2002, McMahon and Patton, 2002). Various qualitative assessment methods include Collages, Flights of the imagination, the card-sorting system and the narrative approach, which was the focus of the qualitative career assessment part of this research.

Goldman (1990) as cited in McMahon and Patton (2002) believes that qualitative career assessment techniques can meet the needs of different cultural and ethnic groups and can be applied to people with disabilities, people in different socio-economic groups and people with different sexual identities. The disadvantages and critiques of this method are that there has not been much research in the area. In addition to this, there is little to aid or guide the assessor, as there are no manuals, instructions or standardised tests (McMahon & Patton, 2002). The process is therefore left very much in the hands of the assessor. This, to a large extent still leaves the assessor as the 'expert' in the career-decision making process. Furthermore, there is little need for psychometric assessment, although it can be used in conjunction with the qualitative method.

Goldman (1992) believes that a Qualitative assessment approach provides the advantage that the process is more informal and allows for greater flexibility. In addition to this, this type of assessment unusually does not require the statistical competencies involved in number scores, norms, or data regarding reliability and validity. Further advantages as identified by Goldman (1992) are that the assessment usually involves the client more actively in the search for self-awareness and that qualitative assessments tends to be more open-ended, divergent and holistic in their interpretation and discussion. Qualitative assessment methods have been considered particularly useful for group use, an aspect that will be discussed in more detail in the research findings.

4.1 The Narrative Approach

Another post-modern qualitative approach to career counselling and assessment is the Narrative approach, because it actively involves the learner in the career assessment and decision-making process. The Narrative approach to career assessment is considered to be a third wave post-modern qualitative approach, which according to Doan in Maree and Ebersohn (2002), makes the client the expert in the career decision making process. In doing so, it lends privilege to the voice of the client, rather than to a formal, academic domain of language. In order to understand this career assessment technique, it is important to understand the "narrative" concept. According to Larsen (1999) in Bujold (2004), the role of narrative can be described as both a process and a product. As a process, it requires an understanding of one's experiences and is a form of self-construction or self-awareness. As a product, it is a story consisting of, amongst other things, a person's beliefs, expectations and the environmental influences to which the individual has been exposed. A plot is an important tenet of narrative theory, as it is the organizing theme of a story which must constantly be revised in order to configure new events in a person's life (Polkinghorne, 1998).

According to Campbell and Ungar (2004), people can have different conversations with the world which allows them to change their sense of who they are. Some socially constructed conversations or narratives give certain groups a 'privileged' power over other groups in terms of their understanding of the world, at the expense of the other group. However, narrative techniques allow for the critical examination of how stories are privileged and by whom. In support of this statement Campbell and Ungar (2004:22) postulate that "Individuals' stories are understood not as accurate, but as selective recollections of the past and descriptions of the present contributing to what they hold as a preferred story of the future". It is a shift from finding a job to finding one's self and provides for a more holistic and integrative picture of the client (Brott, 2004).

Eloff in Maree and Ebersohn (2002) explains the key process of Narrative therapy which can be used in the context of career counselling and assessment. This process involves the client narrating his or her personal story which connects the past, present and future. When the client has concluded their story, the psychologist asks questions that clarify and broaden certain aspects of the story to contextualise problems experienced and how these have influenced the client. The story therefore serves as the basis for therapy. Narrative therapy emphasises that the problem rather than person's qualities is separate from the person and is the issue that must be dealt with. This locates the problem 'outside' of the person and helps the client to name and externalise it.

This is followed by a process of determining the relative strength pertaining to the problem and the person by focusing on the extent to which the problem has influenced the life of the person and vice-versa. This process gives the client control over the problem. The therapist then assists the client to re-author their narratives by asking questions that are directed towards the discovery of alternative stories or realities. This alternative story is enriched by the therapist creating thematic links and deconstructing aspects that contradict the client's story or narrative (Eloff in Maree and Ebersohn, 2002).

Eloff in Maree and Ebersohn (2002) stress the importance that the alternative narrative is grounded in the social world in which the client finds him or herself every day. This social world includes a supporting audience of family, friends and peers. Written documents are also a very important part of the process and the therapy ends when the client "decides that the cogency of the alternative self-story is rich enough to be sustainable. The last session may be ceremonial and it may provide a forum in which to tell the new story to invited guests" (Eloff in Maree & Ebersohn, 2002:136).

Narrative career assessment has found its place in the context of career counselling as a counselling approach and not a career development theory. Larry Cochran (1997) explains this approach as one in which the counsellor makes his or her career interventions with clients more personal and subjective. The approach focuses on the central task of career counselling as 'emplotment', rather than matching. This therefore involves placing the client as the main protagonist in a career narrative that is meaningful to the client. Brott (2004) explains how practical techniques provide opportunities to develop a collaborative counselling relationship. The focus of this relationship is to obtain a holistic and integrated picture of the client through their personal narratives. Clients are therefore not only finding out about potential careers, but are also learning about themselves and moving in preferred directions as they construct meaningful future chapters in their life stories.

Larry Cochran (1997) advances the idea of narratives or stories being our primary way of making meaning in the world. A narrative gives us a picture of our lives and allows us to combine a beginning, middle and an end into a whole. Such an approach can be used effectively in career assessment, if the individual concerned identifies with his or her personal narrative. In developing a narrative, a person is able to integrate available options with their ideal career vision. This dialectic process allows the individual to construct their own meaning. The opportunity is then available for them to expand on this, refine it, test it and revise it over the course of their lives so as to make it their own unique career narrative (Cochran, 1997).

According to Sharf (2006:273), the counsellor has several goals in assessing the client's life patterns when using narrative counselling in the context of career assessment. These include:

- Listening to the narrative to identify a pattern in the client's lives;
- The importance of the client and the counsellor forming a sense of the client's identify; and
- There is also significance in listening to the narrative and assessing it to learn about the client's goals for the future.

Within the South African context, narrative career assessment is an effective movement away from the traditional psychometric testing approach which has been used so extensively and problematically and which does not seem to address the complexity of career behaviour. According to Eloff in Maree and Ebersohn (2002), the approach can help individuals to develop their career choices based on their life stories and its effectiveness is supported by the following notions: the client becomes the expert which allows for personal ownership of the decisions made; narrative therapy and assessment techniques allows personal stories to be transformed into career paths; and allows the client, rather than the counsellor, to influence their career narratives.

Based on this client centred-model, Maree et al (2001) propose the following phases for career assessment within a post modern context in South Africa:

- Phase One – Initial phase: Posing the Problem: During this phase clients becomes aware of the challenges which they face. The client has the opportunity to tell his/her life story, while the counsellor utilises communication skills such as paying attention, listening, understanding, empathising, assessing and summarising in order to help the client to elucidate his/her life story and to identify patterns and commonalities. This phase also involves an agreement to cooperate between the counsellor and the client.
- Phase Two – Middle Phase: During this phase, an exploration of possible career possibilities takes place to assist the client with direction towards a future career plan. It involves the composition of a story or narrative that the individual will live (possibilities for a better future). This phase also provides the opportunity to take note of the client's cognitive strategies, such as their faulty suppositions, inconsistent behaviour, irrational ideas, impediments and beliefs about themselves.
- Phase Three- Final Phase: This phase identifies the activity and input needed to put the possibilities identified by Phase Two into operation. It answers questions such as; which potential problems or hindrances may occur regarding the choice of career; and which persons or institutions would be able and willing to provide more information regarding certain careers and steps which the client must take to follow his/her choice of career.

It is envisaged that such a personal and client-directed approach could solve many of the ‘culturally loaded’ issues that plague psychometric career assessment in South Africa today.

However, barriers to a post-modern narrative approach lie in stories that constrain the client. (Campbell and Ungar, 2004). In a country like South Africa, there will be many stories that involve racial and social prejudice, poverty and injustice and a lack of confidence that can influence the narrative that is being told. These constraints need to be identified and addressed in order to assist the client in making a career decision that is well-informed (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). Furthermore, research into the narrative approach to career assessment on an individual level revealed that further research into group level career assessment is necessary in the South African context (Maree and Beck, 2004).

The narrative approach used in the career assessment context can help individuals to develop their career choices based on their life stories. Its effectiveness is further supported by the fact that the client becomes the expert, which allows for personal ownership of the decisions that are made. In addition to this, narrative assessment allows personal stories to be transformed into career paths and allows clients to influence their career narratives rather than be dependent on the career counsellor’s influence (Eloff, as cited in in Maree and Ebersohn, 2002).

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will examine and explain the research design and methodology used in the study. The focus will be on the non- probability purposive sampling technique used as well as the sampling criteria identified. Furthermore, the chapter will elaborate on the psychometric and narrative techniques which were used to gather career assessment information. The research design will be covered in chapter four.

1 Selection of Participants (Sampling)

A sample of 11 learners was chosen to facilitate the administration of the two forms of assessment in a group setting. Furthermore, 11 learners were considered to be ideal for the focus group interview, which according to Krueger (1994) normally consists of between seven and ten people. However, the number of people involved in a focus group depends largely on the objectives of the study. This will be elaborated on in the discussion on focus groups. Non-probability purposive sampling was used. This method involves the researcher selecting participants based on defined characteristics central to the population according to which the researcher wishes to generalise the findings (May, 2001). The process also includes stratification, where the participants are required to meet specific characteristics outlined in order for the sample to reflect an accurate proportion of individuals required for the research (Henry as cited in Bickman and Rog, 2000).

The sampling included the following criteria to ensure that the research findings could be generalised to the larger South African population under investigation:

- The learners had to be selected from a traditionally disadvantaged background. In this research the term 'traditionally disadvantaged learner' refers to learners from previously disadvantaged Black, Coloured and Indian communities. Bernhardt in Maite (2005:7) defines a disadvantaged community as “rural and township communities that are characterised by low income families, mostly with unemployed parents, inadequate educational resources, lack of career centres and lack of career counselling in the majority of the schools”. With this in mind, a semi-urban school in a disadvantaged area in the Gauteng region was selected.
- The learners had to be in Grade 11 during which academic year learners typically make career decisions and subject choices before entering Grade 12.
- The 11 learner sample included six male and five female learners, to facilitate a relatively fair gender sample.

- The learners had to be second or third English language school learners, in order to assess their perceptions of the cultural fairness of the quantitative traditional assessment and qualitative post-modern assessment methods, since this kind of career assessment is largely done through the medium of English.
- The learners had to be between the ages of 16 and 19, the general age of Grade 11 learners.

When considering the sampling strategy it was important to keep the following points in mind and was verified by the Consent Form which the parents were asked to complete (Appendix F):

- The mobility of the learner needed to be taken into consideration and the researcher needed to ensure that the selected learners were or had been in the same school and lived in the same area for more than six months. This was to ensure that all eleven learners would be present for the duration of the study.
- The researcher needed to be fully aware of single parent families, given that the fields in which parents work may have a large impact on the career choice of the learners in question. Informal questionnaires completed may therefore only reflect the viewpoints of one parent, rather than two, and learner career concepts may be based on the career of only one parent.

At the beginning of the school term in January 2006, all Grade 11 learners and their parents at the relevant school received an information sheet (Appendix D, E) and five consent forms (Appendix F, G, H., I and J) to read and fill out. From the forms that were returned, 11 learners were selected that fulfilled the above criteria. The biographical details of the learners will now be explained.

2. Biographical Details

The following table provides an indication of the biographical details of the sample used, indicating the age, gender, home language and grade of the learners and whether or not they participated in both forms of career assessment and the focus group interview.

LEARNER (11)	AGE ON ASSESSMENT DATE	GENDER	HOME LANGUAGE	GRADE	COMPLETED PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENT (11)	COMPLETED NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT (7)	INVOLVEMENT IN FOCUS GROUP
1	18 years 1 month	Male	English	Grade 11	yes	**No**	Yes
2	16 years 3 months	Male	Northern Sotho	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes
3	17 years 3 months	Male	Setswana	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes
4	16 years 10 months	Male	Afrikaans	Grade 11	yes	**No**	Yes
5	16 years 8 months	Male	Sepedi	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes
6	18 years	Male	Afrikaans	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes
7	17 years 1 month	Female	English	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes
8	16 years 9 months	Female	English	Grade 11	yes	**No**	Yes
9	16 years 9 months	Female	Zulu	Grade 11	yes	**No**	Yes
10	16 years	Female	Sesotho and Setswana	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes
11	17 years 10 months	Female	English	Grade 11	yes	yes	Yes

The above table indicates that:

- Six out of the eleven learners were male.
- Five out of the eleven learners were female.
- The average age of the learners was 17 years.
- Seven out of the eleven learners did not have English as their home language.
- All the learners were in Grade eleven
- Seven out of the eleven learners completed both sets of assessments
- All eleven learners participated in the focus group.

The significance of these biographical details will be discussed in the results section of the research report. The procedure used to collect the data will now be explained in detail.

3. Procedure

Quantitative data was collected through traditional group psychometric career assessment, administered to the learners on a single school day during the second school term of 2006. These assessments were scored and results interpreted in order to develop career recommendations. One month later, this was followed by the collection of qualitative data through post-modern narrative career assessment techniques. This data was interpreted to uncover career recommendations. The learners then received two written reports and verbal feedback on the recommendations uncovered by the traditional and the post-modern assessments.

In order to ensure the objectivity of the researcher to the process, an Independent Psychometrist was used to administer both the traditional and post-modern career assessments. The Independent Psychometrist also provided the learners with two written reports and verbal feedback of their traditional and post-modern career recommendations in a separate feedback session with each learner and their parent or parents. The feedback session was held after both types of assessment were conducted. Furthermore, the Independent Psychometrist who was selected was experienced in the administration, report writing and feedback of psychometric career assessments and post-modern narrative career assessment as this person had also attended a post-modern career counselling and assessment workshop.

It is central to this dissertation to note that the results (recommendations) from the two sets of assessments were not compared in any way. Rather, a focus group interview was conducted with the learners in which semi-structured questions were asked to gauge their perceptions of the two separate assessment procedures. The data on their perceptions was gathered with the use of a tape recorder and this information was analysed through the use of thematic content analysis. The researcher only interacted with the participants in terms of conducting the focus group interview, as the purpose of this researcher was to gather and analyse their perceptions of the two assessment techniques.

The researcher attempted to ensure that both the traditional and post-modern assessments were conducted with the same group of learners because the researcher wished to understand their perceptions of both forms of assessment in a group setting. However, only seven learners completed both sets of assessments due to attrition. The researcher was aware of the possibility of an additive effect whereby the second form of assessment might 'build' on the outcomes of the first. The researcher attempted to deal with this by ensuring that the learners did not receive any feedback until both forms of assessments had been completed. The time span of one month between the administration of the traditional and the post-modern assessment was also meant to deal with the possibility of order effects.

The traditional quantitative psychometric career assessment comprised of a number of frequently used and established tests. These were administered to the learners over the course of a school day in the second school term of 2006 in the following order:

1. Differential Aptitude Test (DAT) to assess aptitude (Coetzee & Vosloo, 2000).
2. The High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ) to assess personality (Visser, Garbers-Prinsloo & Strauss, 1995, 2000)
3. The South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII) to gauge the learners' career interests (du Toit, Prinsloo, Gevers & Harilall, 1993).
4. The Values Scale (VS) to assess the learners values and needs (Langley, du Toit & Herbst, 1992).

The validity and reliability of each of the psychometric assessments listed above ensured the quality assurance criteria for the quantitative psychometric assessments. Each of the four instruments will now be described.

4. – The Psychometric Components of the Traditional Career Assessment Instruments

4.1 - The Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)

According to Coetzee and Vosloo (2000), the DAT was established as a battery of aptitude tests to measure potential and ability. It is used for Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners as well as adults who wish to complete post school training or start a career in a particular profession. The purpose of the DAT is to measure aptitude which the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) defines as "the potential a person has which will enable him/her to achieve a certain level of ability with a given amount of training and/or practise" (Coetzee and Vosloo, 2000:2). The reason for development of the DAT was to revise the Senior Aptitude Test in order to ensure that all learners in South Africa have access to an indicator of ability and potential. The test is aimed at measuring specific intellectual abilities and not general intellectual ability and assumes that the following will indicate the success of the leaner in achievement of an academic, technical or practical school course: The ability to reason abstractly on the basis of verbal and non-verbal material; memory for meaningful material; quick and accurate visual and spatial perceptual abilities; ability to make quick comparisons and to react to them and ability to see and apply arithmetical, mechanical and physical principles (Coetzee and Vosloo, 2000).

According to Coetzee and Vosloo (2000), the reliability of the DAT was determined with the Kuder-Richardson formula 14 (K-R 14) and the reliability coefficient is fairly consistent for the different grade groups and ranges from 0.69 to 0.86. Although some are on the low side, the reliability of the nine tests of the DAT is considered to be of an acceptable standard. The DAT takes into consideration content, construct, concurrent and predictive validity (Coetzee & Vosloo, 2000). Conclusions drawn from various studies on the DAT show that it can indeed predict performance in school subjects and determine the aptitudes of learners.

4.2 –The High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ)

The HSPQ was developed in the United States of America by Raymond B. Cattell and Mary D.L. Cattell to create a questionnaire that could reliably and validly indicate the personality of individuals aged between 12 and 18 years. Cattell used factor analysis to identify 14 primary personality factors that cover the human field of personality. The aim of the HSPQ is therefore to obtain maximum information on an individual's personality within the shortest space of time and is used to determine emotional and behavioural problems, predict future school achievement and determine career-personality fit (Visser et al., 1995).

The test-retest reliability coefficients for a 1-week period ranged from $r = 0.60$ to $r = 0.78$, while that for 2-weeks ranged from $r = 0.53$ to $r = 0.64$ (HSRC, 1995). The HSRC (1995) did not regard the internal consistency of a personality instrument adequate since personality is not a homogenous phenomenon; thus the homogeneity of items was calculated for each primary factor. The internal reliability coefficients calculated using Küder-Richardson (Formula 8) on form A ranged from 0.44 to 0.63 (HSRC, 1995). The fact that that there was an absence of clear correlation among the various HSPQ factors among a South African sample indicates that the construct validity of the instrument is adequate for South African usage. Furthermore the content validity was taken as an act of faith that Cattell did develop the instrument adequately (HSRC, 1995). However, recent research by Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux and Herbst (2004) indicated that the High School Personality Questionnaire has not been developed or adapted to a multicultural context. Furthermore, very little South African-based research has been carried out on the concurrent and predictive validity of the HSPQ and it should therefore be used with care, especially when considering disadvantaged populations. Nonetheless, recent research by Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux and Herbst (2004:63) revealed that South African “Psychologists in general seem to view the HSPQ as an excellent instrument, provided that it was updated and revised”.

4.3- The South African Vocational Interest Inventory (SAVII)

According to du Toit et al. (1993), the SAVII measures occupational interest and has been developed and standardised for all South African population groups. The reliability coefficients for the SAVII fields are acceptable (KR-20) and are between 0.53 and 0.87 for the different fields of the Self Directed Search (SDS). In order to ensure the content validity of the SAVII, du Toit et al. (1993) undertook a literature study on interest, sorted items into fields based on the framework of Holland's theory, utilised experts to examine the wording and sorting of items into fields and examined the item-field correlations. The construct validity was determined through the intercorrelations of the main fields, as well as the main fields and the subfields of the SAVII. Du Toit et al. found that even the low consistency fields showed correlations that were statistically significant (at the 0.01% level). Furthermore, the intercorrelations of the subfields for the different groups indicated a high correlation between the subfields.

4.4 – The Values Scale (VS)

The South African version of the VS was developed by the HSRC to "understand the needs that individuals experience and satisfy in various life roles and to assess the relative importance of the work role as a means of needs satisfaction in the context of other life roles" (Langley, du Toit, Herbst, 1992:1). The Work Values inventory was developed by Donald Super in 1973 and studies were carried out on its applicability to South African populations in 1987 and 1988 to identify English words with which second language speakers may experience comprehension difficulties (Langley et al., 1992). The VS was never translated into any of the African languages as the testers argued that English was the medium of instruction for scholars in school and some abstract words could not be accurately translated. According to Langley et al. (1992), the reliability coefficients from these studies (KR-8) were higher than 0.70 for the entire sample with 12 scales having a reliability coefficient of 0.80 or higher. For the English and Afrikaans speaking pupils all scales obtained reliability coefficients higher than 0.75. For the African language pupils, 20 scales of the VS had reliability coefficients higher than 0.70 with only Spirituality (0.68) and Variety (0.65) being lower.

Content validity was ensured via a number of processes (c.f Langley et al., 1992). Construct validity studies showed that as far as sex and standard were concerned, there were statistically significant differences between the means of groups in respect to most scales, but these differences were small and no meaningful deductions were consequently made. A factor analysis of the items revealed that the VS corresponded reasonably well with those found in other countries (Langley et al., 1992).

4.5 Cultural Validity of Psychometric Tests Used

It is important to consider the cultural validity of the psychometric tests used in this study. All the tests used were included in a study by Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux and Herbst (2004) and revealed that most practitioners who use psychometric tests in South Africa have questioned the cross-cultural usage of these instruments in the current South African context. The assessment instruments used in the relevant research formed a part of the study. The study indicated that:

"Only a relatively small percentage (16%) of practitioners felt that the tests that they were using were appropriate to use cross-culturally. In contrast to this, almost two-thirds (65.8%) of the respondents indicated that they feel that the tests that they use are only sometimes appropriate to use cross-culturally, while 11% of the respondents did not feel that any of the tests that they used were appropriate to use cross-culturally. It is thus not surprising that the majority (58%) of practitioners indicated that more culturally appropriate tests are needed in South Africa". (Foxcroft, et al., 2004:36)

5. Components, Validity and Trustworthiness of the Post-modern Narrative Assessment Instruments

The post-modern career assessment comprised of methods and techniques developed to gauge the learners' aptitude, personality, interests and values using narrative career assessment techniques (Cochran, 1997; Maree and Beck, 2004). The post-modern qualitative psychometric assessment utilised the following narrative methods suggested by Cochran (1997), Goldman (1992) and Maree and Beck (2004) which were administered over the period of a school day in the second school term of 2006 in the following order:

1. The learners were asked to complete a *collage* depicting their past, present and future in order to illustrate their narrative. This exercise took approximately one hour.
2. The learners completed a *Vocational Card Sort* (VCS) exercise which involved a pack of cards (Cochran, 1997). The back of each card contains information about a particular job. The number of cards ranges from about 60 to 100 and the main purpose of the VCS is to elicit personal criteria for evaluating options, providing a personal map of the job terrain. The learners were presented with the deck and asked to separately divide the cards into three piles consisting of those that the person might choose, those that the person would not choose, and those that the person is unsure of. The 'maybe' pile was removed from the table, leaving the two piles for the main task. The main task of sorting the accepted and rejected piles than began. The learners were asked to divide the pile into small groups, as many groups as the person wants that reflect a common reason for rejection. After groups were set, the learner was then asked to take each

group and say what the jobs have in common as a basis for rejection. This means that the learners were asked to clarify a common feature of the job that was the reason for them not picking that job. The same procedure was carried out for the accepted pile as a basis for careers that the learners were interested in. The Independent Psychometrist then responded to the learners with ‘counselling leads’ such as reflection, interpretation and probing in order to elicit ideas from the learners. According to Goldman (1992), this is done in order to make the interaction more productive. This exercise took approximately one hour.

3. The qualitative *Career Interest Profile* (Maree, 2005) was also completed by the learners to establish their primary career interests. This exercise took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.
4. An *autobiography with life chapters* was compiled by the learners to make them aware of important phases in their lives and which would help them to construct their ideal career scenario. This exercise also made them aware of their strengths, desires expectations, needs and prospects. In addition to this, the process assisted them in applying their knowledge to a suitable career (Cochran, 1997). This exercise was also intended to yield information on the learners’ personality and took approximately 30 minutes.
5. The learners were asked to complete a *life line* to represent the flow of their lives and yield information about their personality. According to Cochran (1997:74), the client is asked to draw a horizontal line through the middle of a blank (A3) sheet of paper in landscape position. On the far left, the learner labelled the beginning of the line as 'birth' and on the far right 'present'. The learners were asked to recall the chronological milestone experiences in their lives by placing a dot higher or lower on the sheet depending on whether the experience was positive or negative. Each dot was labelled to identify the event. Once all the dots and labels have been inserted, they are connected to graphically represent the flow of the learners’ life. This took approximately 30 minutes.
6. The learners were asked to complete an informal questionnaire in order to establish their values, interests and talents and their scholastic strengths and weaknesses (Appendix A). This exercise took approximately 30 minutes.
7. The learners were then asked to make a list of *successful experiences* which they found enjoyable. According to Cochran (1997), learners are asked to provide a detailed description of how the experience began, how the achievement came about, how it ended, what he or she thought, felt and did throughout the experience. The exercise is intended to reveal strengths that the learner enjoyed and used in the past and could possibly use in the future. Furthermore, success experiences can be examined to identify recurring values and to clarify what constitutes success for that learner. This exercise took approximately 30 minutes.

8. Finally, the learners were asked to complete their *life line* to sensitise them to desires, unfinished tasks, loyalties, models, old ambitions, patterns and so forth. Cochran (1997) explains how learners will be presented with a new life line that moves from the present to death.
9. The learners' parents or parent were asked to complete an informal questionnaire in order to establish the learners' parents perceptions on their children's values, interests, talents and their scholastic strengths and weaknesses (Appendix B). These questionnaires were also used to validate the questionnaires completed by the learners.
10. School reports for each learner from 2005 were collected. These were intended to yield qualitative data on the learners' aptitude's and intelligence.

Information yielded from the above qualitative methods was used to make inferences as to the learners' aptitude, fields of interest, personality and values. The process included the feedback session which took place separately with each learner and their parent or parents which became a type of brainstorming session. In this feedback session the learners were encouraged to discuss such issues as potential opportunities and challenges to realising the selected career, sources of information and the physical steps necessary for the learners to fulfil and actualise their decisions (Maree & Beck, 2004).

The quality assurance criterion of the qualitative narrative assessment was ensured through the validity and trustworthiness procedure utilised by Maree and Beck (2004) in their case study. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (as cited in Maree and Beck, 2004), the concentrated, personal and in-depth involvement of the Independent Psychometrist and the learner in the qualitative data collection can be seen as satisfactory to ensure reliability and validity. Furthermore, the qualitative post-modern technique attempted to ensure proposed research's internal validity by (Cohen et al.; McMillan and Schumacher, in Maree and Beck 2004): ensuring that the Independent Psychometrist kept a systematic record of the assessment procedure; the collection of multi-method strategies including triangulation in data collection and analysis; the facilitation of peer examination data; member checking, which is consistent with the principles of the narrative approach; the facilitation of participant review; the identification of discrepant data and the Independent Psychometrist interacted consistently with the participants to obtain an insider view, but still remained detached from activities that would make them a part of the setting.

5.1 The Career Interest Profile (CiP)

The Career Interest Profile (CiP) is a new instrument which is still in its experimental phase and is constantly being updated. The rationale behind this instrument is given by Maree (2005) in that it follows a Qualiquan approach (implying a mixed-method approach, although priority is given to a qualitative approach). Maree views a qualitative career interest inventory as having an identifiable, positive and possibly even a longer term effect on career counselling than a quantitative career inventory. However, the aim of the profile is not to 'prove' that any particular approach is the only viable method. Its aim is rather to investigate the possible use of the CiP in diverse South African contexts.

According to Maree (2005) two sided paired t-tests (based on the ranking of the first six career categories of the CiP) showed that the first administration mean ranking of only two career categories (9 and 19) differed significantly from the mean ranking of the second administration. However, even in the case of categories 9 and 19, the effect sizes were small and the career rankings remained stable (for the most part) over time.

In order to ensure the content validity of the CiP, an extensive literature review was undertaken on the subject and care was taken that the key interest fields were accounted for and the phrasing of terms and the placement of careers in career categories were checked by various experts and clients (Maree, 2005). In order to establish simultaneous validity, CiP profiles were compared to scores obtained from the Rothwell-Miller Interest Blank (RMIB) (Hall, Halstead & Taylor, 1986). The RMIB is used to assess the basic interests, attitudes and motivation of people choosing a career. In the vast majority of cases, practical significant correlations between CiP career categories and RMIB career categories were established. Conclusions were made that the correlations between CiP and RMIB categories were, with a few exceptions, highly satisfactory (Maree, 2005).

6. Research Design

6.1 Data Collection: Focus Group

According to Mouton (2001), the research design addresses the form of study which will be undertaken to provide the research problem and questions with acceptable answers. The proposed research is an empirical study and the assessment data was collected using a qualitative approach.

The learner's perceptions were collected in a focus group with the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews questions. The focus group was approximately 30 to 45 minutes in duration (See Appendix C for interview schedule). According to Welman and Kruger (2001), semi-structured interviews conducted by an interview guide are used when the respondents come from divergent

backgrounds. The interview guide contains a list of topics and aspects of these have a bearing on the given theme that the interviewer should raise during the course of the interview. All respondents are asked the same questions, but the interviewee can adapt the formulation and the terminology to fit the background and educational level of the respondents. The order in which the interviewer approaches these topics may vary from one person to another and are adapted to the direction taken in the interview. According to Welman and Kruger (2001), the advantages of this technique are that the interviewer can use probes to clear up vague responses, or to ask for elaborations of incomplete answers.

Focus group theory is a based on a qualitative data collection technique. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), the technique involves a group of people who share certain characteristics relevant to the question of the study. Most focus groups consist of between 6-12 people. Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990:137) suggest that "the size of the group should manifestly be governed by two considerations: it should not be so large as to be unwieldy or to preclude adequate participation by most members, nor should it be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater coverage than that of an interview with one individual". However, the number of participants will depend on the objectives of the research (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). For example, smaller groups (4-6 people) are preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion (Kreuger, 1994:94). For the purpose of this research, eleven learners were considered appropriate for both the career assessments and the focus group, based on the objectives of the research and logistical constraints.

When engaging the learners in the focus group, the researcher aimed to create an open environment by asking focused questions to encourage discussion and the expression of differing opinions and different points of view. Focus groups allow the researcher to identify themes in the perceptions and opinions that are expressed and these are then analysed and revealed through careful and systematic research.

The learners in the research shared a common factor, in that they were all assessed through the same two differing career techniques and come from the same school and Grade. The focus group method therefore allows for group interaction amongst participants to be gauged to gain greater insight into their perceptions of the two career assessment methods (Mathers, Fox and Hun, 1998). A further advantage of the focus group interview is that it is socially-oriented, given that it studies participants in a natural real-life atmosphere. The method also has high face validity as it is easily understood, the findings appear believable, and it is affordable and produces quick results (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

However, disadvantages which exist and which the researcher has to keep in mind are that the interviewer has less control over a group than over an individual in an interview. The qualitative data collected from the focus group interview could be difficult to analyse as it is important to be aware of the context in which the participants' make comments. This is not easy to identify unless the focus group is video-recorded. There are also logistical problems arising from the need to guide the discussion so that it becomes a conversation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

6.2 - Data Capturing – Tape Recorder

The data was captured with the use of a tape recorder and subsequently transcribed. According to May (2001), this form of data collection has a number of advantages and disadvantages. At an interactional level, a disadvantage may be that learners may be inhibited by the tape recording because they do not want their discussion to be recorded. Transcription is also time-consuming and the tape recorder may pick up on background noise. However, when used correctly, tape recording can assist with the interpretation of data because the researcher can focus on making observational notes of the learners' behaviour and have an accurate record of their responses for the process of content analysis. Participants who did not wish to be tape recorded were not used in the study. In line with Krueger's (1994) suggestions, the interviewee encouraged the participants to speak one at a time to avoid garbling the tape and in accordance with Howe and Lewis's (1993) suggestions, the members of the group identified themselves before they spoke.

6.3 - Data Analysis: Thematic Content Analysis

6.3.1 Paradigmatic Perspective

The researcher utilised a qualitative paradigm which is based on interpretivism when analysing the information retrieved from the focus group. Interpretivism strives to understand how individuals in everyday settings construct meaning and interpret social life in their worlds (May, 2001). A qualitative process of thematic content analysis was used to answer the research questions.

6.3.2 –Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the recorded learner perceptions of the traditional and post-modern career assessment experience. Content analysis is a form of empirical qualitative research where the researcher plays an important role in making sense of the information that was gained. According to Banister et al. (1994:2-3), this form of qualitative research can be defined as: "the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made and is seen as a) – an attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do; b)- an exploration, elaboration and systematization of the

significance of an identified phenomena; c) – the illuminative representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem."

Content analysis is useful for its ability to straddle both the quantitative and qualitative paradigms and can also be used to make qualitative data accessible to quantitative analysis. It can be further defined as "any research technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics within the text" (Stone, as cited in Eagle, 1998:195). Traditionally content analysis is underpinned by three general guidelines (Berelson in Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1991:171-172):

1. It is important that the analysis be consistent among judges. If each category and unit of analysis is carefully defined, and if the judges are properly trained, the intercoder reliability should be satisfactorily high;
2. It is essential that the specific categories and units be relevant to the questions or hypotheses of the study and finally
3. It is important to decide on a good sampling procedure.

4.3.3 – Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic Content Analysis is "the term used to describe a more clearly interpretive application of the method in which the focus of analysis is upon thematic content which is identified, categorized and elaborated upon on the basis of systematic scrutiny" (Eagle, 1998:195). This was used to identify the 'themes' emerging from the focus group interview.

The recording unit was categorised according to units. The *theme* can be identified in its most condensed form as a sentence consisting of a subject and predicate and can therefore be seen as an assertion about a subject-matter (Berelson, 1952). It can also be seen as "a sentence, usually a summary or abstracted sentence, under which a wide range of specific formulations can be subsumed" (Berelson, 1952:138).

The themes or "thematic units can be identified by their correspondence to a particular structural definition of the content of narratives, explanations, or interpretations. These are distinguished from one another on conceptual grounds" (Krippendorf in Eagle, 1998:197). Eagle (1998) explains how these four characteristics help us understand the initial stage of content analysis which occurs in accordance with specified guiding principles which are then applied to the manifest content of the text and the later interpretive stage involves a lot more common sense and intuition on the part of the researcher to draw inferences about "latent content (decoding process), as well as draw

conclusions about the meaning of manifest content (encoding process)" (Guba and Lincoln in Eagle, 1998:196).

Categories used in thematic content analysis can be inductive, deductive or a combination of both. "The inductive approach begins with the researcher immersing themselves in the documents in order to identify the dimensions or themes that seem meaningful to the producers of each message. In a deductive approach, researchers use some categorical theme suggested by a theoretical perspective, and the documents provide a means for assessing the hypothesis. In many circumstances, the relationship between a theoretical perspective and certain messages involves both inductive and deductive approaches" (Berg in Eagle, 1998:198).

Thematic content analysis is therefore advantageous as it requires little more than common-sense and logic to develop a coding system and the implementation requires minimal capital investment. It is also a safe methodology as the researcher can add necessary or missing information and it forces the researcher to "scrutinize the material that they are evaluating and classifying by specifying category criteria and assessing their success in measuring qualitative phenomena" (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996:172). Furthermore, it is an exploration, elaboration and systematisation of the significance of identified phenomena. Finally, it can be seen as an illuminating representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem.

Thematic content analysis has a quantitative aspect whereby "more precise, objective and reliable observations about the frequency with which given content characteristics occur either singly or in conjunction with one another" are given (George in de Sola Pool, 1959:8). In the proposed research, this quantitative aspect will be used to give an indication of the frequency of a theme in the perceptions of the learners. This forms a part of the steps in thematic content analysis.

There are six basic steps in the thematic content analysis process which were used in the proposed research. According to Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, (2004) these steps include the selection of a topic and the determination of a research question; the selection of a documentary source; the development of a set of analytical categories; the formulation of a set of instructions for using the categories to code the material; the establishment of a basis for sampling the documents and the counting of the frequency of a given theme in the documents sampled. This is followed by the writing of the final themes of the set of data and the presenting of patterns of related themes (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004).

7. Ethics

This research attempted to address and maintain ethical considerations, namely:

- The learners and their parents were firstly informed of the aims and reasons for the study through a participant information sheet (Appendix D and E).
- The principal received an information sheet on the study (Appendix K) and the Department of Education provided the researcher with approval to conduct the research in the chosen school (Appendix L).
- The Department of Education received information on the aims and reasons for the research in the completed Research Request Form and provided written consent for the study to take place.

The learner's right to privacy was also taken into consideration. According to Mouton (2001), this meant that the learners were informed of their right to refuse to be assessed or interviewed, and their right to refuse to answer any questions. Furthermore, the learners were not assessed or interviewed at mealtimes, at night and for long periods.

The learners also had a right to anonymity and it was made clear to them that their names would not be used in the final research report. They also had a right to confidentiality, which applies to the collection of their perceptions in the interviews using a tape recorder or any other data gathering devices. The learners were made to understand how these devices worked and they were free to decline their usage if they wished so. If accepted, then the results must correspond with the learners' right to welfare, dignity and privacy. All information gleaned from the learners would be treated as confidential (Mouton, 2001). The learners were reassured that they would be protected from physical and psychological harm, that they could abandon the research if they so desired and that their confidentiality would be respected.

The issue of informed consent involved carefully and truthfully notifying the learners of the research and obtaining their parents' consent (Mouton, 2001). The learners and their parents were asked to sign a form consenting to the study and the use of a tape recorder to record the perceptions of the learners (Appendix F, G, H, I & J). Furthermore, the Department of Education was asked for informed consent which was approved (Appendix L) and the relevant Research Request Form was filled out. Informed consent was also ensured by obtaining approval for the research from the Ethics board at the University of the Witwatersrand.

More specifically, it was made clear that the learners and their parents would not receive specific benefit from the research other than career recommendations from the two sets of assessments that they completed. It was also made clear that the learners, parents and principal could request a summary of the research results if they wished. However, only the learners and their parents had access to the career recommendations. Any conflicting recommendations present between the two sets of assessments were discussed with the learners and their parents to achieve more clarity on which recommendation was more appropriate.

The researcher made it clear that the learners and their parents would not be discriminated against in any way if they did not wish to participate in the study. Furthermore, the principal and the parents had a right to withdraw their children from the study at anytime and the children had a right to leave the study and refuse to answer any questions that they may have felt uncomfortable answering. Lastly, the researcher ensured that no harm would come to the participants of the study in any way. However, the researcher also made it clear that confidentiality could not be guaranteed in the focus groups as the entire group of learners participated simultaneously.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will focus on a description and interpretation of the various themes which emerged from the content analysis of the focus group interview. These themes will be grouped around:

1. The themes which emerged from questions asked on the learners' perceptions of the traditional quantitative career assessment;
2. The themes which emerged from the questions asked on the learners' perceptions of the qualitative narrative career assessment;
3. An interpretation integrating these themes and the theory revealed in the literature review.

1. Traditional Quantitative Career Assessment Themes

When questioned on their perceptions of the traditional quantitative career assessment, the learners' answers revealed two primary themes, which will be discussed in the context of the first research question, namely: "What do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive as the limitations and strengths of a traditional psychometric group career assessment?". The themes were:

- The significant influence of the formal structure and properties of the psychometric career assessment on the learners

When the learners were asked about their perceptions of the psychometric career assessment, certain influencing factors such as the impact of the assessor, the language of instruction and the nature of the psychometric instruments used, emerged. In addition to this, issues surrounding applicable career assessment theories in the South African context, implications of bias and the administrative process of the assessment, were revealed.

- The significant influence of the group environment of the psychometric career assessment.

Evidence from the focus group interview suggests that the completion of the psychometric career assessment in a group environment had a significant impact on the learners. Issues around contradictory statements made by the learners on how they would change the assessment process came to light. Furthermore, the learners uncovered certain advantages and disadvantages to completing the psychometric career assessment in a group environment. This revealed issues around indecision and demotivation on the part of the learners. These concerns were related to potential career barriers experienced by the learners, as well as issues around their career maturity and adaptability. These will be discussed in detail in terms of Social Cognitive Career Theory in the section covering this particular theme.

2. Qualitative Narrative Career Assessment Themes

When questioned on their perceptions of the qualitative narrative career assessment, the learners' answers revealed the following two primary themes which will be explained in the context of the second research question, namely; 'what do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive as the possible significance of group post-modern assessment?'. These themes were:

- The cultural and psychological loadedness of the narrative assessment

When questioned on their perceptions of the group narrative career assessment, the learners revealed that the narrative assessment allowed them to 'talk about' personal aspects of their lives and their personalities. Furthermore, some of the narrative instruments that were used appeared to be culturally-loaded. Reynolds and Kamphaus (2003:524) explain how "cultural loading refers to the degree of cultural specificity present in the test of individual items of the test. The greater the cultural specificity of a test item, the greater the likelihood of the items being biased when it is used with individuals from other cultures". This theme will also further explore the career barriers and demotivation felt by the learners and the empowering effect that the narrative assessment had on them.

- The significant positive and negative influences on the learners of the informal structure and environment of the narrative career assessment

The structure and the environmental influence of the narrative assessment on the learners was another theme that emerged from the focus group interview. Issues around the instructions given, the language of the assessment and the group environment of the narrative career assessment revealed certain limitations to a narrative career assessment which will be explored in the interpretation of this theme.

3. An Interpretation of the Themes which emerged from the Focus Group Interview

3.1 The Traditional Quantitative Career Assessment Themes

Theme 1: The significant influence of the formal structure and properties of the psychometric career assessment on the learners

This theme emerged from the focus group interview with the learners and corresponded with the questions posed by the researcher on aspects of the psychometric assessment which the learners both enjoyed and criticised. In response to the question "what did you think was good and/or easy in the first set of assessment exercises you completed?" the learners responded that they found the 'language' and the 'personality test' to be enjoyable. Furthermore, they found the 'instructions easy to understand and given in detail'. The learners' perceptions therefore seemed to correlate with the aims of the assessment which, according to Murphy and Davidshofer (1998:3) "a psychological test is a sample of behaviour which is obtained under standardized conditions. There are also established rules for scoring or for obtaining quantitative (numeric) information from the behaviour sample".

In terms of the second defining characteristic of a psychological test, the psychometric tests used during the career assessment had strict instructions for adherence to standard procedures in terms of administration and testing conditions. These ensured that every learner completed the assessment under the same conditions in order to minimize the effects of extraneous variables such as "the physical conditions of testing, the characteristics of the examiner or the subject's confusion regarding the demands of the test" (Murphy and Davidshofer, 1998:5). Furthermore, this standardised environment is very similar to the testing and examination conditions in the schooling environment. The learners therefore seemed to feel quite comfortable in this environment.

However, contextually speaking, the use of traditional psychometric testing with learners from disadvantaged communities is seen as problematic. Watson and Stead (2002:26) view a traditional approach to career counselling as a weakness, because "they are prone to victim blaming at the expense of considering structural factors such as poverty, discrimination and oppression. Personal solutions to problems are sought and in so doing, community and familial resources are weakened." It is therefore interesting that the learners in the study found the environment of the traditional psychometric testing to be 'comfortable.' In this particular environment, according to Maree and Ebersohn (2002), learners are marginalized as they don't have to make their own decisions about a future career. The assessor as 'expert' makes this decision for them and ultimately the learner avoids taking any decisions about a future career due to the reliance on the psychometric test

outcomes. The learner is therefore disempowered from making this decision. Foxcroft (2001:237) emphasises how "the assessment practitioner holds a great deal of power as he or she has first-hand knowledge of the assessment measures and will directly or indirectly contribute to the decisions made on the basis of the test results." However, this disempowers the learner from becoming actively involved in the process and accepting responsibility and ownership for the results of the assessment. The learners may therefore have felt comfortable in the psychometric testing situation because all decision-making was taken out of their hands and they were not really held accountable for the results of the assessment and potential career outcomes.

Children in disadvantaged communities face many career barriers in reaching career goals that may disempower them from making career decisions. These career barriers can be attributed to a lack of parental involvement, limited exposure to role-models, lack of opportunity and the poor socio-economic circumstances in which they find themselves (Maite, 2005). Naicker (1994) posits that under such circumstances, career counsellors should not only try to get young people to develop personal decision-making skills, but also help them to adjust successfully to the opportunity structures open to them which may be used as stepping stones for better jobs in the future.

The properties of the psychometric assessment in terms of the language used in the assessment also seemed to have a significant influence on the learners. The major positive feedback relating to the understanding of the academic language used in the psychometric assessment came in the form of the suitability of the personality questionnaire (HSPQ). The learners stated that they enjoyed this instrument as 'the questions were easy to understand'. Recent research by Foxcroft, Paterson, le Roux and Herbst (2004:63) revealed that South African "psychologists in general seem to view the HSPQ as an excellent instrument, provided that it was updated and revised".

However, in response to the question "what did you think was difficult and/or not so easy in the first set of assessment exercises you completed", the learners criticised the content of some of the test items saying that 'there were a lot of words which were difficult to understand and too quick.' They also stated that they 'needed more time to complete' the questions. The learners seemed to be referring to the language used in some of the test items and time limits imposed in the DAT. In addition, the learners indicated that they struggled with certain areas which included the 'Maths', 'technical stuff' and 'memory' components of the psychometric assessment. These also seem to relate largely to the DAT. This instrument, in attempting to measure aptitude, is based on the Trait-and-Factor approach, which assumes reliability and validity for the learner population group taking the test. Due to language, socio-economic, educational and belief backgrounds, these measures do

not always tap into the same characteristics for different groups (De Bruin in Foxcroft, 2001), which could have explained the learners' difficulty with certain components of the test.

There was also a discrepancy among the learners' responses in that the language in some of the psychometric assessments was easier to understand than others. However, this also raises issues around the use of English as the medium of testing, given that the majority of the learners are English second-language speakers. This creates a measure of cultural and language bias, which is predominant in South African psychometric testing where "test users have developed that bad habit of administering a measure developed for one cultural or language group to a member of another cultural or language group" (Foxcroft, 2001:238).

South African psychologists have indicated that one of the shortcomings of psychometric testing in South Africa is that very few psychometric tests are available for African language speakers (Foxcroft et al, 2004). These African language users, particularly those living in the rural areas or disadvantaged communities, find it difficult to express themselves in English. Accordingly, "tests should be developed that overcome language issues so that test administrators and test takers are confident that the assessment is done in a fair way" (Foxcroft, et al. 2004:77). Although there is an urgent need to develop tests that will meet the needs of all South Africans, evidence from Foxcroft et al (2004) suggests that, in reality, this is not taking place and there is a need for a comprehensive test review system to enhance the ethical practice of psychological testing in South Africa. According to Watson and Stead (2002:29), "a review of career measures in use in South Africa has identified only two original instruments, the Career Myths Scale and Meyer Interest Questionnaire, both of which were developed in the last decade."

The learners' responses also called into question the cultural appropriateness of the theory used in the psychometric assessments. The majority of the assessment instruments which were used in the psychometric part of the assessment (DAT, HSPQ and SAVII), are largely based on traditional theoretical approaches such as the Trait-and-Factor theory and Holland's person-fit theory which are in turn based on Euro-centric theories and models. Blustein and McWhirter (in Watson and Stead, 2002:28) emphasise the need for South African career theory and practice to move from "its traditional focus on identifying personality characteristics towards a consideration of the cultural, economic and political contexts that provide structure and meaning to those personality factors." Furthermore, research by Du Toit and De Bruin (2002) indicate that Holland's focus on interest structure is a poor fit when applied to black South African adolescents. Reasons for this were explained by Du Toit and De Bruin (2002) as a possible contrast in African and western values, the

influence of socio-economic factors and the possibility that participants struggled to understand the meaning of many of the items in the Self-Directed Search.

Watson and Stead (2002) also indicate that Donald Super's lifespan-lifespace theory, on which the Values Scale is based, has been insufficiently used and applied in the South African context. Super's approach has the potential to add significantly to career theory in the South African context, since it focuses on the interaction of all of the individual's activities. This focus allows "us to examine what an individual is engaged in, even within a macro-environment of unemployment and economic depression" (Watson and Stead, 2002:27). However, the application of Super's theory in South Africa has largely been focused on white, middle-class individuals" (de Bruin and Nel in Watson and Stead, 2002).

The learners' responses to the questions also revealed the potentially negative impact of construct, method and item-bias which is prevalent in cross-cultural assessment. According to Van der Vivjer and Rothman (2004), construct-bias happens when there is only a partial overlap in the definition of the construct across cultures and differential appropriateness of the behaviours associated with the construct exists. Method-bias is seen to exist when samples cannot be compared (e.g., caused by differences in education, motivation). Method-bias is also said to exist when there are differences in environmental administration conditions and instructions that are ambiguous for respondents and/or unclear guidelines for administrators (Van der Vivjer and Rothman, 2004). Differential expertise of administrators, tester/interviewer/observer effects (e.g., halo effects) and communication problems between respondent and tester/interviewer are further influencing factors. Differential familiarity with stimulus material, response procedures and differential response styles also create method-bias. Van der Vivjer and Rothman (2004:3) explain how "Item- bias exists due to poor item translation and/or ambiguous items, nuisance factors such as the fact that the item may invoke additional traits or abilities and also cultural specifics (e.g., incidental differences in connotative meanings and/or appropriateness of the item content)."

The assessor must also take cognisance of the effects of Administration Bias, which according to Van der Vivjer and Rothman (2004), is created by differences in the procedure or method used by the assessor when administering a psychometric test. Studies have shown that communication problems between the testee and the tester can create administration bias. Van der Vivjer and Rothman (2004:4) explain how "language problems may be a potential source of bias when the participants differ in proficiency in the testing language, which is not uncommon in multi-cultural studies, in which a test or an interview is administered in the second or third language of the

participants". There was evidence of this in the learner's criticism of the content of some of the test items saying that 'there were a lot of words which were difficult to understand and too quick'.

Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo (2006) also emphasise how rural learners may firstly have to understand certain concepts or test items in their own language or culture in order to internalise or respond to a situation. "Major confusion often develops because an understanding of the item by the learner may be totally different from the euro-centric meaning of the concept as expected by the tester or the context in which the tester has formulated the test. The context is therefore challenged by the syntax" (Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo, 2006:55).

Theme 2: The significant influence of the group environment of the psychometric career assessment.

The learners completed the psychometric assessment in a group environment which did not seem to provide the learners with an opportunity to reflect on the procedure and the tests. According to Maree, Bester, Lubbe and Beck (2001), the degree of objectivity present in psychometric testing does not lend itself to self-exploration and self-development by the learner. In this environment, the learner is unlikely to question the administration process or the career recommendations made by the assessor who is regarded as the 'expert'.

When asked: "if you had a chance to change anything about the assessment, what would you change and why?" the learners indicated that they would like 'no breaks', and that they 'needed more time to complete' the assessments. This relates specifically to the DAT, as this is the only psychometric assessment that imposed a time limit. In this assessment all the learners have to start and finish the exercise at the exact same time. The learners listed some advantages and disadvantages when they were asked the question: "Tell me about your experiences on completing the assessments in a group. What do you think it would be like doing the assessment alone and why?" Listing the advantages of doing the assessment in a group, the learners indicated that there was 'less pressure and you don't feel alone', and thus sensed support from their peers. The disadvantages included the fact that a group environment "complicates the discussion' and when working with others there is 'a need to work according to the time specification of the group'. This response relates to the majority of the psychometric career assessments that did not include time limits (SAVII, HSPQ, VS). In these assessments all learners had to wait for the entire group to finish before being able to move on to the next exercise. Accordingly, those who finished quickly may have become impatient with those who took longer to complete the tests.

The learners completed the psychometric assessment in a group environment. In terms of group behaviour, Barker, Cegala, Kibler and Wahlers (1979) identified relevant effects of the presence of others which may have had an influence of the learners' performance. The presence of others in a group environment may provide comfort and support in anxiety-inducing situations. By observing others in a group environment, the individual can also tap into the type of behaviour that is desirable or permissible. An individual's performance can be influenced by the perceived potential for social rewards and a person's productivity may increase in the presence of others. Barker, et al (1979) posits that an individual's defensiveness may increase in the presence of others and they may thus become distracted which may result in lower productivity.

Accordingly, the learners experienced the comfort and support of the group environment in the testing situation and individuals' productivity may have been increased by the presence of the other learners. However, they may also have been distracted by the varying time limits and the fact that some learners finished before or after others. Furthermore, their differing responses reflected potential indecision and demotivation on the part of the learners and could be linked to the disadvantaged environment in which the learners find themselves. This factor can be explained in terms of Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Isaacson and Brown (1997) explain that in Social Cognitive Career Theory, direct variables such as discrimination, economic variables that influence supply and demand and the culture of the decision-maker and chance happenings also have an influence on career choice and development. In terms of the SCCT theories, learners from disadvantaged communities are faced with certain career barriers which can lead to indecisions and a lack of motivation. Fouad, Stead and Els (2004) define career barriers as negative contextual influences which can diminish a learners' self-efficacy and subsequently has an impact on their career choices, goals and actions. Stead and Watson (1999:43) define self-efficacy as "the belief and confidence individuals have in their ability to perform successfully on given tasks or behaviours". Fouad et al. (2004:207) explain that learners from disadvantaged communities may experience career barriers derived from personal factors such as a lack of confidence or in difficulty relating to others. Further potential career barriers may include experiential factors such as modelling or social persuasion and contextual factors such as opportunity structures and racial discrimination. Indications from the research are that the students experienced these career barriers, particularly in terms of demotivation, which will now be discussed.

The researcher experienced demotivation on the part of the learners in trying to get them to supply report cards and motivating them to participate in the focus group interview. Some of the learners

performed very well in the psychometric assessment, but were failing in their schoolwork, indicating not only a lack of motivation, but perhaps also a lack of parental support in their current environment. Research by Maite (2005) indicates that the career development of learners in disadvantaged communities is strongly influenced by destructive parental involvement and low parental income. Negative parental reactions to career choices and a lack of encouragement can also lead to learner demotivation and create further potential career barriers (Maite, 2005).

According to Savickas and Lent (1994) in terms of SCCT theory, career choice is influenced by the beliefs the individual develops and refines through four major sources: a) personal performance accomplishments, b) vicarious learning, c) social persuasion and d) physiological states and reactions. These can influence learner perceptions and probability of success, particularly when these learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to SCCT theory, if learners perceive few barriers, the likelihood of success reinforces career choices, but if the barriers are viewed as significant, there is a weaker interest and choice actions. (Savickas and Lent, 1994). This needs to be taken into consideration when assessing learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, these barriers could have had an influence on the learners in the research in terms of the environment in which they find themselves, which will now be discussed.

De Bruin (in Stead and Watson 1999) emphasise that the environment in which certain South African learners find themselves are consequences of the apartheid era. Such environmental barriers include a lack of prior opportunities and freedom in pursuing occupations of choice; social contextual variables such as race and gender and a lack of finances. In terms of SCCT theory and the four sources of self-efficacy information, South African learners may have been disadvantaged in a number of ways. Personal performance accomplishments are a very important source of self-efficacy information. Learners in South Africa have had limited access to books, educational facilities and adequately trained teachers to provide them with direct learning experiences (de Bruin in Stead and Watson, 1999).

In terms of vicarious learning, South African learners have lacked role-models to which they can relate, particularly in terms of people from similar backgrounds that have excelled. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may also fear that they are not adequately prepared for the demands of tertiary education, due to language problems and the fact that their parents do not have experience of universities, technikons or colleges. This may create anxiety in terms of coping with such an environment which, in turn, could lead to physiological and emotional arousal. Since the end of apartheid, South African learners have been encouraged to seek high-level occupations through verbal persuasion. “without the accompanying support programmes that provide opportunities for

personal performance accomplishments and exposure to appropriate role models, such encouragement is unlikely to have a major impact on students efficacy expectations" (de Bruin in Stead and Watson, 1999:98).

Recent research by Pieterse (2005) also indicated that learners from advantaged schools seemed to score higher on career maturity assessments than learners from disadvantaged schools. Super in Pieterse (2005:6) defines career maturity as "whether or not the vocational development of an individual is appropriate for his age." Indications from Pieterse's (2005) research were that previously disadvantaged learners in South Africa are not adequately prepared to make informed career choices. Despite having expanded career choices in post-Apartheid South Africa, learners from disadvantaged communities still seem to have a low career maturity due to the socio-political dispensation of the past. The learners in the research seemed to lack this career maturity in terms of their uncertainty around career recommendations revealed by the psychometric assessment. They stated that these results 'might be useful', but they seemed unconvinced.

As stated in the literature review, it may be more important for South African career counselling and assessment to focus on the career adaptability as opposed to the career maturity of learners due to new challenges encountered in a rapidly changing work environment (Langley in Stead and Watson, 1999). Although Super's theory on career development places the concept of career adaptability during the adult life-stage, the challenges and principles it raises can easily be related to career adaptability problems experienced by adolescents. Little research has been done in terms of considering the career adaptability of adolescents. When examining contextual factors such as a lack of financial resources and the impact of family life in terms of parental influences on career choices (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven & Prosser, 2004), it becomes clear that learners may need to develop skills to adapt to these changes. More importantly, changes in South Africa's socio-economic and political atmosphere may mean that career assessment and counselling needs to focus more on learners' career adaptability.

When questioned on their perceptions of working in the group environment of the psychometric assessment, the learner's indicated that 'if you are working in a group, then you see your friends, whatever their issue then you still discuss it as a group'. This indicates that the learner's may have felt more comfortable discussing testing problems and issues with their colleagues than with the test administrator. When working in a group, learners may be less likely to ask questions or request assistance, especially when the test administrator and the test-takers are from different cultural backgrounds. According to Foxcroft (2002), this could be due to the fact that they feel they are displaying their ignorance by seeking help from somebody belonging to another cultural group.

This may impact negatively on their test results. Furthermore, when the assessor takes on the traditional role of an 'expert', the learner adopts a passive and receptive role. According to Watson and Stead (2002: 30) "the present definition of our expert role is largely a legacy of the prescriptive definitions of career counselling and education we have inherited from apartheid education". The learner is once again disempowered from taking responsibility for career decision-making and participation in the process of assessment.

3.2 Qualitative Narrative Career Assessment Themes

Theme 1: The cultural and psychological loadedness of the narrative assessment

In response to the question 'what did you think was difficult and/or not so easy in the second set of assessment exercises you completed?' the learners responded that the assessments 'brought up emotional issues from the past' and 'brought back buried memories from the past'. This theme emerged specifically when the learners were questioned on their perceptions of the Collage and the Autobiography with life chapters. Certain learners provided the assessor with a candid narrative of their life stories, wishes and dreams in these assessments.

Goodman in Capuzzi and Stauffer (2006) expands on the idea of how career and personal assessment are inseparable. The assessment practitioner needs to take into consideration all areas of the learners' life, and they need to be aware of the environmental barriers and general mental health of the learners when conducting the assessment and assisting them to make career decisions. Goodman (in Capuzzi and Stauffer 2006:70) explains that "individuals face barriers from the environment as well as from their own expectations, beliefs, sense of self-efficacy, and general mental health. Identifying barriers and planning strategies to overcome, avoid, or change them is an important aspect of the career assessment process." Maree and Beck (2004) believe that work roles are no longer separate from life roles and there is no longer a difference between career counselling and therapy. People also tend to attach a personal meaning to their careers, which also narrows the gap between career counselling and psychotherapy, particularly in terms of a post-modern view (Maree and Beck, 2004).

In response to these issues, the researcher and the Psychometrist attempted to ensure that learners focused on their career aspirations and expectations while completing the exercises. A potential constraint to the process emerged when many of the learners revealed personal and sensitive information throughout the exercises, which could not be realistically addressed in the brief hour-long feedback session with the learner and their parent(s). Furthermore, there would be a need for a

Psychologist to address such issues and this resource was not available during the assessment process.

Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo (2006:50) stress the importance of displaying sensitivity "to the dilemmas generally encountered when individuals from educationally, environmentally or culturally marginalized groups participate in assessments". In addition to this, Pope, Cheng and Leong (1998:54) argue that "there is a need for the use of culturally sensitive counselling skills, career as well as personal, in the context of the individual's social/cultural influence and personal reaction to these influences." It is important to look at an individual's context and reality in which career decision-making takes place. The learners in this research were influenced by their disadvantaged backgrounds where few financial and motivational opportunities exist for them to follow potential careers which were identified. The researcher attempted to assist the learners by providing them with as much information as possible on the careers which included contact numbers, colleges, technikons and universities as well as bursary and financial assistance information. The principal of the school in question stated that he personally had to visit the home of every matric student to emphasise the importance of the examinations and school attendance during the year to them and their parents. In such circumstances very few of the learners seem to feel motivated to work hard and achieve to the best of their potential. Further evidence of this was when all the Grade 11 learners at the school were given the opportunity to receive free career assessment, only 11 made themselves available. Consequently, it is important to consider the differing contextual situations in which learners from disadvantaged communities find themselves and the relationships between these contexts.

In terms of these differing context's, Pope et al. (1998) emphasise the triadic relationship between the social context (the culture), the personal context (interpersonal relationships) and the context in which career decision-making takes place. The narrative can provide a useful environment in which to locate some of the internal and external barriers experienced by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. These barriers need to be dealt with to assist the learner in making career choices. This relates to the perceived lack of career maturity as experienced by learners from disadvantaged schools in South Africa and the career barriers they may experience (Pieterse, 2005, Fouad, Stead and Els, 2004).

Despite the significant political changes in South Africa since the democratic elections in 1994, Duncan and van Niekerk in Seedat, Duncan and Lazarus (2001:325) explain that "the majority of South African children are still faced with enormous socio-economic problems, which could compromise their development. These problems include poverty, homelessness and exposure to

violence". These socio-economic problems are likely to have a significant influence on a learners' self-concept. Super's developmental theory states that a sense of self begins to emerge in late childhood to early adulthood where a child uses exploratory behaviour to develop a self-concept (Sharf, 2006). Children in disadvantaged communities may not be able to develop a strong sense of self due to socio-economic problems which occur while they are in the exploration stage. This can have a negative impact on their ability to plan and make career-related decisions. However, "children must have sufficient information, motivation in terms of interests and activities, a sense of control over their own future and an idea of what the future will be" if they are to plan for their futures (Sharf, 2006:154). The socio-economic problems may prevent learners from developing this sense of self and this could be a further reason for the lack of motivation and the career barriers experienced by the learners in the research. Nonetheless, Osipow and Smith in Patton and McMahon (1999) argue that poverty and discrimination are more valid determinants than self-concept for career choice in ethnic groups, as these factors may have a larger impact on a learners' ability to plan and make career related decisions than the development of a self-concept.

Patton and McMahon also argue that in different cultural groups self-concept is entwined with cultural attitudes, beliefs and values and that "the degree of an individual's acculturation may affect the role of the self-concept in career development differentially" (1999:105). It is therefore necessary for career counsellors to understand the diverse contexts and cultural influences in which disadvantaged learners find themselves.

According to Hickson and Christie (in Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo 2006), counsellors need to obtain certain important skills if they are to function effectively in a diverse context. These include a clear understanding of their own values and assumptions as well as assumptions about human behaviour and being able to identify and accept differing values. Counsellors also need to become aware of generic characteristics of counselling, as well as its relation to matters such as class and culture. They must also be willing to act on the basis of a critical analysis of their own conditioning, that of their clients and the socio-political system in which they find themselves. Hickson and Christie (cited in Maree et al 2006), believe that counsellors need to become culturally aware in order to understand the basis for world views and being able to accept world views that differ from theirs. They must also be willing to be eclectic in administering counselling and strive to create the widest possible array of micro-counselling skills that are relevant to the idiosyncratic lifestyles of individual clients.

During the narrative career assessment process with the learners, the researcher and the Independent Psychometrist attempted to keep these points in mind. Furthermore, the researcher and the

Independent Psychometrist were conducting a narrative career assessment for the first time after having conducted many traditional psychometric career assessments in the past. Reflecting on this experience, the narrative assessment seemed to facilitate the need to take the culture and the personal experience of each learner into consideration as opposed to adopting an 'expert' and impersonal approach, indicative of a traditional psychometric assessment. This is due to the fact that the assessor has to engage more actively with the learner during the exercises. There is also room for questions and creativity from the learner and there seemed to be more enthusiasm on the learner's part in participating in the process compared to involvement in the psychometric process. There was evidence of their enthusiasm in their responses to the question on what aspects of the narrative assessment they enjoyed where they responded that they 'actually enjoyed everything so far', and that they enjoyed 'writing your own story'.

The researcher and the Independent Psychometrist attempted to adhere to certain 'helping strategies' as identified by Chen (in Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo 2006:54). These include facilitating subjectivity, where the Independent Psychometrist tried to engage and involve the learners actively in the process. Attempts were also made to assist the learners to internalise their personal life career journey experiences so as to ascertain their personal goals, objectives and outcomes. The assessor consistently tried to put the learners' narratives into perspective to assist them in understanding the career counselling and development context. The assessor also tried to support the learners by helping them make sense of their experiences through the promotion and facilitation of flexibility and creativity in their perception of meaning. Finally, the assessor tried to assist the learners to construct meaning for planning the future, thus actively involving them in the decision-making process.

Limitations in terms of facilitating and using the above strategies in a group setting were identified through the assessment process. Accordingly, this placed a limitation on the final results of the narrative assessment as it was not possible to work with the learners individually to involve them actively in the process. There seems to be a fine line between career assessment and therapy when utilising the narrative approach to career assessment. Research suggests the need for culturally sensitive counselling skills in order to help learners address social-cultural influences which may impact their career choices (Pope, Cheng and Leong, 1998).

When asked the question "what did you think was good and/or easy in the second set of assessment exercises you completed?" the learners indicated that they enjoyed 'talking about issues', 'talking about one's lifestyle', 'writing your own story' and' discussing issues about the self'. Consequently, the learners seemed to feel empowered by the opportunity provided by the narrative assessment to

express themselves through their stories. This is in stark contrast to the traditional career psychometric approach where attempts have been made to "normalize individuals from diverse cultures to fit into the dominant culture" (Maree and Beck, 2004:81). The focus of narrative career assessment is to empower learners to create and implement their own life plans. (Savickas in Maree and Beck 2004). The narrative approach allows learners to express their personal experiences where they are "sharing stories that they attempt to enact in the world of work, even if the narrative does not necessarily construct real events but rather clients' idiosyncratic versions. This includes indications of what the clients need to know about themselves" (Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo, 2006:51). The narrative assessment thus provided the opportunity for the learners to reveal personal information which supports data gathered in the narrative career assessment process.

The learners also identified issues around the culturally-loaded quality of some of the narrative instruments used. A distinction needs to be made between cultural loading and cultural bias: an instrument can be culturally-loaded without being culturally biased. Reynolds and Kamphaus (2003:524) explain how "cultural loading refers to the degree of cultural specificity present in the test of individual items of the test. The greater the cultural specificity of a test item, the greater the likelihood of the items being biased when it is used with individuals from other cultures". When asked the question 'what did you think was difficult and not so easy in the second set of assessments exercises you completed?' the learners found that the magazines that were supplied lacked the material that they wanted to use in their Collages. They responded by saying that it was 'difficult to find something that one liked' and thus a solution would be to 'bring our own magazines'. The magazines were supplied by the researcher who is a white male and thus consisted of material which may not have been culturally appropriate for that group of learners. Furthermore, when questioned about the Vocational Card Sort, the learners did not seem to understand all of the careers presented. This raises the issue that items are culturally-loaded, because of their culture-specificity and this may have led to cultural bias in the material used in a narrative assessment. The learners seemed to view these two items as obstacles in terms of selecting careers that they liked. Further career barriers that the learner's may have experienced in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs will now be discussed.

According to Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2002) individuals can give up on occupational options because of inaccurate self-efficacy beliefs and/or outcome expectations. They are also likely to ignore certain careers due to barriers which they recognize as being impossible to overcome. The learners in the research may have experienced low self-efficacy and outcome expectations due to the career barriers that they experience in their present circumstances. When relating this to Social Cognitive Career Theory, there seems to be a need to raise the self-efficacy of the learners through

vicarious learning opportunities. De Bruin in Stead and Watson (1999:101) suggests the training of high school teachers in SCCT principles so as to "enhance self-efficacy and outcome expectations of students in terms of career decision-making and job seeking processes".

Maite (2005) suggests that career development among young adolescents in disadvantaged communities is largely affected by destructive parental involvement and low parental income. This may provide an obstacle in terms of assisting learners to overcome career barriers in order to achieve self-efficacy so as to become motivated and succeed in life. These career barriers were evident in the learner's personal responses to some of the narrative assessment items. Furthermore, their lack of support in overcoming these barriers may have been a reason for their demotivation and obstacles revealed in their answers to focus group questions.

Theme 2: The significant positive and negative influences on the learners based on the informal structure and environment of the narrative career assessment.

The structure of narrative career assessment is significantly different from the structure and formalized setting of a psychometric career assessment. When asked the questions, 'did you find the instructions that were given to you easy to understand? Elaborate on this' and 'Did you find the assessment as a whole easy to understand?', the learners responded that 'some of the questions were easy to understand and follow because explanations were done well', indicating that perhaps the Independent Psychometrist had an opportunity to rephrase or re-explain certain instructions as there were no formal written instructions that had to be read out. However, in certain instances the learners struggled with the instructions saying that 'they needed to be simpler' and 'it was difficult to understand instructions on the lifeline' and some of the learners 'messed up' and had to restart certain exercises after not having understood the instructions clearly. Questions around the validity of a narrative approach to career assessment have been raised. This concerns the "value-laden aspects of life stories, the personal construction that they represent, and suggest that their trustworthiness may be more important than what we might call their validity" (Bujold, 2004: 482). This once again reflects the issue that narrative assessment reveals psychological issues and the need for a degree of sensitivity and therapy on the part of the assessor.

Furthermore Bujold (2004) identifies the following limitations to the narrative approach to career assessment, in terms of internal consistency issues where people may occasionally react differently to the inconsistencies that they face in their lives, even though "their stories of what happened and what they did should be consistent within itself" (Atkinson as cited in Bujold, 2004:482). Furthermore, with respect to the objection that the use of narratives in research goes against the

scientific law according to which generalizations cannot be made from the observation of a single case, Lapointe (cited in Bujold, 2004) expresses his belief that everyone's story can find an echo in another person, and that to some extent, similarities exist between all people. In addition to this, concerns have been raised over the skills required by practitioners in co-creating stories with learners. It is also important to take problems around the extensive time taken to administer a narrative approach in career counselling into consideration.

Further disadvantages of a narrative approach include the subjective interpretation of information by the assessor and the fact that the cost of a narrative career counselling assessment can be quite expensive, especially if it involves a number of career counselling sessions to take full advantage of the process (Maree and Beck, 2004).

When asked the question: "Tell me about your experiences on completing the assessments in a group. What do you think it would be like doing the assessment alone and why?" the learners revealed a few advantages and disadvantages to the process of working in the informal environment of group narrative career assessment. Among the advantages, the learners said that it was 'easier to work in a group and we could work and interact through problem-solving in a group'. The informal nature of the narrative career assessment gave the learners the opportunity to discuss issues with one another and reflect on the instructions and activities.

Betz (1993) explains the importance of group as opposed to individual career interventions, especially with regard to people from disadvantaged backgrounds. She explains how family tends to be the most important frame of reference for individual behaviour and decision-making. Consequently, counsellors who have emphasized individual self-actualization above all else must try not to pressurise their clients to adopt this value system. Furthermore, Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo (2006) explain how many learners in South Africa are used to be being taught or spoken to in groups and they are therefore not used to one-on-one types of interactions. Accordingly, it would be useful to start from a group context and then proceed into a one-on-one type dialogue with the learner to "encourage clients to take counsellors into their confidence and become able to share their life experiences" (Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo, 2006:55) However, a limitation in the research was that there were no face-to-face type dialogues except for the feedback session. Even in this instance, the parents were present and the learners may not have felt comfortable sharing their life experiences in this context.

Furthermore, Clark, Severy and Sawyer (2004) explain how group assessment and counselling provide learners with the opportunity to give and receive feedback and gain insight through

personal reflection and through listening to other people's experiences. A career counselling group based on a post-modern narrative framework has proven useful to help learners "process and internalize career information in a meaningful way by bringing personal themes and stories to the discussion" (Peterson and Gonzales as cited in Clark et al., 2004:26). However, there is a need for the assessor to be aware of the learners' cultural expectations so as to facilitate the process of sharing their narratives. The learners also experienced this informal setting as less pressurized than the psychometric environment. However, they also identified a disadvantage, in that the other learners 'won't leave you alone'. This may have been as a result of common group behaviour.

4. An Integration of the above-mentioned themes in terms of Learners' Career Assessment Preferences

In response to an over-arching evaluation of the themes revealed by both sets of assessments, the research will now focus on a summary of the learners perceptions of the third research question, namely "What do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive as the limitations and strengths of a group psychometric career assessment and a group narrative career assessment?". These themes were:

- The advantages and disadvantages of a group psychometric assessment as perceived by the learners.
- The advantages and disadvantages of a group narrative assessment as perceived by the learners.

4.1 The advantages and disadvantages of group psychometric career assessment testing

When asked the question 'Now that you have answered questions on both the 'psychometric' and the 'narrative' forms of assessment, can you tell me which form of assessment you prefer and why?' the learners responded that they enjoyed the 'structured' format of the psychometric assessment, and that the entire process of reading the questions and getting the answers was a 'simpler (than the narrative assessment) process'. They felt that the psychometric assessment allowed one to 'prove' yourself and it was an accurate judgement of their performance. The learners also 'enjoyed the questions'. It is clear that the formal structure and properties of the traditional psychometric career assessment revealed contradictory statements on the part of the learners in terms of their comfort and understanding of the testing process and instruments. They seemed to feel comfortable with the standardized exam-like environment of the assessment which is similar to their school experiences. As previously discussed, the learners seemed to prefer the assessor to take on an 'expert' position. In this position, the assessor is inclined to take responsibility for the career decision-making of the learner (Foxcroft, 2001; Maree and Ebersohn, 2002) by providing them with career guidelines based on the assessment results. However, this is problematic as it removes the accountability of the

learner for their results, as well as their subsequent accountability for potential career outcomes. This will now be discussed in terms of the 'expert' position taken by the assessor in the psychometric career assessment process.

When exploring the theme of **"the significant influence of the formal structure and properties of the psychometric career assessment on the learners**", the researcher argued that by assessing the learners in a structured and standardised environment where they allowed the assessor to take on the role of an expert, the learners were 'freed' from taking personal responsibility for the test outcomes and the decision-making process. The researcher suggested that this came as a result of the disadvantaged community in which the learners reside and where they are not likely to have received the support they require in overcoming career barriers and making well-informed career decisions (Naicker, 1994; Maite, 2005). Further findings indicate that the learners criticized some of the language and content in the tests items. Supporting evidence suggests that the assessments used were largely inappropriate in terms of the theory and language used and the requirements of learners in disadvantaged communities particularly in terms of cross-cultural assessment (Foxcroft et al, 2004, Watson and Stead, 2002). The argument was made for the development of more culturally appropriate assessment tools in South Africa to address these shortcomings and cross-cultural bias problems in assessment.

The learners were probed further in order to understand their recommendations for psychometric and narrative assessment to be conducted in group setting for other learners, emerging from similar disadvantaged backgrounds. They were asked the following question:

- Which form of assessment, 'psychometric' or 'narrative', do you think is better to use with learners from a similar background to you?

The learners responded by saying that the psychometric assessment was more 'academic' and more 'structured' than the narrative assessment. The psychometric assessment was seen by the learners to identify 'weaknesses and strengths in order to develop academically'. Furthermore, the learners felt that as high school students, they required 'structure to focus attention on a subject matter'. They also agreed that the psychometric assessment 'helps with concentration' and in the narrative assessment a disadvantage was that they could 'say anything'. According to Super's Life-Span theory, the learners in the research study were at the 'exploration' stage of their career development, where they would normally learn to process information and "develop ways to control their own behaviour by listening to themselves and others" (Sharf, 2006:146). Sharf (2006) explains how, as children grow and successfully complete activities and tasks, they develop a sense of autonomy and a feeling of being in control of future events. This feeling can assist learners to become more aware

of their likes and dislikes which, in turn, could have an influence on their career decisions. The learners in the research may have preferred the assessor to 'take control' of their career decision-making and thus preferred the structured environment. This structure may also counter the anxiety of being 'out of control', due to the difficult socio-economic environment in which they find themselves. However, there has not been much research as to the link between self-control and the eventual impact on career planning, particularly in the South African context. Nonetheless, Sharf (2006:151) believes that learners can be assisted in their career decision-making process by "helping them to develop a balance between self-control and external control". The demotivation and career barriers experienced by the learners in the research will now be explained in terms of Social Cognitive Career Theory.

The primary disadvantage raised by the learners in terms of the format and structure of the psychometric assessment was that 'it was too much work', which can be related to potential demotivation and career barriers experienced by the learners. In integrating the theme of **"the significant influence of the group environment on the psychometric career assessment',** the influence of group dynamics was explored. Furthermore, the indecision and demotivation felt by the learners was explained in terms of Social Cognitive Career Theory in a South African context (Stead and Watson, 1999, Isaacson and Brown, 1997). The possible career barriers and lack of career maturity experienced by the learners in a disadvantaged context were explored and suggestions were made on how SCCT theory could be applied more effectively to the South African context (Stead and Watson, 1999). A lack of parental support as an explanation for demotivation and indecision was also investigated (Maite, 2005).

4.2 The advantages and the disadvantages of group narrative career assessment

When asked the question "Now that you have answered questions on both the 'psychometric' and the 'narrative' forms of assessment, can you tell me which form of assessment you prefer and why?" the learners stated that they 'really enjoyed' the narrative assessment and that it was 'more creative and easier'. They also stated that the narrative assessment was 'more about yourself, and it helps you realise who you are, because some of us don't really know ourselves right now, when you think about it…about yourself". They also stated that it was 'about the individual' and that they could 'write anything'. However, when comparing their answers to the advantages of the psychometric assessment, it was clear that the learners found the narrative assessment to be un-structured, less academic and it did not help them concentrate as much as the psychometric assessment. They may have also struggled to understand the academic strengths and developmental areas revealed by the narrative assessment. A further disadvantage revealed by the group narrative career assessment, was

the difficulty of separating personal counselling in a narrative career counselling context, which will now be discussed.

When discussing the theme of "**the cultural and psychological loadedness of the narrative assessment**", the narrative career assessment revealed certain psychological and personal information which needed to be dealt with. The importance of 'self-concept' was explored as a potential link to the demotivation and indecision felt by learners. The usefulness of narrative career assessment in terms of assisting learners to understand and locate their self-concept was also explored. Furthermore, the learners' responses revealed their demotivation and the career barriers that they perceived in terms of achieving career goals within their current context.

However, the narrative career assessment provides a useful environment for locating some of these barriers, particularly in the South African context when addressing inaccurate self-efficacy beliefs and/or outcome expectations in terms of Social Cognitive Career Theory. Suggestions were provided as to how career counsellors and assessors could function effectively in this diverse environment. The culturally- loaded quality of some of the narrative assessment instruments was discussed. On a positive note, the theme also revealed that the learners felt empowered by the narrative approach in many ways. Their responses suggest that the learners enjoyed talking about themselves, their issues and their lifestyle and thus felt empowered by the opportunity that the narrative assessment provided to tell their stories. Maree and Beck (2004) explain how a post-modern narrative perspective focuses on a client's subjective career (his/her life story) and assists them in developing and interpreting stories so as to empower their career decisions.

Furthermore, in the discussion of the theme of **"the significant positive and negative influences on the learners of the informal structure and environment of the narrative career assessment**", the researcher examined the potential limitations to a narrative career assessment approach based on the learners' responses. Difficulties consisted of a lack of formal written standardised instructions. This raised questions about the validity of a narrative approach to career assessment. Further limitations around internal consistency, generalisations and subjective interpretations made by practitioners using a narrative approach were discussed. The extensive skills required by a practitioner to conduct a narrative assessment were also considered. The impact of conducting such an assessment in a group environment was further evaluated, thus revealing both advantages and disadvantages. The learners believed that the informal nature of the narrative assessment in a group setting assisted their understanding of instructions and activities. In addition to this, issues around the learners' ease in working in a group setting were discussed (Betz, 1993,

Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo, 2006) and the advantage of a career counselling group based on a post-modern narrative framework was covered.

Chapter 5

Strengths, Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Strengths of the study

Several strengths of the study were identified, namely:

- The aim of the study was to ascertain how learners from disadvantaged communities perceive traditional and post-modern career assessment techniques, when the assessment takes place in a group setting. This was done in order to understand the feasibility of conducting such an assessment in a group setting. Evidence suggests that this can be done, but preferably over an extended two-day period.
- The research identified a few of the major problems and challenges facing South African psychometric testing in the context of disadvantaged communities. Even ten years after the democratic elections, little has been done to develop culture- and language-appropriate psychometric assessment tools. The narrative approach as explained and demonstrated in the research provides an opportunity for culturally sensitive assessment to take place and with further research, this could address many of the challenges faced by assessment practitioners in South Africa.
- Although the research was conducted by using a small group (11) of disadvantaged learners, it promoted several recommendations that address some of the concerns facing career assessment in South Africa which, if implemented, could assist learners in disadvantaged communities to make more responsible, well-informed and appropriate career decisions.

5.2 Limitations of the study

The following limitations hampered the study and these should be taken into consideration when conducting related research in the future:

- Learner attrition – The researcher struggled to obtain learner involvement in the study and eventually managed to get eleven learners to participate. However, of the eleven learners who completed the psychometric career assessment, only seven completed the narrative career assessment. Accordingly, the researcher was unable learn about the perceptions of four of the learners on both forms of assessment.
- Lack of narrative research, report format and structure – Due to the fact that this was the first time that a narrative career assessment had been done in a group, there was no assessment or report format to which the researcher could refer to and he therefore had to

develop his own career assessment structure. Further associated limitations were that two days instead of one day would have been preferable to complete the assessment. As a result of this, many of the learners finished late and had not made the necessary transport arrangements to get home.

- Assessment in English with disadvantaged learners – A limitation of both the psychometric career assessment and the narrative career assessment was its English format with second language users. There is a need for language-appropriate psychometric and narrative career assessments to be developed.
- Conducting a narrative career assessment in a group – Evidence suggests that a one-on-one narrative career assessment could have been more beneficial than a group narrative career assessment. In order to make full use of the potential of a narrative career assessment, the assessor needs to work very closely and personally with the learner (and not as an expert). It was not possible to work individually with each learner in the group setting of the narrative assessment.
- The Independent Psychometrist who carried out the assessment with the learners, made an observation that the full assessment time period would be more suited to a two-day workshop with learners than a one-day assessment, as the assessment was very long and tiring.
- A further limitation was that the learners revealed personal information that could not be addressed due to the number of participants in the study and a lack of resources and time. Ideally the career counsellor or assessor should facilitate and incorporate this personal information, thereby assisting the learner in overcoming personal barriers towards a successful career choice.
- The sampling size, with regard to the nature of the study, was not big enough to generalise the findings across other disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

5.3. Conclusion

This research set out to answer the following primary question: How do learners from disadvantaged communities perceive traditional and post-modern career assessment techniques when the assessment takes place in a group setting?

Evidence suggests that learners from disadvantaged communities may prefer the structure and standardised conditions in which traditional psychometric career assessments take place over the unstructured and informal nature of post-modern narrative career assessments. A possible explanation for this is that the learners feel more comfortable with the standardized exam-like

environment of the assessment, which would be familiar in terms of their school experiences. Furthermore, the historical nature of the theory behind this type of assessment places the assessor in an expert position, thus removing accountability and responsibility from the learners for their test results and ultimately career decision-making. The researcher questioned their comfort as a factor connected with disempowerment and linked it to possible demotivation felt by the learners in terms of carrier barriers and lack of parental support as a result of their disadvantaged community setting.

Furthermore, the impact of growing up in a disadvantaged community and feeling 'out of control' and the need for structure and direction from outside 'experts' was explored as another reason for the learners' responses. These career barriers were explored in terms of the Social Cognitive Career Theory and its applicability to the South African context. A lack of career maturity amongst learners from disadvantaged communities was discussed. Nonetheless, the researcher believes that it may be more important for career psychology in South Africa to focus on the **career adaptability** of learners in a constantly changing work environment than to focus on their **career maturity** as proposed by SCCT theory. However, besides being inappropriate in terms of 'disempowering' learners, the psychometric career assessment process revealed flaws in terms of the language used and the theory applied, particularly with respect to the current South African context in which learners find themselves. Accordingly, there is a need for a more culturally-appropriate career assessment process that can be used with learners from disadvantaged communities.

The researcher explored post-modern narrative career assessment as a more appropriate alternative to the psychometric career assessment and questioned the learners on their perceptions of this form of assessment. Evidence suggests that a narrative career assessment provides a good opportunity to empower learners to take responsibility and ownership of their career decisions. Furthermore, it provides a chance for learners to address self-concept issues and to identify internal and external barriers experienced in disadvantaged community settings. Nonetheless, this form of assessment also allows learners to express and share psychological issues which make it difficult to separate career and personal counselling in this situation. Accordingly, those trained in narrative career counselling and assessments need to be cognisant of these issues and deal with them in order to assist clients in overcoming personal issues and career barriers towards effective occupational decision-making. Counsellors and assessors ideally need to be aware of the implications of working in a diverse context and play a more active role in engaging with learners to assist them in understanding their narratives, life career journeys and to help them make sense of their experiences.

However, the limitations of applying such an approach in a group setting were discussed because, ideally, this should be a one-on-one process between the counsellor and the client. In addition to this, the culturally-loaded quality of some of the narrative instruments was discussed as a limitation, which must be taken into consideration when conducting future assessments of this nature. The study suggested that it would be useful to apply Social Cognitive Theory to address issues of self-efficacy and career barriers in combination with a narrative approach to career assessment. The learners also identified the potential limitations of a narrative career assessment approach which the researcher related to issues of validity, internal consistency and the subjective interpretation of information by the assessor, which are common disadvantages of a post-modern approach to career assessment. A narrative career assessment is usually a non-psychometric approach which takes place in a fairly un-standardised and unstructured manner. This type of assessment could thus prove useful in a South African context, where the only current form of career assessment is traditional psychometric assessment.

Narrative career assessment has not been used in a group setting before and the research revealed certain advantages and disadvantages to this approach, particularly in terms of its use in disadvantaged communities. Evidence suggests the feasibility of starting the assessment in a group setting and then proceeding into a more face-to-face type interaction and dialogue with the learners (Maree, et al. 2006). Nonetheless, the study has indicated that the assessor needs to be more involved with learners on an individual basis during a narrative assessment, than what took place in the research.

5.4. Recommendations

Based on the strengths and limitations of the study, the researcher believes that narrative group career assessment can be highly effective among learners from disadvantaged communities if the following points are taken into consideration:

1. The narrative career assessment should be used in conjunction with other psychometric-related instruments, to further validate the results.
2. More time should be spent with individual learners and their parents, so that the narrative process can be fully effective.
3. Narrative career assessment should take place over two days to optimise learner concentration.
4. The assessor should be fully trained in the narrative career assessment and counselling process and be able to facilitate counselling processes in combination with the narrative career decision making process, if necessary.

5. Further research into the applicability of narrative career assessment following the above guidelines will improve the nature of career assessment in South Africa.
6. Further research into the applicability of Super's concept of career adaptability to adolescents and learners in the exploration stage needs to occur.
7. The researcher suggests that research be conducted into the feasibility of training school teachers in narrative career counselling and assessment procedures and that the programme be included in the school curriculum during in the Grade Eleven year. At the moment, the administration, scoring and feedback of psychometric career assessment is restricted to Psychometrists, Independent Psychometrists and Psychologists under the Health Professions Council Act. In addition to this, career assessment tends to be quite expensive and out of reach for most learners in disadvantaged communities. Narrative career assessments are largely non-psychometric and, with sufficient training, can be administered by appropriately qualified school teachers or counsellors. The inclusion of such a training programme for teachers could greatly assist high school learners to make appropriate career decisions within the school setting.
8. Further research on a quantitative and qualitative comparative study between the psychometric and the narrative career assessment results and career recommendations is encouraged so as to see how closely they correlate.
9. Further research needs to be done on the validity and reliability of narrative career assessment techniques.
10. Refer learners' for personal counselling to address the personal issues that surfaced during the narrative assessment process.

Appendix A

Informal Questionnaire for Learners to be used in Narrative Assessment

Adapted from: Maree, J.G. (2005, November) *Informal Questionnaires. One-day workshop in post-modern career counselling*, University of Pretoria.

1 – How important are each of these values for you?

	VERY	**A LITTLE**	**NOT AT ALL**
COMPETITION			
INDEPENDENCE			
STATUS-SYMBOLS			
CREATIVITY			
TAKING RISKS			
MONEY			
HELPING OTHERS			
ROUTINE			
BEING WITH PEOPLE SOCIALLY			
ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES			
SECURITY			
INDIVIDUALITY			

2 – To what extent are you interested in the following?

	Very	*A little*	*Not at all*
Science			
Biology			
Art			
Numbers			
Helping People			
Performing in front of people			
Gathering socially with people			
Travel			
Accountancy			
Business			
Hand skills			
Music			
Sport			
Nature			
Languages			

3 – How good are you with respect to each of these talents?

	Very	*Average*	*Weak*
Administrative skills			
Hand Skills			
Precision work			
Organising			
Numbers			
Accountancy			
Art			
Working with money			
Music			
Creativity			
Writing			
Designing things			
Socialising			
Helping others			
Selling or promoting things			
Performing in front of people			

4 – Is this me?

	Definitely	*To a degree*	*Not at all*
Outgoing person			
Disciplined			
Creative			
Organised			
Sensitive			
Tense			
Patient			
Task-oriented			
Energetic			
Punctual			
Domineering			
Emotional			
Self-confident			
Shy person			

Appendix B

Informal Questionnaire for parents of learners to be used in Narrative Assessment

Adapted from: Maree, J.G. (2005, November) *Informal Questionnaires*. *One-day workshop in post-modern career counselling*, University of Pretoria.

1 – How important do you think each of the listed values is to your child?

	Very important	*A little*	*Not at all*
Competition			
Independence			
Status-Symbols			
Creativity			
Taking risks			
Money			
Helping others			
Routine			
Sociability			
Artistic Activities			
Security			
Individuality			

My comments on the above-mentioned: _____

2 – How talented do you think your child is in respect of the following?

	Very	*Average*	*Weak*
Administrative skills			
Hand Skills			
Precision work			
Organising			
Numbers			
Accountancy			
Art			
Working with money			
Music			
Creativity			
Writing			
Designing			
Socialising			
Helping others			
Selling or promoting things			
Performing in front of people			

My comments on the above-mentioned: _____

3 –How interested is your child in the following?

	Very	*A little*	*Not at all*
Science			
Biology			
Art			
Numbers			
Helping People			
Performing in front of people			
Gathering socially with people			
Travel			
Accountancy			
Business			
Hand skills			
Music			
Sport			
Nature			
Languages			

My comments on the above-mentioned: _____

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Schedule and Guide

Question Rationale

The following interview schedule has been developed with the primary research and secondary research questions in mind. Consequently, the first section of semi-structured questions to be asked will contain six questions and cover learner perceptions of the traditional quantitative psychometric experience. The second section will contain six questions that cover the learner's perceptions of the post-modern qualitative narrative career assessment experience. Both these sections will contain the same consistent format of six similar questions. The last section will consist of four questions that will focus on the learner's perceptions of both forms of career assessment. The words 'psychometric' and 'narrative' will not be used at the beginning of the interview by the researcher. These words will be explained and used at the end to locate the learners in the context of the comparative questions to follow.

A - Traditional Quantitative Career Assessment Questions

The researcher will begin the interview with an introduction and explanation of the psychometric assessment procedure and rationale to remind the learners of the procedure and locate their awareness in the context of the following six questions:

1. What did you think was good and/or easy in the first set of assessment exercises you completed? Elaborate and explain.
2. What did you think was difficult and/or not so easy in the first set of assessment exercises you completed? Elaborate and explain.
3. If you had a chance to change anything about the assessment, what would you change and why?
4. Did you find the instructions that were given easy to understand? Elaborate. Did you find the assessment as a whole easy to understand? Elaborate.
5. Tell me what you thought about the career recommendations and results that were given to you in the feedback session. How useful do you think they will be in helping you find the right career after school?
6. Tell me about your experiences on completing the assessments in a group. What do you think it would be like doing the assessment alone? Give reasons for your answer.

B - Post-Modern Qualitative Career Assessment Questions

The researcher will begin the interview with an introduction and explanation of the post-modern assessment procedure and rationale to remind the learner's of the procedure and prepare and locate their awareness in the context of the following six questions:

1. What did you think was good and/or easy in second set of assessment exercises you completed? Elaborate and explain.
2. What did you think was difficult and not so easy in the second set of assessment exercises you completed? Elaborate and explain.
3. If you had a chance to change anything about the assessment, what would you change and why?
4. Did you find the instructions that were given to you easy to understand? Elaborate. Did you find the assessment as a whole easy to understand? Elaborate.
5. Tell me what you thought about the career recommendations and results that were given to you in the feedback session. How useful do you think they will be in helping you find the right career after school?
6. Tell me about your experiences on completing the assessments in a group. What do you think it would be like doing the assessment alone and why?

C – Questions on the learners perceptions of both forms of assessment

1. Now that you have answered questions on both the 'psychometric' and the 'narrative' forms of assessment, can you tell me which form of assessment you prefer and why?
2. Which form of assessment 'psychometric' or 'narrative' do you think was more enjoyable and easier to complete?
3. Which form of assessment 'psychometric' or 'narrative', do you think is better to use with learners from a similar background to you?

Appendix D

Parent Information Sheet

As part of my Masters degree in Research Psychology I am researching how learners from communities such as that in which Westbury High School is located view two different methods of career assessment.

Participation in this research will require your child to complete two sets of career assessments alongside 9 other learners from Westbury High School, which will take approximately two full school days. They will also be required to take part in a group interview of approximately 30-45 minutes with the other learners in the study. This will all take place on a date and time to be agreed upon by you, the school principal and myself.

Your and your child's participation in the study is voluntary and you will not be disadvantaged in any way for choosing not to participate in the study. You are free to remove your child from the study at any time. All information that I will obtain in this study will be treated as strictly confidential. The only people who will have access to the information are my research supervisor, the Psychometrist administering the assessments and myself. However, I cannot guarantee confidentiality in the group interview as all the learners will be present. All the information collected for the research will be destroyed once the study is completed.

Only ten learners will be chosen for the study. It is important to know that the only reason your child may not be chosen is because I can only complete the study with ten learners, and not for any other reason. You and your child will receive career recommendations in a feedback session following the assessments.

Should you choose to allow your child to take part in this study, please complete the two attached Consent Forms and ensure that your child also completes his/her Consent Forms. Your participation in the study will include supplying me with a copy of your child's end of term report from 2005. This will be used to find out which subjects he or she is good at and which subjects he or she struggles in order to make a suitable career recommendation. During the study I will also ask you to complete a few questions to find out what you think your child's talents and values are. These questions should not take you more than about 30 minutes to complete. You are welcome to ask for assistance to complete these questions if necessary.

The results of the study will be made available to you and your child at your request. Your name and your child's name will not be used in the final report. Should you have any queries relating to this letter, please feel free to contact the research supervisor (as per contact details below). I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Bischof (Researcher)
Cell number 073 254 5119

Dr Daleen Alexander (Research Supervisor)
(011) 717 4526

Appendix E

Learner Information Sheet

Dear Westbury high learner

As part of my Masters degree in Research Psychology I am researching how learners from communities such as that in which Westbury High School is located view two different methods of career assessment.

Participation in this research will require you to complete two sets of career assessments alongside 9 other learners from Westbury High School, which will take approximately two full school days. You will also be required to participate in a group interview of approximately 30-45 minutes with the other learners in the study. This will all take place on a date and time to be agreed upon by your parents, the school principal and myself.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and you will not be disadvantaged in any way for choosing not to participate in the study. You are free to leave the study at any time. All information that I will obtain in this study will be treated as strictly confidential. The only people who will have access to the information are my research supervisor, the Psychometrist administering the assessments and myself. However, I cannot guarantee confidentiality in the group interview as all the learners will be present. All the information collected for the research will be destroyed when the study is finished.

Only ten learners will be chosen for the study. It is important to know that the only reason you may not be chosen is because I can only manage the study with ten learners, and not for any other reason. You and your parents will receive career recommendations in a feedback session following the assessments.

Should you wish to participate in this study, please complete the two attached Consent Forms. Your parent/s will also be asked to complete two Consent Forms and to supply me with a copy of your end of term report from 2005. This will be used to find out which subjects you are good at and which subjects you struggle with and will help me make suitable career recommendation for you. During the study I will also your parent/s to complete a few questions to find out what they think your talents and values are.

The results of the study will be made available to you and your parent/s at your request. Your name and your parent/s will not be used in the final report. Should you have any queries relating to this letter, please feel free to contact the research supervisor (as per contact details below). I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Bischof (Researcher) Dr Daleen Alexander (Research Supervisor)

Cell number 073 254 5119 (011) 717 4526

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form – Learner's parents

I (please state your name……..……) have read the Participant Information Sheet on the study entitled "*Exploring the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities about Psychometric and narrative career assessment"* to be conducted by David Bischof, and I agree to allow my child take part in the study under the following conditions:

- That my child's participation is voluntary and I reserve the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time.
- That my child may choose not to answer any questions he or she might feel uncomfortable answering.

Can you please answer the following questions which will be used to identify appropriate learners for the purpose of the research:

1. What language does your child speak at home? _____

2. How old is your child? _____

3. How long as your child been attending Westbury High School? _____

4. Are you the only parent looking after the child at home? _____

The researcher would also like to publish the results of this research.
Do you consent to the results being published? _____

I understand that no information that may identify my child or Westbury High School will be included in the research report to ensure that my child will remain anonymous and his or her responses confidential.

……. …….

Signature learner's parents Date

Appendix G

Informed Consent Form – Participation in study - Learner's parents

I (please state your name……..……) have read the Participant Information Sheet on the study entitled "*Exploring the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities about Psychometric and narrative career assessment"* to be conducted by David Bischof, and I agree to participate in the study on the following conditions:

- That my participation is voluntary and that I reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- That I may choose not to answer any questions that I feel uncomfortable answering.

The researcher would also like to publish the results of this research.
Do you consent to the results being published? …….

I understand that no information that may identify me or my child or Westbury High School will be included in the research report to ensure that I and my child will remain anonymous and our responses to the study will be confidential.

……. …….

Signature learner's parents Date

Appendix H

Informed Consent Form – Learner

I (please state your name……..……) have read the Participant Information Sheet on the study entitled "*Exploring the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities about Psychometric and Narrative career assessment"* to be conducted by David Bischof and I agree to take part in the study on the following conditions:

- That my participation is voluntary and I can leave the study at any time.
- That I don't have to answer any questions that I might feel uncomfortable answering.

The researcher would also like to publish the results of this research.

- Do you consent to the results being published? ……

I understand that no information that may identify me or Westbury High School will be included in the research report to ensure that I will remain anonymous and my responses confidential.

……. …….

Signature learner Date

Appendix I

Informed Consent Form to use a tape recorder – Learners' parents

I (please state your name……..……) have read the Participant Information Sheet about the study entitled "*Exploring the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities about Psychometric and Narrative career assessment"* to be conducted by David Bischof and I agree to allow the focus group interview to be recorded with the use of a tape recorder on the following conditions:

- That my child's participation is voluntary and that I reserve the right to withdraw my child from the study at any time.
- That my child may choose not to answer any questions he or she might feel uncomfortable answering.

I understand that no information in the tape recording that may identify my child or Westbury High School will be included in the research report and that my child will remain anonymous and his or her responses confidential.

……. …….

Signature Date

Appendix J

Informed Consent Form to use a tape recorder – Learners

I (please state your name……..……) have read the Participant Information Sheet about the study entitled *"Exploring the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities about Psychometric and Narrative career assessment"* to be conducted by David Bischof and I agree to allow the focus group interview to be recorded with the use of a tape recorder on the following conditions:

- That my participation is voluntary and that I reserve the right to withdraw myself from the study at any time.
- That my I may choose not to answer any questions that I might feel uncomfortable answering.

I understand that no information in the tape recording that may identify me or Westbury High School will be included in the research report and that I will remain anonymous and my responses confidential.

……. …….

Signature Date

Appendix K

Participant Information Sheet for the Principal

Dear Dr Robinson (Westbury high school principal)

As part of my Masters degree in Research Psychology I am researching how learners from communities such as that in which Westbury High School is located view two different methods of career assessment.

With your consent, all the Grade 11 pupils will receive an information sheet on the study and can volunteer to participate. Ten learners will be chosen from those who wish to participate based on criteria identified by the researcher for the purposes of the study. The 10 learners will comprise of five females and five males. Please note that the learners' participation is voluntary and that non-participation will not result in any negative consequences.

The learners will be required to complete a series of career assessments on two separate occasions which will take up approximately two complete school days. Furthermore, they will be required to participate in a focus group interview of approximately 30 to 45 minutes with the researcher, and answer questions relating to their experiences and views on the two sets of career assessments. The focus group interview will be recorded with the use of a tape recorder in order to obtain as much information on the learners' perceptions as possible. These assessments will take place at a time to be agreed upon by yourself and the relevant learners' parents. The parents of the chosen learners will be asked to provide the researcher with a school report from the end of 2005. They will also be asked to complete an informal questionnaire as part of the narrative career assessment which will take them approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Please note that questions, statements and activities contained in the assessments and the interview have been formulated with great care so as not to be harmful, insulting or unnecessarily intrusive. All information that I will obtain in this study will be treated as strictly confidential. Under no circumstances will anyone other than my research supervisor and I have access to this information. The data collected from the two assessments and the tape recordings from the interviews, will be destroyed upon completion of this study. No identifying information will be included in the final report and the learners' anonymity will be assured at all times. The career recommendations of both the *psychometric* and the *narrative* assessments will also be made available to each separate learner and their parent(s) in a confidential feedback session. The school will not receive the assessment results; however the learners will be given the option to share the results with their teachers or the guidance counsellor should they wish to do so.

Should you choose to allow the learners from your school to participate in this study, please provide the researcher with consent for the study. The results of the study will be made available to you at your request. The name of the school will also be kept confidential and not included in the final research report or the journal article should the research be published. Should you have any queries pertaining to the proposed study, please feel free to contact the research supervisor (as per contact details stipulated below).

Yours sincerely

David Bischof (Researcher)
Cell number 073 254 5119

Dr Daleen Alexander (Research Supervisor)
(011) 717 4526

Appendix L

Approval in Respect or Request to Conduct Research from iiic Department of education

UMnyango WezeMfundo
Department of Education

Lefapha la Thuto
Dcpailcincnt van Onderwys

Date:	15 May 2006
Name of Researcher:	Bischof David Anton
Address of Researcher;	5 Arras Road
	Delville
	Germiston 1401
Telephone Number:	(011)8732486
Fax Number:	N/A
Research Topic:	Exploring the perceptions of learners from disadvantaged communities about psychometric and narrative career assessment
Number and type of schools:	1 Secondary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg North

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 Managei- confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

Permission has been granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met, and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:

1. ***The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with 9 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. ***Tlte District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and In writing, far pemtissioit 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.***

Office of the Senior Manager - Strategic **Policy Research & Development**
Room 525,111 CommiissionerStreet Johannesburg, 2001 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (Oil) 355-0488
Fax: (Oil) 355-0286

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4. *A letter / document that outlines 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, 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 tha normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school} and/or Senior Manager (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when (he r&searcher/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.*

$. 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 must supply the Senior Manager Strategic Policy Development, Management & Research Coordination with one Hard Cover bound and one Ring bound copy of the final, approved research report. The researcher would also provide the said manager with an electronic copy of the research abstract/summary and/or annotation.

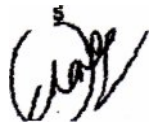
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*

14. *Should the researcher have been Involved with research at a school and/or* a *district/head office level, the Senior Manager concerned must also be supplied wSh 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.

ALBERTJGWNEE

ACTING DIVISIONAL MANAGER: OFSTED



Kind regard

The contents of this letter has been read and understood by the researcher.

Signature of Researcher

Date

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