

EXPLORING CAREER INFORMATION THROUGH DEVELOPMENTAL-  
CONTEXTUAL FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUTH FROM  
DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

Submitted by

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the importance of initiating career exploration discussions with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, using the developmental-contextual framework of career development by Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenburg (1986). This model stresses the dynamic relationship between an individual, the ever-changing environment and how each influences the other. Based upon an earlier study by Spencer (1999), this study aims to explore the developmental-contextual model as the basis of successive group discussions at a pivotal moment in the lives of the youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, it aims to understand individuals' perceptions of career education and the influences on career decision-making and aspiration. Data were collected through setting up and running a focus group session once a week over a period of five weeks, in which different career-related topics were discussed. The sample consisted of nine unemployed students who were currently not in a tertiary institution between the ages of 18-25 years. The findings indicated a noteworthy need for more relevant career interventions to be investigated and implemented for the diverse South African population. The study's findings demonstrated that individuals might be more open to exploring career development through group rather than individual counselling. It was found that parents are the main career influencers in their children's lives. Mothers were experienced as role models, supporters and encouragers while fathers were experienced as absent and unsupportive, playing little or no role in their children's lives. The participants found this form of career exploration appealing as it allowed for peer consultation and the freedom to discuss career issues in a non-judgemental setting.

**Keywords:** Career exploration, career guidance, disadvantaged backgrounds, career services, developmental-contextual model, focus group, action research.

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*declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.*

Ke fihle mo ke lego gona ka lerato, kgotlelelo, le tlhohleletšo ya lena. Le ka moso tswelelang pele gompha thego ya lena.

## Chapter 1 - Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

The constitution of South Africa (SA) stipulates that a person has “the right to choice of trade, occupation or profession and the right of access to information are of particular importance to career development services” (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2017, p.1). Although SA is into its third decade of democracy, developments in career education, guidance, and counselling services have progressed at a slow pace. Career education and services to most South Africans are either misunderstood or unfamiliar concepts. Maree (2009) states that career assistance in our country remains mostly unchanged for most people: career counselling continues to be provided to previously advantaged people while little consideration is given to the disadvantaged majority. Akhurst and Mkhize (2006) pointed out that career education in SA was formerly offered in specific environments such as: urban secondary schools, institutions of higher learning, specific non-government organisations (NGO’s), mostly situated in larger urban areas within the country. This meant that the majority of learners in other educational settings remained neglected (Maree, Ebersohn & Molepo, 2006).

In the past, career education was offered in the school setting as part of “School Guidance” however, currently, it has been incorporated into the Life Orientation (LO) school subject (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006). The LO subject is described by the Department of Basic Education (DBE): Curriculum and assessment policy statement (Grades 10-12) as “the study of the self in relation to others and to society. It addresses skills, knowledge, and values about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, careers and career choices.” (DBE, 2011, p.8). Unfortunately, frequently the time allocated to teach this subject is used as a free period or to

teach other subjects (Rooth, 2005). The context intended for career education discussions are not utilised for this purpose perhaps because educators are not adequately equipped to deliver it, or schools are not aware of its importance to learners. Thus, the previous status quo of career education in SA has continued; with limited delivery of career services, a lack of adequately trained personnel to provide the service and traditional career guidance models focused on career assessment are still utilised (DHET, 2016).

In a study by Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa (2006) based in Kwazulu-Natal, respondents mentioned that the career guidance they received at high school did not provide them with essential information to learn more about themselves. In addition, most of their career interests were based on fantasies and not on quality information; they also reported not receiving any assistance in learning the skills required to make a career choice. The participants identified a variety of barriers that affected their career choices; these include academic performance, lack of career information and educational opportunities as well as funding. It is important for SA to acknowledge that due to insufficient career education services, those disadvantaged by their environments or backgrounds are not afforded the opportunity to choose a suitable career path, while those who were privileged before the apartheid era continue to benefit from these kinds of services, with adequate career services still offered to learners in top quality schools (Maree, 2015). DHET indicated in their recent study that there are various obstacles that prevent people from gaining access to career development services such as the area they live in, socio-economic status and gender. These obstacles need to be removed in order for people to receive this essential service (DHET, 2017b). More than a decade on from the above references, the process to implement a national career service is underway. The DHET in collaboration with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and other stakeholders have taken various initiatives to

implement this service, which includes conducting research to evaluate the status of career development services in SA, compiling and approving policies that mandates the DHET to be a leading entity to set-up a reliable, sustainable and collaborative career service in the whole of SA (SAQA, 2012; DHET, 2013; DHET, 2017a & b; DHET, 2018b). These efforts have been done in order to begin the pilot project that was needed to showcase the necessity for this kind service in the current socio-economic climate. This process began with the setting up of the national career development services (CDS) which is mostly known by its the brand name KHETHA.

The process began in 2010 with the introduction of a flagship project collaboration by DHET and SAQA. The project is currently underway and is meant to end in 2020 (DHET, 2018a). It appears there is a great challenge for the service to fully launch effectively and on an extensive scale. According to the DHET (DHET 2018b; DHET, 2017b) in the research agenda for an integrated career services in South Africa and the evaluation done in both 2008 and 2012 by SAQA and DHET, findings indicated an inadequacy in the provision of this service and that the “the demand for career development services exceeds supply” ( p.27). Unfortunately, DHET (2017b) reiterates the SAQA 2012 career development scan that there is still no agency either on a national or provincial level that is solely responsible for the provision of this service.

With the above in mind, this study was planned to trial a potentially low-cost approach to group career discussions with learners who have the opportunity to re-write their school leaving exams at an NGO based in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape. These discussions were facilitated by myself, a trainee psychologist. The framework that forms the theoretical basis for the work by Vondracek et al. (1986), draws from broader systems models of career

development, locating career ideas and thinking within the family, school and cultural life influences on the participants. Guided by an Action Research approach, a series of group discussions aimed to enable the learners to have an opportunity to articulate their personal attributes and the various influences upon their thinking, to enable them to explore possible options (Stringer, 2014). In the Eastern Cape the dearth in career education for the majority of learners was clear to see in the researcher's role working in the field with learners/ youth with aspirations to study further. Many young people are in need of career assistance, but do not have the financial means to seek this privately.

## 1.2 Definitions

- **Career guidance**, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], (2004, p.19) encapsulates the definition of career guidance comprehensively as “services intended to assist people, of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers”.
- **Career counselling** refers to the “process of assisting individuals in the development of a life-career with focus on the definition of the worker role and how that role interacts with other life roles” (National Career Development Association [NCDA], 2009, p.1).
- **Career education** is about equipping a person to deal with the choices and changes they will go through in life (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006).

The above three definitions highlight the lifespan developmental nature of career assistance - which is not something confined to schooling or to one specific phase of career decision-making, since skills to make these decisions continue through adulthood. Vondracek (1998) and Super (1980) in their studies emphasise that career development is a process that takes place across a person's lifetime.

- **Black people**, the Based Black Economic Empowerment Amendment Act defines “black people” as a term used to refer to Black Africans, Coloureds, and Indians (Republic of South Africa, 2013, p.1).
- **Youth**, according to the African Youth Charter is defined as any individuals between the ages of 14 to 35 years (African Union, 2006).

### 1.3 Outline of the Dissertation

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and it provides a broad overview of the context to the study. Chapter 2 will explore the literature related to the topic being investigated, the theoretical framework, the background to the study and the literature that will provide contexts and support to the study. It also explains the developmental contextual model of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986). Chapter 3 will review the methodology utilised in this research, the research design, explain the procedure of data collection and analysis, the ethical considerations, limitations and trustworthiness. In chapter 4 the findings and the analysed content from the focus groups sessions (FGS) will be presented. Tables and extracts are included to support the findings. Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the findings of the research study, and a manual will be proposed for a guideline of how to set up and run the FGS (the manual is included as Appendix I). The purpose of the manual is to assist facilitators with the practical implementation of the FGS, using the developmental-contextual model of career development and action research as an overarching framework. Chapter 6 will present the limitations, recommendations, and conclusions.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a review of literature that concentrates on relevant studies dedicated to exploring career education, then goes on to explain the current state of career education services in SA. It then concludes by giving attention to the theoretical framework used to guide the study: The System Theory Framework (STF) and the developmental-contextual model of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986). The study builds on a previous study by Spencer (1999), which is relevant to understanding the multiple factors influencing career decisions of culturally diverse and disadvantaged youth in SA.

### **2.2 The Provision of Career Education Services in South Africa**

The legacy of our country is influenced by racially defined systems. In their research Naidoo, Pretorius and Nicholas (2017) report that career guidance services in SA were introduced in 1958 by the National Institute of Career Guidance, to solely cater for white communities. It took 23 years (in 1981) for this service to be extended to black communities. The distribution and access to such services in SA has always been restricted when it has been offered to Black Africans. Naidoo, et al., (2017, p.8) noted that “education in SA has been characterised by the control of policy making and the government’s financial distribution of resources based on racial segregation” forming the basis of inferior service-provision.

A study on career guidance policies conducted in 37 countries by (Watts & Sultana, 2004) revealed that globally, career education seemed to be gaining greater priority on governments’ policy programmes compared to the past. Taking a developmental perspective, to emphasise the need for the provision and adequate access to career services, the study further states that consequently career guidance needs to be easily available not only to school-dropouts and those without a job, but to every person in all phases of their lives.

In the contrast, the harsh reality is that even after SA became a democratic country in 1994, the government has been slow to provide adequate service delivery, dispensation of equal opportunities, social inclusion, equal educational and health opportunities (Nengwekhulu, 2009). Our unjust apartheid history as well as the failure or slow service delivery by the current government are evident in that the vast majority of people still live in disadvantaged conditions. In their study, DHET & SAQA (2012) highlight that presently in SA there is no particular agency either nationally or provincially that is accountable for the management and delivery of career education services.

To address the fragmentation of the delivery of career services and to offer a collaborated and coordinated career development service, DHET has indicated that, though they have been mandated to provide this service, years later and even after they have evaluated the status of this service and offered it as a pilot programme, the service has not been adequately launched. Their finding was that the “the demand for career development services exceeds supply” (DHET, 2017b, p.27), however there is a hope that through holistic collaboration with various relevant stakeholders, which include government agencies, organizations, professional bodies, community career service providers there will reach a time when SA citizens can be able to easily access this service. Currently, the career development services are offered through a KHETHA centre in Pretoria where they provide a services to the SA population, reaching them through various mediums such as SMS, telephone, social media, radio broadcasting, one walk-in centre, and outreaches. It must be noted that this is not enough, to reach or make a visible impact to the population it is trying to assist (DHET 2017a, DHET 2017b; DHET 2018a). A review of the literature suggests that the existing policies restricted Black African people the access to education, with the provision of career education functioning limited to within privileged contexts (Watson, 2017).

Therefore, attention needs to be drawn to the country's current stance regarding the provision of career education to youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, because most Black African students continue to struggle to gain access to career counselling at institutions of higher learning (Maree, 2009). The need for agency regarding access to career education was indicated by Chuenyane (cited in Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006, p.139) who highlighted the need for career education and that "90 percent" of black school leavers have serious career planning problems. Due to the lack of career education for learners from economically disadvantaged groups, they are at a further disadvantage as they are not well-oriented to the labour market.

To further emphasise the above, in their recent study Maila and Ross (2018) provide evidence that the provision of career guidance is still insufficient in SA. This is a disservice to these young people (Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006) because information and education about employment markets, which includes job opportunities, their geographical spread, or locations, their entry requirements, as well as personal and social information about economic environments, all constitute major factors that have serious impacts on career choices. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) explain that occupations form a large part of people's everyday realities and serve as a major source of personal identity and self-evaluation. Despite this fact, economically disadvantaged youth are expected to compete for work opportunities with more privileged youth who have been provided with basic career information from a young age.

In their study conducted in two schools, Penryn College and Mthombo High School in Mpumalanga Cook & Maree (2016) emphasised that because there is the constant introduction of new careers in the world of work, while some old careers cease to exist, those who are financially established continue to function and benefit from the world of work, while the disadvantaged plummet further into deprived social-economic conditions.

Furthermore, the insufficient provision of career counselling is said to be a contributing factor to academic failure at institutions of higher learning, leading to students' withdrawal from their studies, which in turn reinforces the low socioeconomic statuses of those living in poverty (Maree, 2012).

### **2.3 Career Development Theories Suitable for a Culturally Diverse SA context**

According to Naidoo, et al. (2017) the foundation, development and evolution of career psychology in SA has been dominated by both mainstream psychology (which originates from Europe and the United States of America, USA) and vocational psychology in the USA. Watson (2010) argued that it is essential to challenge the nature of career counselling in SA, in order for it to be re-evaluated to fit in with relevant theoretical frameworks, research inquiries, guidance and psychometric methods. Alexander, Buthelezi, and Seabi, (2009) highlighted the need to confront the degree to which career methods, inquiry, and training are informed by westernised practices, inclusive of individualism and autonomy but rejecting of indigenous practices. Maree and Molepo (2004) suggest that when planning interventions, work should be from a holistic approach incorporating the person and their surroundings.

Maree (2009) emphasises that there is a current shift to move away from using the predominant trait-factor approach that imposes a westernised idea in a SA context, because its validity and reliability is questionable. Watson and Stead (2017) explain that trait factor theories propose that a person should be matched to a specific occupation that is supposed to meet their needs, based on their interests which are supposedly consistent throughout time. It is also assumed that a person is suited for one career path, with a career choice being a fixed and limited process. These ideas and this theory has been proven to be of little use for the SA context, with its high unemployment and the lack of available job opportunities (Akhurst & Mkhize, 2006).

According to Watson and Stead (2017) there has been a noticeable gradual development and improvement in the main career theories, for example developments from the theories by Holland and Super with the emerging of recent concepts. These theoretical developments have paid extensive attention to approaching career education from an integrated perspective and there is an increase in understanding the setting in which people make their career decisions.

It is unfortunate that the assumption has always been that career counselling theories from various countries around the world could be adapted and utilised within the SA context (Maree, 2013). It is evident that little consideration has been given to acknowledging SA as a multicultural diverse and developing country. This is apparent because most of the psychometric tests utilised were not designed to cater for the disadvantaged population in this country (Maree & Beck, 2004). These tests are easily accessible to the more privileged population with good financial resources. Maree (2013) is in support of the development of career counselling theories that are based on the need of the SA population. He emphasises the necessity for career counselling theories that would focus on group contexts instead of individuals.

Stead and Watson (1998) argue that there is limited literature dedicated to career education from the developmental-contextual model of career development Vondracek et al. (1986), even though this approach might be more suitable to understand and intervene in the career education of people who must cope with not only career development changes, but also with environmental challenges that complicate career exploration and planning. Watson and Stead (2017) claim that career development can be viewed as a procedure that cannot be separated from both the macro-system (cultural context) and the micro-systems (people in direct contact) in which a person is located.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This inquiry employed an overarching framework of the developmental-contextual framework of career development as based upon an earlier study by Spencer (1999). In her KZN-based study, Spencer (1999) found the use of focus groups effective because they fostered a collective learning experience, participants felt more comfortable to explore career issues, discover any drawbacks and to make decisions with the assistance of their peers in a context that is less pressurised and non-threatening, unlike in the presence of a trained professional. The developmental-contextual model of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986) will be utilised to plan for the career exploration of young people who took part in a series of focus groups. This framework is related to the system theory framework (STF), which is motivated by the ideologies of career philosophers and investigators.

Vondracek et al., (1986) noted that there are problems with certain theories and existing career models, even though there were emerging theories that could be potentially utilised in vocational behaviour and career development. They took it upon themselves to intentionally direct the career field to focus on themes of life span development, an interdisciplinary approach, a contextual perspective similar to that which had been proposed a decade earlier by Bronfenbrenner (1977) and greater awareness of the multiple contexts and influences on individual differences that are then expressed in vocational behaviour and career development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Both the STF and the developmental-contextual model of career development have some similarities, so this led both frameworks informing the study to be described further. They are similar in that Vondracek et al., (1986) explain that people in their contexts are understood to occupy multiple dimensions which are inter-reliant, evolving and/or modified through time. STF presents career development as a dynamic process, depicted through its process influences, recursiveness, adapting to change over time and chance (Patton &

McMahon, 2006). Both frameworks emphasise that the person and environment are intricately connected and have an influence on each other. They are meta-theoretical frameworks that allow the integration and contribution of other career development theoretical approaches in an attempt to find interventions suitable to deal with the complexities of career development (McMahon, 2011; Vondracek et al., 1986).

## **2.5 System Theory Framework (STF)**

Arthur and McMahon (2005) highlighted that STF could be a useful theoretical foundation for an all-inclusive career education because of the way it accommodates both a particular social group as well as universal stances on multiculturalism. Patton and McMahon (2015) suggested that this theory could be beneficial for individuals who are uncertain about their futures and careers decision making, because STF places individuals at the centre of attention to enable them to create their individualised career narratives.

As explained by McMahon (2011, p.170) STF comprises of a variety of complex “content and process influences”. The content influences consist of numerous vital interrelated systems, which include the intrapersonal system, interpersonal systems and the environmental-social systems. The process influences represent the recursive interconnectedness between influences, progress over a certain period, and career development as an active and complicated interaction of influences. According to Patton and McMahon (2006) the various systems of influence are all positioned and intricately connected through time, with the past influencing the present, while collectively the past and present influence the future. These systems do not function in isolation because they are in constant interplay, are recursive in nature, they are altered through time and they take into account the effects of chance. It should be noted that career decision making and career construction takes place during this process (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2017).

The STF has been extensively researched by both authors Watson and McMahon: their studies provide the support for the need to create career development interventions that are suitable for the SA multicultural context. In their inquiry McMahon, Watson, Foxcroft and Dullabh (2008) applied STF at both a theoretical level (utilising the My System of Career Influences (MSCI) assessment measure) and a practical level, to further explore and describe the career development of adolescents from SA disadvantaged backgrounds. Their findings support the Super (1990) lifespan-space theory, which in this study indicates that people's careers development happens across their life-span and during this time people's life roles increase and direct their interpersonal skills. It was also highlighted that career development and influences should be understood from individuals' interactions with their contexts which include social, political and historical influences. It showed that individuals tend to choose occupations that are aligned to those of their family members. It also demonstrated the benefits of using a qualitative career assessment measure (MSCI) with a group of young people (McMahon et al., 2008).

The MSCI is an STF inspired qualitative career assessment battery created for both adolescents and adults. It is a reflective guide that clients can use to make sense of their systems of career influences in relation to the other systems and on their career development. This is done by completing a sequential activity in which they would reflect on their realities, share and make meaning of their narratives from their own perspectives, be able to understand how their systems of influences have impacted their lives, identify patterns and themes across their narratives. It is also meant to help people learn and plays a role in constructing their future identifies and career stories (Watson & McMahon, 2006; Patton, et al., 2017; McMahon et al., 2008), in both South Africa and Australia.

The intention of the current study was to seek to explore an alternative conceptual framework that could be adapted for the context as it were. This was exploratory research to

see if there might be another model that can be modified that does not require us to purchase career counselling and assessment resources and tools. The MSCI was not used because we were working in a more resource constrained context and there was no funding to purchase this measure.

## **2.6 The Developmental-Contextual Framework of Career Development**

Vondracek et al., (1986) draws from the ecology of human development because it involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relationships between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

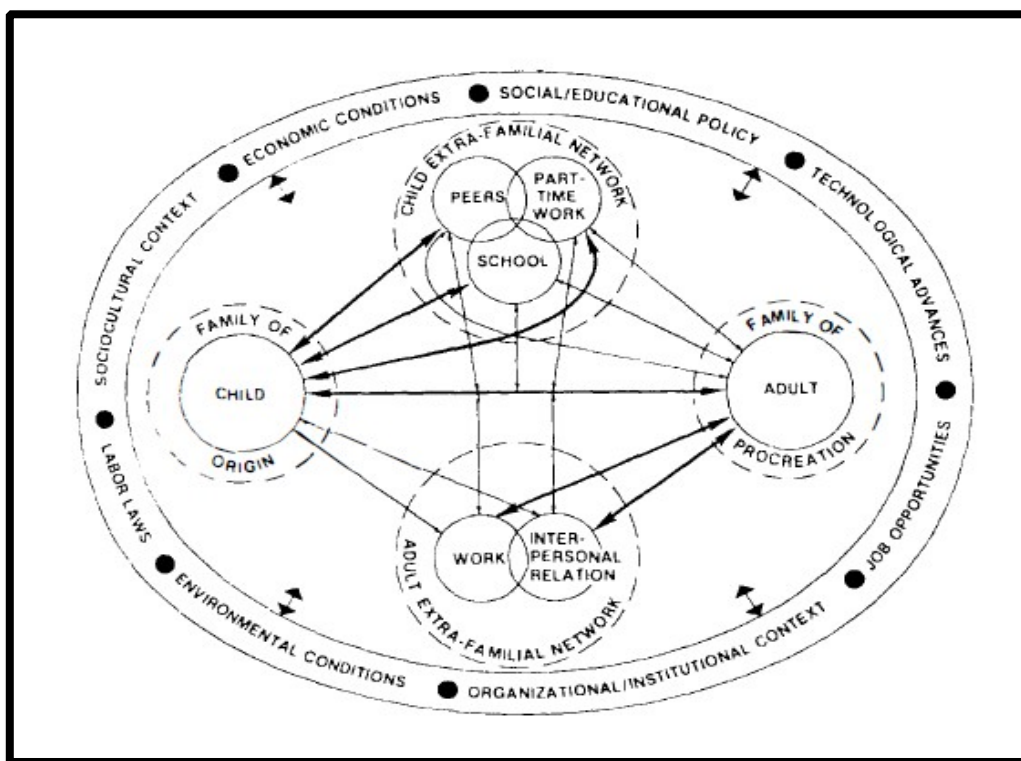
The Vondracek et al., (1986) framework stresses the dynamic relationship between an individual, and the ever-changing environment and how each influences the other. The relationship can be explained by the bi-directional arrows between the person, the proximal (e.g. family of origin, extra familial) and the distal (e.g. social, economic) settings. According to Vondracek et al. (1986) developmental-contextualism proposes the idea that a person's circumstance does not only create changes in their development it is also motivated and controlled by the individual's attributes.

Stead (1996) suggested that the developmental-contextual framework of career development could be employed for the South African context. Youth might benefit from exploring career information through group interactive discussions because the culturally diverse population of SA leans towards group attitudes rather than individualism.

The Stead (1996) study looked at the degree to which the (1) "contextual and individual factors dynamically interact in the career development" (p.1) of young people in SA, (2) in order to propose suitable career interventions and (3) how this study might assist counsellors.

This study proposed that interplay between a person and their environment is vital for formulating appropriate career interventions for SA's diverse young population. It also highlighted that counsellors should become mediators, in order to assist individuals to interact with their surrounding settings. The model emphasises that career development is not a process that happens in isolation, but there exist dynamic interactions between the different contexts and the individual (Watson & Stead, 2006). The interactions can be seen in the figure below.

Diagram 1. The Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg (1986) model



The developmental-contextual framework of career development model comprises four central circles as well as eight macro-systemic factors with the bidirectional arrows indicating a mutual link or a relation amongst the microsystem and macrosystem circles (Spencer, 1999). According to Vondracek (1990) the development-contextual approach to career

development incorporates development, context and change, focusing on the interaction between the developing person and their ever-changing context in relation to career development. Through these interactions the changing environment not only changes the person's development, but the context is also influenced and controlled by the person's attributes.

This framework suggests that career development can be perceived as a developmental process that forms part of an individual's entire lifespan (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2008). Individuals spend their lives moving through these environments, and are influenced by or the environment influences their decision making and life experiences. In Vondracek et al., (1986) a critique is made that Bronfenbrenner's (1977) four ecological frameworks are not adequately nuanced to account for the proximal and distal contextual influences. His earlier version of ecological theory disregarded the role of individuals in their development. However, his later version (bio-ecological system theory) focused on the importance of the person roles in relation to their context; in the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Ettetal & Mahoney 2017). This is more aligned to the developmental-contextual framework of career development by Vondracek et al., (1986), which emphasises that a person's career development is as a result of the active connections between the person and their constantly changing environments

As cited in Vondracek et al., (1986) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) four ecological structures describe the environment: The microsystem is the system closest to the individual and has direct influence on their development, such as the family and work environments; the mesosystem symbolises the connection between different microsystems, which includes the connections between a child's family and peers or the school. The exosystem refers to external environments in which a person is not an active participant, but is still impacted indirectly, such as individual's partner, and parents' workplaces, community, media, and

public institutions; lastly the macrosystem symbolises the influences of the broad country and predominant cultural system a person lives in, for example, the traditional belief systems and sociocultural principles that dominate practices in the other subsystems. In the description of the elements of the model that follow, mainly relevant South African studies and literature will be used to explain the issues.

### 2.6.1 Microsystems

For Vondracek et al., (1986) and Bronfenbrenner (2005) the microsystem represents an individual's immediate surroundings, the environments that have an influence on individual's development. Vondracek et al., (1986) further define a microsystems as "pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality and systems of belief"(p.47). There are various contexts that are especially pertinent to understanding an individual's career development including child's family of origin, the child extra-familial network, the family of procreation-adult, and the adult extra-familial network.

### 2.6.2 The child's family of origin

Robinson and Diale (2017) in a study based in school in Johannesburg stated that an individual's career decision making is a process influenced by interpersonal relationships. They confirmed that families have an impact on a person's career aspirations, but it does not mean that people would necessary choose career path similar to those of their family members even though their families are supportive and they admire their characteristics. Although there was some noticeable support from their next of kin, parents did not seem to have much contribution to their children's career planning, a finding supported by other literature (Albien & Naidoo, 2017).

### 2.6.3 Child extra-familial network

#### Peers

According to Vondracek et al., (1986) peer groups are crucial to an individual's career development, nonetheless they are perceived to be flexible but generally are undefined microsystem. Childhood is a period when young people engage in various activities with their peers, which could help them find their interest and abilities, as well as get exposed to information about the workplace that might either be different or consistent with their parents. In their studies located near Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006) and Albien and Naidoo (2016) found that young people's career choice is influenced by their interaction with various contexts such families, school environment, media, culture, community and peers.

The influence can either be negative or positive. In their study Albien and Naidoo (2016) found that participants experienced their peers as either negative (as a barriers) or positive (as a supportive) influencers on their career decision making. Their finding was that peers can provide a supportive role because they offer support in school work and provide advice on career related issues and they can also encourage an individual to accomplish their goals. They are also experienced as barriers because an individual can be pressured (giving in to substance abuse, criminal activities); or being surrounded by peers that say discouraging comments, can demotivate a person to give up because they are surrounded by people who constantly tell them they should not try at anything, because there is a high possibility of failure (Albien & Naidoo, 2016).

### School

According to DHET (2012) the SA educational policy's mandate and responsibility is to guarantee that every single student is provided with career education and facilitation during the course of their schooling. However, in a study based in schools in the Durban South region, Muribwathoho and Shumba (2006) noted that even during our democratic era the career education services offered in previously all white schools are still superior to schools attended by Black Africans. Because there is inadequate provision of these services, young people tend to make uninformed career decisions. Bray, Gooskens, Moses, Kahn, and Seekings (2010) in a study done in the Western Cape, argue that parents and their children seem ill-informed about the intricacies that go into career planning, acquiring a good job and basic information on how to succeed. Their research further highlighted that parents and children tend to believe that to be successful an individual needs determination, to work hard at school and obtaining grade 12, which might not always be possible. Maila and Ross's (2018) recent study also emphasised the dire need for a well-functioning career service. The researchers studied learners from a predominantly black area in Siyabuswa, which was formed as a result of apartheid segregation. Though the school had basic furniture or facilities and a feeding scheme, they are still disadvantaged when it comes to sufficient educational resources, technology, and were not provided with career guidance.

### Part-time work

Individuals take up different roles throughout their lives, either during childhood or adulthood. These roles include being a child, learners, a significant other, parent, and employee (worker). When individuals take part in part-time work from a young age such as cutting a neighbour's grass or helping someone with cooking, through being exposed to such contexts the child takes on the role of a worker, which helps them to improve their career development. In addition, the child also gets the opportunity to acquire abilities and

competencies linked to a career (Vondracek et al. 1986; Super, 1980). Mturi (2012) suggests that this begins at a young age, it is also a fact that there have been a growing number of child headed households in SA. They argue that children 18 years and younger are responsible for households due to parents falling ill, death, or they take on the responsibility of an adult when the adults in that family are unable to take on this responsibility.

#### 2.6.4 Family of procreation (adult)

According to McConnell's (2010, p1) inquiry based in conducted in eThekweni Municipality the transition from youth into adulthood is an important period for the individual's family and community and economy as this is a period of an individual's life cycle they shift from "childhood and schooling into adulthood and work". They shift from depending on their family and society to begin to live independently and secure employment. However, in their study noted above, Bray et al., (2010) highlighted that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is not necessarily smooth and straightforward. During this phase some people are involved in various activities or responsibilities, which includes full time work or having had previous work experience, while others might be simultaneously working and studying. Others remain living at home with their family of origin while others progress by forming independent lives or starting a family of their own. It must be noted that there is no set sequence, an individual's transition is through experience and it take place at different points in life.

#### 2.6.5 Interpersonal and professional dynamics in the adult's extra-familial network

It should be taken in to consideration that the support and encouragement parents offer their children, their ways of socialising, roles within family context and the activities in which they participate in, to some extent influence the career the child pursues as well as how they conduct themselves, the roles they play, the decisions made in relation to others, be it in a work environment or social setting. These are because of the dyadic relationships formed

between these individuals involved influencing each other's development (Vondracek et al. 1986). Having such experiences could assist the individual to navigate their way in life as they look towards their future which includes creating an extra-familial networks and pursuing careers aligned with who they are.

Blustein (2013) states that working assists people to create their own identities and navigate relationships and interactions within a sociocultural context. In addition, work is a common feature that brings unity amongst people from various cultures and periods in time. Glaser (2018) explains that youth is seen as a time in which young people are obligated to take greater responsibility for themselves and for others in their lives. De Wet (2017) states that young people who are financially secure are able to contribute both on a micro-level by having the capability to provide for their own needs, and to those of their next of kin; and on a macro- level by contributing to the economy and depending less on the government to meet their basic needs. This could help these young people to make decisions about the job or organisation they work for.

Adams (2014) argues that if an individual believes that the organisation they work for is supportive, regards their work as worthy and prioritises their welfare, they believe they have a good person-environment fit. They are more likely to invest in their vocational growth and foster good interpersonal relationships with their colleagues.

#### 2.6.6 Macrosystems

##### Economic conditions

Klasen and Woolard (2009) noted that the SA unemployment rate was at 28% in 2004, and according to Statistics South Africa (2018) in the first quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate was at 38.2 % for people who are in the age bracket 15-34. This suggests that almost one in three people are without a job. Klasen and Woolard (2009) reported that the

unemployment rate varied significantly according to a person's ethnicity and age; with the rate of unemployed black people being the highest at (33%) as compared to other ethnicities, Coloured (19%), Indians (18%) and Whites (5%). While according to Statistics South Africa (2018) in the first quarter of 2018 the rate of unemployment decreased amongst black and coloured men, however, there was an increase amongst India/Asians and White men. There was an increase for Black, Asian/Indian and white women, but not for coloured women. Because of the high unemployment rate most youth are not unable to acquire the necessary skills that come from being trained and educated, which leads to discouragement about the job market (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

#### Sociocultural context

Ramose (2015) argues that a person and the community would not be able to describe and follow their purpose without understanding the importance of oneness- that a person is not separate from those they coexist with. The African collective view is based on the concept of "Ubuntu/Botho (humaneness)", which strongly suggests that people do not exist in isolation but they belong in a community (which includes extended family, and the whole community). A sense of belonging is essential to an individual, it is through their communities' influences, and contributions that individuals are able to understand themselves, acquire personal growth, and form a self-concept and identity (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005). Since most people in SA lean towards a collective approach to life, most young people's decisions making lies in their interactions and relationships with their families and communities. As Vondracek et al. (1986) argue, people do not live in isolation, they are constantly interacting and influencing each other. Furthermore, people are expected to occupy various roles and show certain behaviours depending on who they interact with and the context they find themselves in, because these roles are also important to understand people's career development.

### Labour laws

Labour laws are meant to govern, and restore human dignity to people in the workplace. The Employment Equity Act 55 (1998) aims to prohibit injustice and unfair treatment of people in the world of work through the promotion of affirmative action, addressing the issues of discrimination and inequality in the workplace, so that those who were previously disadvantaged are represented and receive equal opportunities. Leibbrandt, Woolard, McEwen and Koep (2010b) noted a prominent increase in unemployed white people between 2005 and 2008, nonetheless this increase is to some extent queried because of the difficulty of obtaining sampling from white people. However, Leibbrandt, Woolard, Finn, and Argen (2010a) report that with the implementing of note that affirmative action policies, now the unemployment rate is same as in 1997, which affect mostly the young black population.

### Environmental conditions

Leibbrandt, et al. (2010a) state that because of geographical segregation due to race inequality during the apartheid era, the rural and townships areas are still mainly occupied by black people living in extreme poverty, which seem to be declining with time, however there seems to be an increase in the rate of people living in poverty in the urban areas. Leibbrandt, et al. (2010a) suggest that though it is indicated that there has been an improvement in access to services, houses and private assets from 1996 to 2008, the poverty level is still higher for black people than other races. This is a challenge for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds because the unemployment rate seems to be rising gradually, in a period in their lives they are preparing and /or are seeking employment.

### Organisational/ institutional context

Burns, Godlonton, and Keswell (2010) note that the information about job opportunities and the world of work depends on the social networks and structures to which individuals

belong. Many companies seem to prefer to recruit employees through social networks and referrals rather than employing strangers. Individuals predominantly from middle to higher class obtain job opportunities through people who are in the same social circles. Companies seem to prefer employing individuals who are of the same socioeconomic status rather than those who are less privileged to maintain a so called “code for class”. They also indicate that it is easier for people with a job to get more opportunities than those whose social networks consist of people who are unemployed (Nattrass, 2002). Unfortunately, this does not benefit the less privileged because they are less likely to have received the opportunity to interact with potential employers or know anyone that can help them get a job through referral.

#### Social/Educational policy

The South African Bill of Rights highlights that every person has the right to education. They should have access to adequate schooling and be provided with appropriate and satisfactory education. An efficient educational system could inspire society to invest in knowledge becoming a legacy so that it can be cultivated as a way of life. As a way to guarantee that a nation receives good education, there needs to be progression and an enabling social, economic and political system, all essential for a decent educational system to be established (Modisaotsile, 2012). This would benefit young people because having basic education is essential to navigate through life and the world of work as well as contribute and participate in the systems mentioned above.

#### Job opportunities

Even though the government has implemented policies such as affirmative action, the unemployed rate is still high for black people. According to the YU (2013) findings, as compared to adults, a high percentage of young people are classified as either a work-seekers (a person who is not actively looking for a job, or a person who remains unemployed after

unsuccessfully looking for a job for long periods of time); or as a narrow unemployed (people with previous work experience and are actively looking for jobs). Black people are expected to compete for jobs with privileged people under unequal circumstances, which includes demographic, geographical area, training accomplishments. The discouraged work-seekers probably do not have work experience and live in provinces that are perceived to have low employment opportunities, which includes provinces such as Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (YU, 2013). It is a great challenge and concern for these young people who reside in areas that are underdeveloped, because of the limited job opportunities. Nong's (2016) study emphasised the importance of having access to career information, as it build the bridge between choosing a tertiary course and preparing a person for the work environment; because information is necessary for a person for make an informed decision

#### Technological advances

Nong (2016) emphasises incorporating technology as essential in changing how the current generation learn because it is perceived as interesting and appealing. Therefore, it would make a difference for learners to have access to technology (internet) earlier on in their schooling to be able to research essential career information; because this would also teach them the necessary skills needed to search for information. As future employees, young people have to constantly adapt to accommodate changes in the workplace. Halpern (2005) points out that we live in an era where technology constantly advances in the work place and economically, this means that previous generations are required to stay abreast in order to maintain their socioeconomic position. Maree (2012) notes that to keep up with technological advances it is vital for employees to develop a lifelong learning attitude, they need continuous professional development in the form of training and gaining skills to be able to stay relevant in an extremely competitive work environment.

## **2.7 Rationale for the Study**

### **2.7.1 Previous Studies**

In their study based in Germany with a group of youth between the ages of 20-29, Reitzle, Vondracek, and Silbereisen (1998) support the concerns expressed in the previous section that though youth may experience the same issues in their milieu, there are significant differences in their primary experiences of career development because of environment and conditions they live in. The study focused on young people's timing of transitioning from school to work. Their study was conducted in two very different areas in Germany: their findings indicated that people's different environmental issues affect the timing an individual would transition from school to work. They found that the education system affects the timing people complete their schooling, which in turn may delay their career decision making depending on the area they lived in. They also found that parents who expect their children to succeed are more inclined to inspire them to envision their future careers, which helps the child to decide on a career earlier on. Particularly for males, the inquiry showed that unemployed or absent parents (mainly fathers) appear to play a significant role in the male children entering the work place earlier, because they are required to take on the parent role. This illustrates that family circumstances and socio-economic conditions impact on the school to work transition and emphasises the importance of intervening with a career intervention at this stage.

The Spencer (1999) inquiry in KZN aimed to explore the possibility of using a career education programme (CEP) as a way to assist black students (who were in a bridging programme between school and university) at an institution of higher learning at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, to gain self-understanding concerning career planning and decision making, increasing their knowledge about occupations and the world of work. The sample was 135 students who registered for the CEP, part of the Science

Foundation Programme (SFP). The programme concentrated on the macro- and micro-contextual issues that characterised the students' lived experiences, which were significant in prompting their career decisions. The researcher used the developmental-contextual framework of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986) for her study. There are few published studies nationally and internationally that appear to have utilized this model.

The inquiry was both quantitative and qualitative in nature and took an exploratory, descriptive and interpretive approach. Initially Spencer (1999) had no pre-prepared methodology because of the ever-changing environment in which the study was undertaken, the methodology employed emanated from what materialized from the programme, based upon action research. Spencer's study revealed that it is essential to understand career information when positioned in an individual's context rather than when viewed separately. The findings also indicated that in addition to using existing career development methods, it is important for individuals to participate in exploratory career conversations. By being involved in the educational group the participants were able to gain collective knowledge. The research indicated that when working from a multicultural approach it is too restrictive to employ an individualistic approach.

As a way to extend the existing but limited literature it was important to draw from Spencer's (1999) inquiry through the implementation of a focus group using the developmental contextual model of career development. For example, participants indicated that the FGS provided them with a space to learn and teach each other skills, gain self-confidence, and become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

### 2.7.2 Current Study

As SAQA (2009) argues, the career education programme materials utilised in SA are not rooted in appropriate research. Based upon the earlier study by Spencer (1999), this study aims to explore the developmental-contextual model as the basis of sequential group

discussions at a decision-making point in the lives of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition, it aimed to explore the provision of career education to the youth and the influence of this on their career decision making and aspirations.

The rationale of this study is to understand:

1. The themes that emerge through group discussion with youth from a disadvantaged background; the evidence of effects on their self-knowledge and their knowledge about careers.
2. The factors that influence career decision-making, including their reports of sources of career information and influences.
3. The reports of group members about their experiences of this developmental-contextual form of career exploration.

The information discussed above supports ideas that career education and career information are vital for any individual to progress in life. Without knowledge and the chance to interrogate and discuss life issues (careers included), the youths from a disadvantaged background have limitations in terms of which careers they would aspire to.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The intention of this study is to find alternative and suitable ways to conduct career education with young people other than doing one-one counselling and focusing on career assessments. The information obtained hopes to provide support for the career education intervention to be implemented, in order to find practical ways to assist young people to get an opportunity to discuss career issues, make informed decisions, make preparations to follow in a particular career path, and explore their career options that is to develop their career aspirations. In the next chapter the focus will be on the methodology and approaches to data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The methodology chosen for this study is interpretive in nature. According to Maree (2012) “interpretive studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meaning that people assign to them” (p.59). This perspective attempts to understand the associations people draw from their social interactions. This study followed a qualitative design (Creswell, 2007) because the purpose of a qualitative approach is to define and understand people’s behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Maree (2008) qualitative methodology aims at exploring the “why” questions of research and it is also concerned with understanding the motivations in the different behavioural patterns that can be identified in social and cultural context. The research methodology is more related to inductive and exploratory research projects (De Vos, Strydom, Founche, & Delpont, 2011). The aim was to create a platform for participants to have discussions on careers, to explore and share information within a group of peers.

### **3.2 Research Question and Aims**

This research attempts to understand the experiences of young people when they explore career information through the developmental-contextual model. The following questions were investigated: what aspects of self-knowledge emerged during the group discussions?

- 1a. Where do participants access knowledge about careers?
- 1b. What are the factors influencing career decision making?
2. What are family roles in their decision-making process?
3. What are the contextual factors involved?
4. What is the impact of exploring career issues through group discussions?

These questions were informed by the themes that emerged through group discussion with youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **3.3 Design**

A qualitative approach to this research was taken, within an overarching framework of Action Research using focus groups as a basis. According to Maree (2008), action research can be used in various contexts such as communities, schools, and NGO's. Action research is the way in which participants work together to find practical solutions to their problems (Maree 2008). Reason and Bradbury (2008) highlight the role of action research in prompting discussions about important issues. Action research was deemed appropriate for this study because it attempts to take cognisance of the complex dynamics found in social context, unlike experiments or quantitative research which focus on making links between variables (Stringer, 2014). Interacting with the participants assisted with eliciting relevant information required to answer the research questions.

Maree (2012) explains that the process of collecting and analysing data from an action research perspective is cyclic in nature, the participants are the experts of the research problems, it is imperative that they work collaboratively with the researcher to implement the research. Stringer (2014) emphasises that favourable working relationships and effective communication styles can be constructed through a collaborative approach to an investigation. Action research has the potential to engender powerful learning for participants through combining research with reflection on practice. The development of self – understanding is important in action research, because of the extent to which the analysis of data and interpretative processes of developing meaning involves the self as a research instrument (Somekh, 2006).

De Vos et al., (2011) describe the power of focus groups as being to expose realities and investigate complex situations. For a group to reach its objective and develop balanced relationships, it is necessary for the participants to engage in communication (Stringer, 2014). Using focus groups was the main research procedure used to collect data. Focus groups were appropriate for this method because they offer people the space to interact and construct meaning within a group instead of individually (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This approach concentrates on trying to comprehend people's problems as a way to come up with interventions (Maree, 2008). When people go through the process of communicating, their experiences allow them to gain better understandings of the events that take place in their lives. In addition, when working with groups the researcher gains insight into the various ways people use to communicate with each other in daily interaction such as their narratives, shared humour, and conflict styles (Kitzinger, 1995).

Focus groups were used because they are better at gaining the opinions of the individuals and because of their "unstructured but guided form of discussing topics of interests with a group of individuals" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.109). In addition, the benefit of using group discussion rather than individual interviews is that participants get the chance to explore, expand and elucidate their opinions without restrictions (Kitzinger, 1995). Group discussions were valuable for participants because these offered the platform to learn from each other, bounce ideas off one another, express their beliefs and engage freely in discussions that they normally would not engage with their family members or older people.

### **3.4 Sampling and Participants' Recruitment**

#### Participants

The sampling process involved non-probability purposive sampling. Tansey (2007) notes that in this sampling technique, selection does not rely on chance. It is differentiated from other sampling techniques because the researcher chooses who to include. Purposive

sampling is a technique whereby the research aim and the researcher's familiarity with the population directs the process. The participants selected were unemployed students who were currently not in a tertiary institution nor working, between the ages of 18-25 years. The aim was to recruit participants from an economically disadvantaged background. They were recruited from a local organisation, which offers an educational programme intended to provide matriculants with a second chance to upgrade their matric results, as well as offering the individuals career-related services. The main intention is for them to gain access to institutions of higher learning. It seemed realistic to approach this educational organisation as it best represented the demographic the research was targeting. It also helped to have the principal and members of the staff interested and willing to assist. I provided the stakeholders with the letter of ethical clearance and recruitment email (see Appendix A and B) to inform them of my research.

After negotiating with the management of the NGO, it was agreed that a research advert would be placed on the school's notice board and circulated to students within their respective classes. Interested participants were encouraged to sign up at the principal's office and within a period of a week, interested participants had signed up for the focus group. Following the signup, there was a brief meeting between the participants, the school principal and the researcher; this gave the researcher an opportunity to explain the research topic. The participants were given an opportunity to clarify their concerns before they made their final decisions to participate in the focus group. During the meeting various concerns were addressed, which included the purpose of the study, consent, duration of the focus group, incentives, time allocated for the focus group and other logistics. It was agreed that for the convenience of the participants the focus groups would be held within the school facilities. The incentive agreements included snacks being offered during the focus groups and for those participants who lived out of town, their transport costs were covered. The focus groups

were held after school in the afternoon and it would be safer for the participants to catch a taxi afterwards instead of walking home.

Recruitment processes are not always straightforward; one needs to leave room for the unexpected. In the first meeting that included the principal, five students attended and were requested to recruit more participants from their circle of friends. In addition, here a form of ‘snowball sampling’ was used to assist the researcher to reach more participants. The participants were requested to approach other people who might be experiencing a similar uncertainty about their careers in the school to take part in the research (De Vos et al., 2011). In total 10 participants prior to the first focus group meeting were interested to join the focus group (five male and five females); however, in the end the focus groups comprised nine participants. It was not anticipated that there might be a mixture of participants in terms of ethnicity, but there was and the group comprised of seven black participants, one white participant and one coloured participant. The researcher wrongly assumed that since the educational programme seemed to be targeting economically disadvantaged individuals the participants would only be black students. It was also noted that most of the participants joined the focus group because the advert mentioned that the researcher was studying towards a Masters in psychology. Most of them had thought the group focused on providing career information in the field of psychology, because participants had an interest in studying towards a qualification in psychology or being part of a helping profession.

Table 1 - Participants' Information

Participant identifier	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade (Matric upgrade)	Home	Home language	Mobile phone	Access to internet	Number of siblings	Birth order	Career interests
P1	18	F	Black	12	Port Alfred	IsiXhosa	Yes	Yes	3	Middle child	Psychology Nursing Hospitality management
P2	20	M	Black	12	Grahamstown	IsiXhosa	Yes	No	5	Youngest	Law logistics Auditing
P3	20	M	Black	12	Port Alfred	IsiXhosa	Yes	Yes	3	Oldest	Teaching Psychology Law/Acting
P4	21	M	Black	12	East London	IsiXhosa	Yes	Yes	4	Middle child	Marketing
P5	22	M	White	12	Grahamstown	English	Yes	Yes	1	Only child	Sport psychology Industrial psychology Human Resources
P6	18	F	Black	12	Grahamstown	IsiXhosa	Yes	Yes	6	Second born	Psychology Education Law
P7	22	F	Black	12	Grahamstown	IsiXhosa	No	No	2	Youngest	Social work Psychology
P8	20	F	Black	12	Grahamstown	IsiXhosa	No	Yes	4	Youngest	Psychology Social work Education
P9	18	F	Coloured	12	Grahamstown	Afrikaans	Yes	Yes	2	Oldest	Psychology Prison warden Nurse

There was diversity amongst the group, even though the participants were drawn from the same education programme. The participants were from different backgrounds and cultural groups. The diversity in the group ranged by age (18-22), gender, ethnicity, home language, access to technology (mobile phone and internet), birth order and number of siblings, as well as their career interests.

### 3.5 Data Collection Tools

To record the group's interactions, during this study multiple data collection techniques were used which included field notes, focus group interviews, questionnaires and observations (Stringer, 2014).

Focus groups interviews: Morgan (1996) describes focus groups as method used to collect information through an interaction between groups of people discussing a topic chosen by a researcher. The focus groups method was used because it take place in a natural context unlike other methods of data collection such as surveys or laboratory settings. The focus group was deemed ideal for this inquiry because they allow participants to engage and

interact on a topic and this would also provide the researcher with instant feedback on how the group members react to each other's responses (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Maree (2012) states that the researcher should take caution while observing the group's interaction and experience, because even though focus group interviews might provide in-depth information, some participants could find the group setting to be intimidating. The use of a questionnaire assisted the researcher to gather a range of information about the participants, which included demographic and background, while open-ended questions were used to elicit specific information pertaining to some of the factors that influence participants', career decision making (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 2000).

Observations: The participants were observed within their context, and the researcher occupied the role of the participant observer. According to Banister (2011) observation can be defined as normal behaviour that takes place in any context. For example, by observing the group members, the researcher has the chance to get a better understanding of the research setting (Stringer, 2014). Maree (2012b) notes that the researcher works collaboratively with the participants to come up with suitable interventions, because the researcher takes on the role of a participant in the observed setting. This gives the researcher the privileges to intervene as part of the group or as an insider. It is also important for researchers to be aware of their role, as Wisker (2001) argued that participant observation could be harmful and nullify the results, because during observation the researcher is bound to become a part of the people he or she would be observing. It is important that the researcher then becomes aware and cautions of the role they play during these interactions with participants.

Documents: The field notes and the reflective journal formed part of recording and capturing of evidence, these documents assisted with the data collection, analysis and interpretation processes. Aspects of these reflections will be noted in the findings. The

researcher used field notes to accurately and chronologically record what was observed (seen and heard) and how the participants interacted in the setting (De Vos et al., 2011). It was also crucial for the researcher to chronologically arrange the notes as this would make them more reliable (Silverman, 2013). The reflective journal was intended to help the researcher maintain transparency during this process. This allowed the researcher to critically reflect on the entire research inquiry and provide evidence of their views, beliefs and feelings, as well as methodological procedures (Ortlipp, 2008).

Audio-visual material: The participants were asked questions, both an audio and video recorder were used to record the interviews. The video was used to assist with transcription and identities of participants, but not for further video analysis. Transcriptions entail the conversion of verbal language into textual data (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). The recordings were used to transcribe (verbatim) the information needed for data analysis. In session five, follow-up questions were asked to gather a richer understanding of the students' experiences. These materials assisted the researcher to accurately transcribe the information discussed during these focus groups.

### **3.6 Procedures for Data Collection**

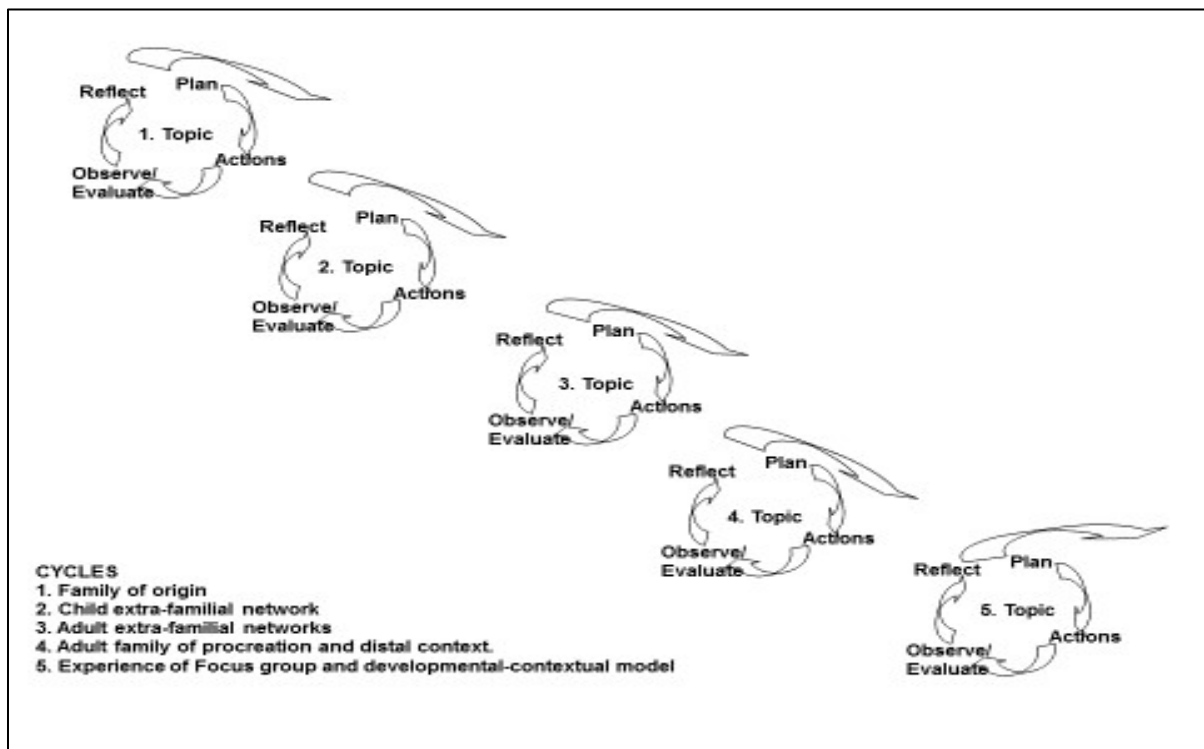
The methodology framework used for data collection was Action Research. According to Somekh (2006) this kind of research is exploratory to check the efficacy of models of knowledge. Furthermore, Stringer (2014) explains that action research integrates research and action in a series of flexible cycles, rather than as separate steps. These steps and cycles provide direction for participants to track their development as they proceed. Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Zuber-Skerritt, (2002) explained the diagrammatic model as a spiral of action research cycles each involving four phases which include planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. These were the steps that guided the unfolding sessions, with each session building on the previous one (each including reflections with the supervisor between

cycles), with the intent of having deeper understanding of the material as discussed by the group.

### 3.7 The Data Collection Phase

The research was done on a small scale, the recruitment and the data collection processes took place within a period of four months from February to May. It was important that data be collected by end of May because of the participants' annual school schedule. If extended longer, the focus groups would interfere with the students' preparation for their May/June examinations. The focus group sessions were held once a week over a period of five weeks. For each week different career-related topics were discussed within the group; these topics were based on the various aspects of the developmental-contextual framework of career development as noted 1-5 in the diagram below.

Diagram 2: Action Research Cycles



### 3.8 Procedures for Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing non-linear process that explains that gathering information, processing, reporting, examining it, is an integrated process and not simply a sequence to be followed (Maree, 2012). As Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) note, qualitative data analysis involves repetitively going through the captured data in order to group the data in categories and themes, at the same time coming up with new ways to elaborate and interpret it.

Data were analysed using template analysis, which Brooks and King (2012) describe as a method used to categorise and analyse qualitative information into themes. They explain this form of analysis as a process in which the researcher compiles a template of categories decided beforehand, which then lead to coding. In Brooks, Mccluskey, Turley, and King (2015), they indicate the possibility of themes being defined by the researcher *a priori*, permitting the researcher to construct themes before the process of analysis begins. This kind of analysis helps the researcher to pay attention to the question that needs to be answered.

Brooks and King (2012) highlighted the following main procedural and flexible steps involved in template analysis, which a researcher can adapt according to the requirement of the research project. Firstly, it is essential for the researcher to acquaint themselves with the raw information that needs to be analysed. Depending on the size (time length) of the interviews, for minimal interviews the researcher could go over all the data at once, while for large-scale interviews they could consider beginning with subsets of the transcriptions. Since each focus group interview was a complex interplay between members, each of the five transcriptions was analysed at a different time. The next phase, which is similar to other thematic methods, involves the coding of the information. This is done by highlighting relevant and applicable written data, which also assists in understanding the research

question. Brooks and King (2012) explain that the researcher then arranges the template in a hierarchical structure in such a way to explain the relationship between the identified themes.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

#### **3.9.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation**

Permission to commence with the focus group sessions was granted by the relevant Rhodes University ethics committee (see Appendix A). Prior to the first group meeting, the participants were presented with an ethical clearance letter and consent form (copies provided in Appendix C), which had details about the study; what is expected of their participation, the duration, and time commitments. The participants were given an opportunity to read the document, to ask questions, and those who were willing to participate in the study signed the written consent form. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the focus group session at any time should they wish to do so. Furthermore, the participants were made aware that each focus group session would be audio and video recorded to assist in the processing of data.

#### **3.9.2 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity**

To address the group's privacy and anonymity and as a way to protect the participants' identities, any other identifying information has been disguised and any names will be presented as pseudonyms. Participants were assured that their details would be excluded from the write up of the results and only the researcher and her supervisor would have access to raw data, in which participants might be identified.

To maintain confidentiality, the participants were informed that the electronic data collected during the group discussion would be stored on a password-protected computer, and backed up on a password-protected drive, which is securely locked away. The data collected from participants would not be used for any other use besides the current study and any

potential resultant publications. All the video and audio recordings would be destroyed once the study is completed.

During the focus group session's participants would not be exposed to any physical, emotional, or psychological harm, however the nature of the information that was to be shared was private and sensitive. To protect them from any possible harm, the participants were encouraged to seek professional assistance should they require debriefing, career counselling or psychological services. They were provided with information about the psychological services offered in the surrounding area and at the University's Psychology Clinic should they require any of the abovementioned services during or after the study.

### 3.9.3 Credibility of research

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) emphasise that without consistency in any research project, the research tends to become insignificant. They also highlight the need for verification, a process of scrutinizing, approving and ensuring accuracy and dependability (Golafshani, 2003). This was done through triangulation, by using observation journal notes to complement the transcripts and the supervisor of this also scrutinising the data.

For the study to be valid and reliable, it is necessary to choose a sample of participants who are suitable and are familiar with the subject matter of the study. My roles as a researcher were to conduct the research, transcribe and analyse the textual data. I had to compile and present the results and findings. It was crucial that I maintain professionalism, abide by ethics and constantly be reflexive in all of these activities.

The following chapter is a summary of the findings in response to the questions posed in subsection 3.2 above. The chapter describes the unfolding of the action research cycles before highlighting the themes that emerged from the template analysis, incorporating illustrative excerpts from the participants.

## Chapter 4 - Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

As indicated in the methodology chapter, this study aimed to understand the experiences of young people from a disadvantaged background when they explore career information through the developmental-contextual model, in a series of FGS. The data collection and analysis procedures have been outlined in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the findings are based on what emerged during the FGS, drawing from the participants' discussions about career related issues.

The sample consisted of both male and female participants between the ages of 18-25 years, who obtained their grade 12, who were unemployed, and were not in an institution of higher learning during the study. The data were collected using a framework of action research, through a series of focus group discussions. In each FGS, the participants discussed a topic chosen by the researcher based on each of the cycles of the developmental-contextual model. Even though an outline of questions was prepared prior each FGS, follow up questions were generated from the participants' responses to further guide the topic discussed. Data were captured and tracked through a reflective journal and both audio and video recordings.

This chapter is arranged according to the research questions posed in section 3.2. The results are organised into two sections. The first section will cover the FGS process, which looks at the progression of the focus groups. The second section covers the content, in which information about the research questions and the themes that emerged from the data analysed will be presented. The research questions focused on understanding the participants' experiences of discussing career issues in various contexts as well as the meaning and influence attached to these discussions.

#### **4.2 Section 1: Focus group process**

The focus groups comprised five sequential sessions on a weekly basis. In each week, the participants would discuss a career-related topic based on the different aspects of developmental-contextual framework of career development. To help guide the group discussions and to gather sufficient data, various activities were completed. The focus of each session was to gather information about the factors that influenced the participants' career decision-making, looking at the dynamic relationships between the different contexts and the individual. It was discovered during the reflection phase in each cycle that not all the themes that emerged aligned with the topic of the week or with what the researcher assumed would be discussed in each FGS. Each session took a direction of its own.

It is important to provide a detailed account of the process that took place in preparation for each FGS. A collaboration between the researcher and participants was required to foster equal involvement. However, it was noted that participants leaned on the researcher to take control. The group members were not keen to make an input when requested to come up with topics they wanted to include in the weekly discussions. They preferred group discussions to completing written task or homework tasks.

The group showed commitment to the FGS. The attendance was generally consistent and regular for most participants, while for some attendance was disrupted by personal priorities and responsibilities. All the participants attended three FGS out of the five. There was a minimum of six and a maximum of nine participants present during each FGS. Four out of the nine participants attended all the FGS as shown in the table below.

Table 2 Number of Participants (n)

Sessions	Female	Male
FGS 1	5	4
FGS 2	4	3
FGS 3	4	2
FGS 4	5	4
FGS 5	5	4

Below are the summaries of what transpired during each cycle of the FGS. A summary on a page (SOAP) method was used to document the data and in the table a list of the topics discussed each session is provided.

Table 3 - Focus Group Sessions (FGS)

FGS	Topics
FGS 1	Family of origin
FGS 2	Child extra-familial network
FGS 3	Adult extra-familial networks
FGS 4	Adult family of procreation and distal context.
FGS 5	Experience of Focus group and developmental contextual model

## Cycle 1 FGS1: Family of origin

*Planning:* As the first session, the focus was on introductions, and to prepare any documents that needed signing as well as the activities for the session. The idea was to gather information about the participants' backgrounds by using different resources and completing various activities. We discussed the family of origin topic, which aims at discussing career influences - looking at their family background and family networks.

*Action:* Arrived on time to set-up the room. Explained the research project, we discussed the consent form, the outline of the program, the rules and norms of the group, incentives (taxi fare and provision of food during each session) and I encouraged the participants to suggest the topics/questions they would like to cover during these sessions. The participants completed the biographical questionnaire (see Appendix D for this) and then I facilitated the group discussions on the topic.

*Observation and Evaluation:* Group participation in the discussions was low in the beginning. Towards the end of the session, they appeared relaxed and they engaged more freely. They were familiarising themselves with each other and the setting. Discussing this topic provoked a lot of emotion in some of the participants with one male participant becoming especially emotional.

*Reflections:* I did not expect the group to comprise of people of different races and ethnicity. I was concerned with group dynamic and language barriers. Most participants are interested in pursuing a career in psychology. I realised that is important to provide a safe and containing space for the participants because the information discussed is sensitive, though confidential, can make them feel vulnerable.

## Cycle 2 FGS2: Child extra-familial network

*Planning:* To discuss the extra- familial network topic, which includes career decisions looking at peers, part-time work, and school. I compiled the following activities for this session: a list of questions to be discussed to guide the group discussion, a family tree activity (see Appendix E), and planned to give them a career cluster interest survey, which can be found at: <https://careertech.org/> for homework (see Appendix F) for the instructions for this survey.

*Action:* Reflected on the last session, and then followed by the completion and discussion of the family tree. Lastly, we discussed some of the questions related to today's topic. We also discussed the psychological services provided by both the Rhodes University psychology clinic and the counselling and career centre, for those who might want to utilise these services.

*Observing and Evaluating:* The participants were more engaging and participated freely. Noted that participants prefer group discussions to completing questionnaires and homework tasks. I noted that most participants are interested following careers in the helping profession, especially the field of psychology. Attendance was affected by the participants' other priorities, with most of them trying to find a balance between academic and personal responsibilities and trying to find time to attend the focus group sessions.

*Reflection:* According the participants being part of the focus group provided them with an opportunity to discuss career issues with their peers because in the past, such discussion never took place or they were not discussed in depth. From the discussion, it was evident that career discussions are limited in their home and social environments. Nonetheless, they felt it was crucial for such discussions to take place.

## Cycle 3 FGS 3: Adult extra-familial networks

*Planning:* Preparing the questions for this topic gave me an idea to give the participants homework to write a letter to their younger selves, asking what they would like their younger self to know about career decision making by the time they reach the age they are currently at: to find out about their experience and access to career resources. I will ask them to contact KHETHA (see Appendix G) and they share their experience in the next session.

*Action:* The group reflected on the career cluster homework. The participants had mixed feelings about the activity. Some experienced it as frustrating, for some it brought further confusion about the career path they should follow. However, the majority found it to be helpful as it required them to reflect on their career and personal interests, the world of work and education. Discussed the next homework: letter to younger self.

*Observing and evaluation:* The group seemed distracted and the participation was low, I was made aware that it was test week and most of the participants were concerned about getting enough time to prepare.

*Reflecting:* Participants are sensitive to each other's feelings. They are quick to rectify the situation if they think they have offended someone. They are able to resolve conflict when it arises and tend to diffuse it by using jokes or humour. They are able to challenge each other's opinions in a healthy manner. As a collective, they requested that one of the more outspoken participants be the last one to respond to most questions. This would provide them with the chance to fully express their thoughts without feeling as if she had expressed most things they wanted to say.

Cycle 4 FGS4: Adult family of procreation and distal context

*Planning:* We shall discuss feedback on the letter homework. The group's reaction during the second and third session made me realise that maybe I should refrain from giving homework, so in the two remaining sessions, the focus would solely be on group discussions.

*Action:* The group discussed various sources of information, career services and a career booklet called APPLY NOW produced by DHET (see Appendix G). The booklet was distributed at their school. I suggested that the participants forward a "Please Call Me" (cellular phone message) to the Career Development Service Helpline to see if they will get a response and to evaluate the service offered for young people. The experiment would be discussed further in the next session.

*Observing and evaluation:* Today, the participants led the discussion more than in the previous sessions. They voiced their opinions freely and seemed to enjoy the debate. This proved to be an interesting discussion, which led to a debate about privilege, personal choices, and destiny. They were concerned that they went off topic and apologised.

*Reflecting:* The participants' debate affirmed my assumption that young people need the platform and opportunity to discuss career related issues. Being part of the group made me realise the importance of providing space for youth to have these discussions with their peers. During the debate, the participants raise opinions without disrespecting and disregarding each other's opinions. It was disappointing that only one participant submitted their letter. Their reluctance might be because like the first session, the letters required they share their personal and intimate information with others.

## Cycle 5 FGS5: Experience of Focus group and developmental-contextual model

*Planning:* Preparation for the farewell celebration. Discussed their experience of engaging with the KHETHA advisors. I compiled an easy to read information leaflet (see Appendix H), containing career planning tips and information about the services and details of the psychology clinic.

*Action:* We celebrated the last session with cake and juice. Group's reflection about their experience of engaging with the advisors from the career development service KHETA. I explained the process of the focus group sessions using action research and the Vondracek model. I summarised and reflected on each group session focusing on the things we discussed.

*Observing and evaluation:* Endings are never easy; the group participation was low and the group felt sad because it was the last session. Even though most of them were still uncertain about their career choices, they did seem interested in utilising the psychology service provided at the Rhodes psychology clinic.

*Reflecting:* The participants' experiences of the group sessions varied. Some explained their experience as similar to that of being part of an edutainment series or show such as 'Soul Buddies' giving it a sense of peer learning. For some, these discussions were either a confirmation of their initial career choices, for others it created further uncertainties, for others it led to change in their career paths or ideas to consider other paths.

### 4.3 Section 2: Content

This section provides an account of the content of the FGS. From the focus group interviews with the participants, it was found that an individual's decision to choose a career path is influenced by a variety of factors. During the discussions, it was noted that the participants had limited exposure to career dialogues in both home and social environments. There are themes that emerged the ways participants' words provided answers to the research questions as covered below in each sub-section. A description of the main aspects of the content is then followed by one or more extracts in italics that provide evidence to support the assertions.

#### 4.3.1 Knowledge

There are various aspects of self-knowledge that emerged during the group discussions. The whole group mutually agreed that self-knowledge is crucial in the process of making an informed career decision. Various themes emerged under self-knowledge, which include self-concepts (values and motivation), personality traits and self-awareness. How individuals perceive themselves is crucial, as it forms the foundation of self-knowledge.

##### 4.3.1.1 Self- concept (Values and motivation)

Some participants reported that growing up in a disadvantaged environment influenced their values. At a young age, they valued money and this motivated them to want to follow in a particular career path. However, as they grew older their mind-set and values changed. They realised the value of being in a career that a person is passionate about, as opposed to being in a career that would only lead to financial wealth as evidenced in the excerpt to follow.

*P1: Well for me growing up I did not take something that I thought I would be interested in... But it was all about the money. Since growing up like you had that mentally to have to work for your parents, earn money for the family and*

*you didn't grow up privileged as the other people so it was all about the money for me but now, I realised that you have to do something you enjoy and find interesting yah. (FGS 1)*

#### 4.3.1.2 Personality traits

According to the participants, personality traits are an important factor in the process of choosing a career path. Most participants believe that there are personality traits that are aligned specifically with the various career fields. Individuals need to have specific personality traits to work in certain career fields.

*P6 Ya, it is like... kind of certain careers for certain groups, certain qualities. (FGS 3)*

*P1 ... but we also have our individual characteristic, which suit our different career fields. (FGS 3)*

#### 4.3.1.3 Self-awareness

The group stressed that self-awareness is at the root of deciding on a good career fit. The participants emphasised that individuals who lacked self-awareness and those who are uncertain about their future, found it challenging to choose a suitable career. They all agreed that self-awareness plays a key role in how individuals perceive themselves. Furthermore acquiring knowledge about the career you want to go into would help one to know if you have the interest, skill, talent, capabilities required. Participants mentioned that doing online research and speaking to people working in these fields are some of the ways to expand their knowledge.

*P5: Information is key, I do not know. Extensive knowledge of yourself. Ya! That is about it. Also if you want to choose a career. First look at it, you go and see it. (FGS 2)*

*P7 First of all you need to know yourself and know what you want in life... And, then be someone who is hungry for knowledge. Then you get information from the internet. You get some people you ask...Like have interviews with them. You ask them all the things you want to know. (FGS 2)*

*P6 Information, yes, knowing yourself. If you are capable of doing it, cause if you really want to do it. You will make ways to be capable to do it. Information and knowing yourself. (FGS 2)*

#### 4.3.1.4 Motivation to succeed

The motivation to work hard and be successful is what drives most of the participants to want to improve their unsatisfactory life situations. For most participants, an indication of success is when they are able to stand on their own, support, and give back to their immediate and extended family, and even communities. This question led to a debate in FGS3 about what leads people to succeed or not. They mentioned things such as disadvantaged schools, being economically disadvantaged, and lack of access to resources. They also believed individuals have a better chance to succeed if they have been given a chance. They also emphasised that a person's success is motivated by their choices to either give up or not. They implied that there is an expectation from society that learners from an economically disadvantaged background, who have limited access to resources, are incapable of thriving and are expected to fail and stay in unproductive circumstances.

*P6: People compare let's say a person from V with a person from M. Then they be like a person from M can't succeed because people from M do not do anything. Then someone from M achieves more than the person from V. The thing is the person from M chose to work because they wanted to succeed. The one from V chose to waste their resources. (FGS 4)*

*P3: I think success for me is coming from nothing to having something. Making it big you know from nothing. Like facing you family problems, fixing your own problems and still be happy. That is what success is to me. (FGS 3)*

*P4: Success, going through a lot in life and finally having a relief that you have a perfect job. You're living a good life. And when you look back and reflect on where you have been. (FGS 3)*

#### 4.3.1.5 Attitude

It was mentioned in FGS5 by the majority of participants that individuals with a positive attitude are inclined to work hard, have determination, courage, and willpower. The kind of attitude towards life and situations is what can motivate a person to succeed. People that emerge from their bad situations utilise their resources and mostly have a positive attitude.

*P1: Exactly, firstly it's two things the resources and the attitude, you understand. People look at M and say they do not have the resources therefore they are incapable of succeeding ... My darling is not that, you can be born into poverty and you can come out of poverty. That is different. (FGS 4)*

*P2: You choose for yourself. You make a decision to go to school and not drop out. (FGS 4)*

*P3: I think it all comes down to satisfaction if what you are doing satisfies you there is no way of quitting that job. And choosing a career that you know you are going to do for the rest of your life has to be the best thing. (FGS 3)*

#### 4.3.2 Participants' sources of career information

When participants were asked where they accessed knowledge about careers, they mentioned different sources, which include media, institutions, work experience, and brief discussions with their family members about their families' generational career patterns. The group agreed that they had limited career knowledge, even though there are a variety of

sources available for them to access career information. They felt that the information they received from these sources was mostly limited and not beneficial to them.

#### 4.3.2.1 Media

The majority of participants shared that they identified with characters played in their favourite television (TV) programmes. From childhood the participants were exposed to TV, this is where most of them learned about the career they later developed an interest in. The participants found the roles played by their favourite TV characters, their personalities' qualities and attire to be appealing. They saw themselves in these career fields in the future; to some extent, their experience of these characters had an impact on how they think about careers. Their understanding and knowledge of a certain career fields was thus informed by the roles played in these TV programmes and often the features of these were relatively superficial.

*P1: I remember myself wanting to be a lawyer in grade five. Only because it's the soapies that I watched. They have been wearing these high heels and those pencil skirt and I will be like, that is me right there. (FGS 1)*

*P2: ... And law because I took a gap year and my brother like... made me watch a lot of series the Suits and the Good Wife and yah. So it was nice. (FGS 1)*

#### 4.3.2.2 Institutions

The majority of the participants stated that they received career information from institutions; this ranged from their high schools, during the LO period and from attending career exhibitions, where various institutions or organisation presented information about opportunities and services they offered. Most participants indicated their disappointment with the information they received from these institutions. According to their experience of engaging with these institutions, career education is not considered an essential factor; because most institutions of higher learning focus on student recruitment, promoting and

marketing their institutions rather than providing the participants with the fundamental career education required to make an informed career decision.

Participants had different experiences and views about the LO subject. One participant mentioned that her LO schoolteacher provided her with valuable career information; while in other schools, participants reported that the LO period was substituted with other subjects, which meant participants were denied the chance to engage with the LO subject's material.

*P1: From LO is like, when it comes to careers choices. What my teacher did a pretty good job at helping us decide what we want to do... helping us know career choices and knowing that we sure that this is what you want... They did go to our school. But it was more like as a campaign for the universities more than giving education, because they would tell you to go to Varsity College. These certain courses are available ... they do not give you information on the careers and other opportunities you have in certain fields of careers ... When people that did come to our school, they just want you to attend their universities and no proper career guidance was given. (FGS 2)*

*P6: P1 just says everything. There were career fairs at school but it was about colleges and universities and I never really did listen. We always like get life orientation period, but there was no teacher and nobody to coordinate or so we never really listen. (FGS 2)*

#### 4.3.2.3 Work experience

The majority of the participants had various work experiences: some had part time jobs, others volunteered while others helped out in their family business (spaza shop). Only one participant did not have any work experience. The participants were somewhat confused by what work experience entailed. Those participants who had volunteered or worked at their family's businesses did not recognise this as proper work experience. According to most

participants, work experience involves only work that an individual is paid to do. Regardless of whether the participants had work experience or not most of them thought it might be advantageous to gain experience or be exposed to a certain occupation as a way to assess if they are making the right career choice. Some had the opportunity to do a job shadowing for either a day or week.

Most participants saw the importance of having prior work knowledge and conducting thorough research about occupations, to eliminate any unrealistic expectations. They hoped the experience could also confirm if they are heading in what maybe a suitable career path that they are interested and passionate about.

*P4: What I learned about the job is that in terms of the career that I want to pursue in marketing you need the right papers. You have got to have good communication skills and be quite good at your job. Be good at persuading people. (FGS 3)*

*P5 ... But my last job showed me that I am better suited helping people because I get more satisfaction out of it, than just say working for money. (FGS 1)*

*P1: All I want is a day in a life of a clinical psychologist. Just to see, experience that this is what they do. Or even a week maybe, because people are different. I just want to be a fly on the wall for once and experience... Work experience like I said, if working in a spaza shop count then, that was me. I was on the till I was everywhere. (FGS 3)*

*P6: I have volunteered once at a crèche for about a week. ... I feel like I want a proper job where I can see that now I am working and earn money. (FGS 3)*

Some of the participants conducted their own personal research.

*P6: I only...if I was interested in a certain career, I would research myself. (FGS 2)*

*P ...so that is when I had to do my own career search about psychology, nursing and education. (FGS 2)*

It appeared that the information provided through some of these sources did not cater to their needs. Some sources such as institutions concentrated more on recruiting and marketing their institutions rather than providing information about how to make a suitable career decision. It was found that participants did not have intensive careers discussions with their family members. Below are the different sources they used to acquire their career knowledge:

#### 4.3.3 Family Influence

The participants were requested in FGS2 to complete a career family tree worksheet activity (see Appendix E). The activity was meant to promote participants' awareness of the extent to which their family members' career choices have influenced their thinking about careers. According to the results of the worksheet, different responses were offered: some participants had a desire to follow in similar career paths because they were inspired by the work their family members did. Others believed their family members had no influence in their career thinking. Other participants felt they were more compelled to follow in careers such as being educators or public sector servants because it was believed that these jobs provide more opportunities, these occupations are familiar and would offer them financial security. Participants felt family members have limited knowledge of the current career fields, while other participants were encouraged to choose careers they felt was a good fit for them. The findings indicated that, in most cases there were no in-depth discussions about career related information or the reasons most family members chose a certain career path. The following table shows information about the participants' generational career patterns and histories.

Table 4 - Family Tree

Participant identifier	Paternal Family	Maternal Family	Relatives career patterns	Families reasons for choice of career	Participant career choice
P1	Police	Nature conservation Educators	Police Nurses	Advised that some career fields offer more opportunities than most people think.	N/A
P2	Absent from FGS	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
P3	Police Pilot	Educators	Journalist	Not discussed was however, encourage to study further.	Psychology Educator
P4	Educators Auditors	Nurse Educators	Teaching	Encouraged to choose a career option rather than study for any qualification.	N/A
P5	N/A	Navy Security Educators	Teaching	Told to become a teacher.	Psychology Educator Law
P6	Law Nursing Sales Educators	Business	N/A	Advice that past job market had more opportunities; however, current job market are competitive.	N/A
P7	N/A	N/A	Social worker	Encouraged to consider passion and interest.	Social work Psychology
P8	Cleaner Taxi driver Sales	Cleaner Construction Self-employed	None	Encouraged to choose a career that can provide financial security.	Uncertain
P9	Absent from FGS	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

#### 4.3.3.1 Family of origin: family circumstances

Family circumstances have a marked impact on the life decision an individual makes, it affects how people perceive and understand life. Most participants mentioned being raised in unfavourable home environments. Three of the participants had witnessed abuse and violence at home while the majority had absent or distant paternal figures. The majority of the participants felt that family circumstances had to some extent influenced their career choice, while only one participant believed family circumstances did not affect his career decision. This question encouraged them to share personal information. This question evoked intense emotion in one participant. He became emotional when sharing about his experience of being raised in dysfunctional family. Like the rest of the participants, he did not anticipate that answering these questions would elicit such intense emotions.

*P2: You know I grew up with both my parents, my dad was abusing towards my mother and they ended up divorcing. And yah during the course of the time it*

*was a struggle and painful. Yah I didn't talk to people much but as time went by you get used to it you know. (FGS 1)*

*P8: Okay, back home my parents were... my father was an abusive man, and he abused my mother all the time. I think that is what brings me here. (FGS 1)*

*P3: What made me interested in psychology is the type of relationship I had with my father when growing up. The way things were back then with my mom: ... He was never supportive. He was never there for me even though he was around, but I never felt his love. (FGS 1)*

*P4: My career was not affected by what was going on back home. (FGS 1)*

#### 4.3.3.2 Family roles

Family is perceived as the main influencer in the participants' life decisions. An individual is not separate from their families. P1 and P3 realised the kind of relationship one has with family has an impact career decision making.

*P3: What made me interested in psychology is the type of relationship I am having with my father when growing up. The way things were back then with my mom made me to take decision that I never thought I would take as a person. (FGS 1)*

*P1: In what we discussed last week, I kind of figured that a lot of the things that happened at home do influence the choices that we make like our parents. (FGS 2)*

#### 4.3.3.3 Support

Family support means a lot to participants; some participants reported that even though career issues are rarely discussed, their family always provides them with support, even though their families might not fully understand these career fields. On the other hand, some participant have never had support from their family.

*P2: They know I have chosen a career but they do not know much about it. They do not know much about careers. But yeah I have talked to them about it. Yeah, they are supportive (FGS 1)*

*P5: There was never a discussion. Like a lot of people their parents sit them down grade nine and say what subjects are you choosing? What career do you want to do? Even the teachers at my school said you know pick a subject and the career you want to do...But I was supported in all those. (FGS 1)*

*P3: Ah, he was never supportive. He was never there for me even though he was around, but I never felt his love. That is all I ever needed in him, just to believe in me. (FGS 1)*

#### 4.3.3.4 Family's expectations

The participants' family members expect them to further their studies at institutions of higher learning and obtain a qualification and to give back to their community once they are established.

*P1: My parents are okay with my career choice. Actually, they just want me to get an education. (FGS 1)*

*P6: They go with whatever I wanna to do. Just as long as I get my education and succeed. (FGS 1)*

*P4 ... Just that I get a degree. (FGS 1)*

*P3: And my mom ... She says it's good whatever it is that I do as long as I would be giving back to the community. (FGS 1)*

In their responses on both the family tree and biographical information questionnaire it was noted that some participants may be influenced to a different extent by family members' occupations and ideas.

*P9: My mom is okay with what I wanna do, as I said before with my father is just one side. My granny on the other hand believes it's not a good umm career field for me. And ... but actually she wants me to go and work in a government work. Unlike studying for the job that I would like to end up in. (FGS 1)*

*P1 ... most of my aunts were nurses. So like nursing was family thing, everyone here is a nurse (FGS 1)*

From the data gathered during the focus group sessions, the theme that emerged were external and internal factors that influence careers decision making. The external factors highlighted were the role models, family of origin: family circumstances, financial conditions, and social conditions.

#### 4.3.4 External factors

##### 4.3.4.1 Role models

Most of the participants regarded their family members as role models, because they played a significant role in their lives. The majority of participants perceived a parental figure, specifically their mothers as role models. Out of the nine, two participants chose different people: one chose an older brother and the other chose a stranger as their role models. Similar sentiments are shared by most of the participants; they perceived their mothers as superheroes who are able to accomplish anything from the little, they have. They described their mothers as resilient, inspirational, courageous, zealous and reliable. The majority of the participants aspire to be more like their mothers, this can be seen in the extracts below:

*P6: She is the only person I have and she is the only person I think I want to be like that one day.... What inspires me about my mom is that she supports like six children of her own without anyone else to like help her. Even or relative, even*

*she does asks anything from them. She is like... I can't explain it. She is superwomen... I do not know how she does it. She is just amazing. (FGS 2)*

*P4: My older brother is my role model. He bought a new car two days after my birthday so it's like my gift it works out man. ... My brother when something is wrong, I call him, bro this is what is happening. He's got that thing you know, we connect on such deep level. (FGS)*

*P3: My role model has to be someone out there. This guy I first heard about him in 2013. He wasn't famous and all that before. He was just hustling doing his thing... He just inspired me you know. (FGS 2)*

#### 4.3.4.2 Financial Situation

Socio economic status affects the way the participants view life and the attitude they have towards careers. Being economically disadvantaged and living in a community that is impoverished caused a struggle for most participants. Some mentioned that at times their families struggled to provide them with basic needs. Therefore, they grew up with the notion of working to make money, rather than being in an occupation that was deemed interesting and fitting for the individual's attributes. Living below the poverty line shaped or determined the kind of career some participants would want to pursue. Interestingly, some participants shared that as they grew older and with life experience, they began to perceive the value of money as less important.

*P5: Finances ... When I was young there was not a lot of money. So, a lot of the time we had to go without things. But we always had electricity and a place to live. We had all of that, but we didn't live this excessively lavishing life style. (FGS 1)*

*P6: Well for me growing up I did not take something that I thought would be interested in but it I was all about the money. Since growing up like you had*

*that mentality to have to work for your parents, earn money for the family and you didn't grow up privileged as the other people; so it was all about the money for me but now, I realised that you have to do something you enjoy and find interesting. (FGS 1)*

#### 4.3.4.3 Community

Participants reported feeling both encouraged and discouraged to by their social conditions and engagement with their community members. Some were discouraged by the fact that some community members did not believe in their capabilities and potential, while others received positive encouragement. Some reported that people always turned to them for assistance. Those who received positive encouragement felt strongly about uplifting and motivating their community once they begin working, though sometimes the motivation appeared to be more materialistic. They would like to be appreciated, recognised for their hard work and achievement, and mostly to become future role models.

*P7: One of the things that I could say discourages me, is one of those jokes ... They will be like, dude you are doing a course that will like take you for ... that will take a duration of ten years. What if something happens and you die on the ninth year? (FGS 1)*

*P1: I found that people who didn't even really know me that well, and who didn't know if they can trust me or not would tell me their deep darkest and deepest secrets. (FGS 1)*

*P9: The impact that will have on my community is that people will look up to me. They will see what type of person I became after what I went through. (FGS 4)*

*P2: Ah in the community, ah when I come out of that car they see, a, moralist, they see a man with wisdom. They see a legal advisor. That is the impact. (FGS 4)*

#### 4.3.5 Contextual factors

##### 4.3.5.1 Economic conditions

The unemployment rate of the country leads to concerns, as there is no surety that once a person completes their studies, they would immediately find work. Both the participants and their family members are discouraged by the lengthy duration of some of the qualifications the participants want to embark on such as psychology or social work. Some family members are inclined to encourage the participants to embark on qualifications perceived as dependable, have more job opportunities, rather than choosing a career path of their interests.

*P7: The masters, then the PhD ne, then someone will be like you will be studying for all... eh heh for many, many years, and (yes) and you won't even get a job ne. Then what is the use of doing it rather than like studying for something... like let's say in agriculture then you will like be doing ...you get a job... or like you do ihuman resource at some college rather than going to university and studying what you want to do for like about sixteen months and then like you would get a job. Rather than spending three years for the undergrad. (FGS 1)*

*P1: But when my mom found out that my second choice was nursing. She thought I should pursue nursing, because of the opportunities that it has more than psychology. And I would always be the one to raise the issue about employment, whether I would get a job being a psychologist and how long would it take. Would it be worthwhile and all. She would be worried about that and she would be kind of enforce the career of nursing rather than psychology. (FGS 1)*

##### 4.3.5.2 Institutional context

According to the majority of the participants, it is important to know which career you would like to go into. Furthermore, it is important to be equipped with the necessary information such as admission requirements, courses offerings, and institutions of higher

learning. Some participants felt they did not have enough information to make an informed decision, while others were satisfied with the information, they have.

*P3: I think to make the best thing career choice is study hard. At the end of the day marks determine whether you get into this or get into that. These things that I want to do also have requirements. So I guess I have to meet those requirements in order to do whatever it is that I want to do. (FGS 2)*

*P7: If having information about career choices is knowing what you want to do, knowing the institutions you want to go to and knowing how many year it takes I think I have enough information. Yes, all I am short of is just the practical. FGS (2)*

*P3: We can't say enough is enough. Enough is never enough, even this information that I have I do not think it's enough for me to like to be what I want to be. Even though I know what I want to be. (FGS 2)*

#### **4.4 Impact of exploring career issues through group discussions**

The participants appreciated the forum to explore career issues freely and safely amongst peers. Most participants came with their own perceptions and expectations. The majority expected group problems and poor group dynamics. They were pleased that the group conducted themselves ethically; there was no breach of confidentiality outside the FGS. This was an opportunity for the participants to explore career information in a secure and unconfined environment

*P8: For me the way that we shared in the group is, really we must not judge someone. And when you are a psychologist you have to be like ... you have to be professional. You have to have a way of handling people. (FGS 2)*

*P1: I think your questions were basic questions but they triggered a lot of emotions in a lot of us. So I don't know maybe is questions we never really asked*

*ourselves. Or we never considered such but ... maybe it was the platform which we were asked these questions that maybe triggered a lot of emotions. (FGS 2)*

*P3: But I would say it boosted my confidence somehow. This is preparing me for my hustle. Because things were different from how they were a week before. Yah! I think it's because I have never shared that with anyone before. For me to share with people I barely even know, (murmurs of agreement), you know it's something so yah. (FGS 2)*

*P3: I would say what stood out for me was the way that here we have ... in this group. Cause it not that I expected the worst. For me is just that I do not think of them as the way they showed me. Things they were saying I was really impressed. I felt like going on and on about this. Yah. (FGS 2)*

It was all of the participants' first experience being part of a focus group. Some of the participants were concerned about how they would relate to each other because they come from different backgrounds and life experiences. They were impressed to learn about each other's life stories, life experiences and how much all of them have overcome in their lives. According to some of the participants, the FGS helped them think about many things related to career issues and others appreciated the opportunity to explore emotions as well.

Although some were still uncertain, they believed the sessions helped because it enabled them to think about how to plan for what they want to achieve in their lives without judgements being made.

*P7: It does not matter if like... if we come from different houses, like families ne. it does not matter if someone is like clever or not like really clever. Or someone who is like poor or like richer or not rich. (FGS 2)*

*P9: For me it's emotional because it's the last session, probably we won't be together again in this small group. I have also learned a lot and got a lot out of*

*these sessions. Actually I was here four times. But I have a much more understanding of what I want to do. How important studying is, the world out there needs to know people, needs more psychologist. (FGS 5)*

*P3: ...for me I think the answer has been a really heavy one. Even though I might come out here still weighing my options of what exactly is it that I want to do. But I feel like, I know exactly what I am supposed to do, you know... This had been really helpful... Not that I am a judgemental person. But it has thought me lot about people, especially people that you see just as normal people. Like people have stuff you know. Everyone has their skeletons but we are not all about that here. It was almost about our lives, you know planning for what we want to achieve in the future. This has really been helpful. (FGS 5)*

Some participants regarded the experience as like having a family where you could share your intimate and private thoughts, to help you process and think about what you want out of life.

They regarded this as a positive learning experience.

*P7: With me being here it helped me a lot. First of all to have a family like this. Like to be like to talk about what is inside you- that's first. Secondly to know what you want, to know who exactly you are. Who you really are? I do not know what to say, but I learned a lot seriously. (FGS 5)*

*P1: It was great, it was an awesome learning experience. It was very... I would do it again and again. But all good thing have to come to an end. It wasn't what we expected actually. Sometimes we did go off bit topic then we went on again, but it was a good thing that we went to off topic because we saw other things (FGS 5)*

The participants felt the group was accommodating and supportive. They experienced the group as more of a support group than a discussion forum. The FGS was compared to a TV educational programme called *Soul Buddies*. Group members said before they had mostly prejudged each other, however were surprised by the way they interacted, by how they were comfortable to share their private most intimate and personal experiences. Participants mentioned feeling a sense of group cohesion, encouragement and unity.

*P5: I am heartbroken to be parting with this group. Sorry guys it's been fun, have a nice day... No, but it obviously came out at certain points but like P3 said he pre judged everyone. When we got to know each other things were different... I pretty much knew what I wanted to do before I came here. This was a confirmation of what I want to do. (FGS 5)*

*P8: As for me I am so emotional. What I like about each other is that we are professionals. We have been acting professionally. I learned a lot from different characters. (FGS 5)*

#### **4.5 Findings Summary**

The findings revealed various barriers to and influences on how people choose a career path. It highlighted the value to explore career development in focus groups and using the developmental approach, which could benefit the multicultural SA population. It was noted that amongst the career influencers, which include family, peers, role models, teachers, and contexts, parents were the most significant influencers. It was highlighted that mothers were the major influencers because participants experience them as sources of support and providers, while fathers are mostly less recognised as most participants' fathers are either absent from their lives or neglected them, offering them little support.

The findings show that systemic issues continue to affect the job market, education, economy, and society, many institutions, causing young people to be concerned about a lot of issues, despite the current government initiatives and living in a democratic country. They are concerned about the time span of qualifications, or having financial support to study at university as most participants' families cannot afford the expensive university fees. They are concerned with access to equal and fair opportunities as they journey through the world of work, to find jobs so that they can become providers and be independent.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The aim of this study was to explore an alternative career development intervention (based upon the work of Spencer, 1999) using a developmental-contextual model of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986) in a series of group discussions with youth from a disadvantaged background in SA. The intention was to assist these young people to navigate and explore the process of career development and the influences that inspire them to select a specific career pathway.

For discussion purposes, in this chapter aspects of the findings will be considered. The discussion is based on the access to career services and resources; the value of having knowledge about the self and careers; family influences; and contextual variables influencing youths' career decision making; the experience of exploring through group discussions; and the impact of implementing relevant career education interventions in a SA context.

### **5.2 Access to Career Services and Resources**

The literature review highlighted the impact of the apartheid system and the effects of the current context on the youth in SA. The former government had denied Black African people access to adequate basic services, while the latter continues to fail the young people of this country by denying them full and sufficient basic services, which includes the provision of relevant and suitable career education. This failure leads the majority of black youths making misguided career decisions because their sources and access to information and career services are either limited or non-existing (Nong, 2016; Nengwekhulu, 2009; Bojuwoye & Mbanjwa, 2006; Muribwathoho & Shumba, 2006).

Recent studies are beginning to focus on investigating career intervention that could accommodate the SA contexts such as STF and the developmental approach to career

development (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). The literature indicated the importance of the interaction between a person and their environments (Stead, 1996) and the way this influences how people make decisions in all aspects on their lives including decisions about occupations (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Furthermore, careers are constructed throughout one's life span as argued by Super (1980), that is why it is crucial to meet people's needs, to easily access career services and resources at any point in their lives, with the intentions to help them construct their careers appropriately.

The findings indicated that participants' career knowledge, and decision making is impacted by the lack of adequate career services and resources. They experience the services accessible to them, which includes career exhibitions provided by institution of higher learning and companies as well as the information they receive during their LO subject, as limited and insufficient. It appears that in most schools the LO period is used for other subjects such as mathematics and physical sciences, which means the students do not get to be taught some of the fundamentals of the LO curriculum which includes career guidance. The career exhibitions offered by institutions or companies they attended left the participants feeling disappointed because the focus was on student recruitment and the marketing of their services, neglecting to provide students with the basic information to make an informed career choice.

The findings showed that the majority of participants developed an interest in certain careers from the TV programmes. Their TV characters made these occupations appealing, igniting an interest and also impacting on how they think about their certain career fields. This was so, even though the information portrayed by these characters was relatively superficial in most cases.

### **5.3 The Value of Having Knowledge about the Self and Careers**

The themes that emerged regarding self-knowledge included an individual's self-concept including motivation and values, their personality traits and self-awareness. This resonates with Super (as cited in Watson & Stead, 2017) as he argues that Self-concept forms the foundation of how a person chooses a career. The participants believed and emphasised that the above-mentioned are essential to the type of occupation an individual will eventually select.

It was highlighted that their environments have an impact on their values systems. The Schwartz (2012, p.3) study explained that values can be used to track change over the course of time as well as give reasons for people's "behaviour and attitude". Values are likely to change as people grow and develop in life experiences. Most participants expressed a noticeable change in what they valued as they grow older, some reported a shift from valuing only occupations that can provide them with monetary things to choosing an occupation that would provide them with personal fulfilment.

In the findings the participants indicated that specific personality traits are aligned to a specific jobs, a person needs to have a specific personality trait to work in certain career field. Theorists such as Holland (1997) argued that there is a link between personality and occupations. The participants also believed that individuals need to do the necessary personal introspection and occupation research to be able to learn more about who they are and to search for their niche. Through the FGS, the participants valued the opportunity to extend their self-knowledge.

### **5.4 Family Influences**

Schmitt-Rodermund, and Vondracek (1999) highlight that people choose career paths in different ways: such as through persuasion from others or by following in their family's career path or through exploring the best option that would be aligned to their personality and

career visions. The findings of this study indicate that a person's family of origin seems to matter most. It appears in most cases family members hope that participants will choose occupations they suggest, even though most participants reported seldom having in-depth conversation about careers with their families. The findings seem to suggest that participants have an appreciation for the overall strong support they report receiving from their immediate family members, mainly their mothers. Mothers are maintained to be the main sources of support, encouragement and strength, while fathers were experienced in a more negative light, because most participants felt that their fathers were either absent, neglected them or did not meet their overall needs. The findings about the mothers being the key career influencers resonate with previous studies by Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa, (2006); Shumba and Naong, (2012) who found that family, peers and teacher are some of the main career influencers, with mothers perceived as the prominent influencer.

### **5.5 Contextual Variables Influencing Youth's Career Decision Making**

The ecological interaction Bronfenbrenner (1979) between the participants and the various interrelated contexts has an influence on the decision they make regarding their careers. Findings show that the education system in our country has not been optimised, because every person needs some form of education in order to navigate through the world of work and life in general (Modisaotsile, 2012). This causes concerns and frustrations for these participants because for them to be employed they need to at least have obtained basic education and training. To add to their concerns, the participants are aware of the economic condition of our country, with the current employment rate being so low (Statistics South Africa, 2018). These socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals are further impacted, especially those living in rural areas as they are forced to relocate to urban areas where they might find prospective employment, unlike if they were to stay in a rural areas where there is less job opportunities (YU, 2013).

Furthermore, participants could be faced with the possibility of being overlooked by some employees because some companies prefer to hire people referred to them or those within their social circle rather hiring a stranger. This proves to be a challenge youth from impoverished socioeconomic background have to encounter when seeking employment opportunities (Leibbrandt, et al., 2010a).

Over the years government has made changes in the labour policies and market, and there has been a noticeable increase in the needs for skills. Therefore, it should be noted that within these changes is that participants would need to constantly develop themselves in order to stay relevant in a competitive job market. Literature points out that participants need to continuously develop their technological skills through training in order to benefit and stay abreast in a complete working environment (Halpern, 2005; Maree, 2012a). This would be difficult for some individuals because employment remains to some extent based on gender and race. In chapter 2 statistics indicated the struggle these young people could go through when they begin to seek employment (Klasen & Woolard, 2009). These contexts are further discussed below:

#### 5.5.1 Education system

Literature argues that obtaining an education could potentially assist an individual to navigate through different aspect of life which include the world of work enabling them to make a somewhat substantial contribution to their economy (Modisaotsile, 2012). The participants found that navigating through the education system tends to be a challenge, as a result of lack of adequate facilities, quality learning in LO and proper career education programmes. The findings show that participants have limited knowledge of the processes one needs for Higher Education such as admission requirements, relevant subjects, or the types of course offering that are offered at the different institution of higher learning.

### 5.5.2 Socio-economic conditions

Literature highlights that policies and laws might be put in place to support and provide workers with equality, fairness and justice (Leibbrandt, et al., 2010a), however the state of our labour system seems to continuously favour the advantaged over the disadvantaged. Job opportunities are scarce especially if you are from a rural area or a small town. The participants are aware that for them to get opportunities they will have to relocate (Leibbrandt, et al., 2010b), just like some of them had to relocate in order to complete their schooling and even re-write their matric subjects. Findings suggest that participants perceive work as a form of identity formation, as people spend most of their time in an occupation. For these youth, work is also associated with contributing to one's household economically, being independent and responsible for themselves, their immediate family and extended family.

The findings indicated that families are concerned about their children securing jobs to take care of both the immediate and extended family. Therefore, some families impose their limited knowledge and views about the world of work with the hope to discourage the participants to enter in occupations where studying is viewed as time consuming and they have no surety of obtaining a job immediately. This in turn, creates a pressure and burden on the participants to find work immediately after they complete their matric or tertiary education. However, in this study it seems few participants were following their families' suggestions to choose a safe occupation.

### 5.5.3 Technology and media

TV programmes that participants were exposed to from early childhood appeared to have an influence on these young individuals. It was noted that TV played an important role in how these young people make connections and understand occupations. This was the form of media that appeared to have the most impact on their career decision-making. Participants had however not seemed to access internet sources much for career-related material, in spite

of there being some government sponsored resources available to them. The researcher encouraged them to contact the Career Development Service/ KHETA, and this led to some having further career-related interactions, however they did not seem to naturally gravitate to the internet for this purpose.

### **5.6 Experience of Exploring Through Group Discussions**

The process of the focus group illustrated that things do not always go according to plans. The participants would at time deviate from the original topic, even though when the researcher enquired, they did not seem keen to come up with or add other topics. It appears that it could have been that they did not know what was expected of them. At times, it seems that the participants would answer questions in a way to please the researcher. This was in contrast with Spencer's (1999) study, in which participants came up with topics for the discussions (however, these learners were already at university). In this study the participants did not have or initiate a topic they wanted to focus on. They depended on the researcher to direct the flow of the group, perhaps this was a result of their education thus far, where their opinions had not been encouraged.

The groups seemed to offer a safe assuring atmosphere that appeared less intimidating. This space provided them with a platform to explore issues they would not necessary discuss freely with people. It was also noted that the participants preferred a conversational way of exploring careers rather than completing activities /tasks. The group provided them with a supportive setting, an encouraging, unified space. The group felt safe to share intimate stories, which they were surprised at, but valued the sharing.

### **5.7 Impact of Implementing Relevant Career Education Interventions in a SA Context**

The impact of the apartheid segregation system is seen in all aspects of the disadvantaged youth's lives. Previous literature highlighted the importance of creating

relevant career interventions that are suitable for the diverse South Africa context (Spencer, 1999; McMahon et al., 2008). The findings suggested that exploring career issues is crucial to the career decision making of young people. It does not help that social inequality is prevalent and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds continue to experience a scarcity in the provision of career services (Watson, 2010; DHET, 2012). This study was to evaluate if developmental-contextual framework of career development Vondracek et al. (1986) would be suitable to explore career education with the SA context. This type of framework can be sustainable because it encourages the use of various interactive approaches, resources and materials, which can be tailor-made to suit the target population. Most importantly it can also accommodate people working within a limited budget because it depends more on the facilitator's skills along with collaborative group inputs.

During a consultation between the supervisor and researcher it was thought beneficial to develop a manual to be used to provide a guideline of how to set up and run the FGS in different contexts. A manual has been created for any career practitioner to implement as they see fit (see Appendix I).

Since this study was motivated to create a low-cost framework for a group-based career intervention, the outline for a manual as its basis is included. This outline of the potential contents of such a manual is derived from the action research basis of this study and will require further trialling and expansion, following research in other contexts and with other facilitators. This is therefore proposed as the first step in a further research process, to contribute to the development of the field in SA.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations

The FGS process provided evidence that the utilising of focus groups based upon a developmental-contextual (Vondracek et al., 1986) framework to explore career issues can be beneficial to young people, even though there are shortfalls as with other career interventions. Nonetheless, it is an alternative intervention that practitioners can consider when conducting career counselling. Because of its collaborative nature, this framework has the potential of being sustainable, it can be of advantage to practitioners working with tight budgets. There is a need for assessment interventions that will enable young people to make satisfactory and informed career decisions. They need to be given the opportunity to make a career choice based on applicable interventions, life experience, access to resources, to choose as they see fit or to make knowledgeable career choices.

### 6.1 Limitations of the Study

Future studies need to consider extending the study to other demographic groups, because this study illustrated that in the current economic climate many young people might not be able to access these kinds of services. There might be limitations to the data as it was collected from one group limited in size from one geographical area. Whilst initially this research was designed for a group of black young people, the sample was more racially diverse. This did not appear to impact on the discussions, but further research across different settings, both rural and urban, with similar or more diverse groups would be helpful.

It is acknowledged that the group size of nine would be a luxury in many school settings, where there are much larger group sizes. Ways to consider working with a larger group should be explored, to enable the broadening of the applicability of this method and design. It might also be wise to extend the number of FGS because five sessions might not be enough to explore various options and discuss information in-depth. Also, to consider work

with a larger group, an alternate suggestion is to extend the time, making the FGS perhaps last for two hours because an hour proved to be too short, as we ran over time in all FGS.

In addition, the facilitator would need to be cautious of the reason people are interested to join the group and how this can impact the data collected. The participants might have been keen to join the group because the researcher was a psychology student and the majority of them were interested or intrigued by the field of psychology. At times in the FGS, the focus would shift from the main study to psychology.

## **6.2 Strengths of the Study**

The strength of this inquiry is that it uses a contextual approach, which is considered to be appropriate to career development in a diverse context such as SA. It also used focus groups in which people can operate from a collectivist point rather than individually. The aforementioned approaches proved to be valuable as they were able to show that career development can be explored using inexpensive resources. The research demonstrated that FGS-based career exploration could be beneficial as they are able to reach a larger number of people, when compared with individual career counselling. FGS are less driven by advice and information; rather they are more focused on exploring and discussion of career related issues amongst peers, exchanging ideas, opinions and experiences. Groups are likely to be interactive, lengthier and people have enough time to go and think, discuss and draw from others outside the group, then may come back into the group to reflect and continue to interrogate the issues to hear other people's opinions.

This research showed that a group setting can create an environment that fosters free-flowing conversation, sense of group unity and coherence, confidentiality, support and responsiveness, acceptance, acknowledgement of one's experience and realities; and a place participants can learn from and gain confidence through their interactions with their peers. This gave the participants the opportunity to explore, rather than closing off options too

quickly, which is important in terms of career exploration, more suited to where they are at in that point in their career development. This is possible because, when facilitated carefully the group is led by the members too, rather than only the researcher. The facilitator needs to be experienced as mediator and agreeable, so that participants feel able to discuss openly, rather than feeling the need to please.

### **6.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

We recommend further studies in to extend the limited literature and research that focused on the contextual and STF approaches to career development. It might be useful for further studies to implement the developmental-contextual framework of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986) to a larger group of mixed-race samples from different socioeconomic backgrounds and various contexts to further evaluate the utility of this framework.

A further recommendation is the use of the proposed manual to train career practitioners, because currently in schools the services are provided by practitioners who obtained different types of qualification and those who do not have formal qualification in careers but have various training experiences (DHET, 2016). Offering training, based upon the suggested training manual could be beneficial, given the shortage of people with career education training in SA. Such an approach means that potentially more people could be reached in the same amount of time, which might be a real benefit of doing this work in groups.

### **6.4 Conclusion**

This inquiry has shown that the pre-existing lack of access to career services and resources continues in SA. It proposes the usefulness of exploring career development from an overarching framework of action research and the developmental-contextual approach Vondracek et al. (1986), based upon a focus group design. The study revealed the value for

participants of group discussion and the implementation of a relevant career intervention for diverse group members. It illustrated how the previously excluded can be reached and provided with opportunities to explore career education in familiar environments, using relatable resources that are not costly (which would otherwise excluded them from such services).

The inquiry recommends that this framework further be evaluated in different contexts with different populations from different areas to see its benefits and usefulness. The limitations to the study need to be addressed in order for the framework to be refined, so that it become the basis for an intervention that is used in many contexts in the SA population and with similar populations that work from a multicultural and collectivist approach.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Where leaders learn*

Psychology Department  
1 University Road, Grahamstown, 6139, South Africa  
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#### RESEARCH PROJECTS AND ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

01 February 2017

Jacqui Akhurst  
Department of Psychology  
RHODES UNIVERSITY  
6140

Dear Jacqui

#### ETHICAL CLEARANCE OF PROJECT PSY2016/12

This letter is to re-confirm that your research proposal with the following students as co researchers Modipadi Phala and Georgia Roberson with tracking number PSY2016/12 and title, 'Implementing a developmental-contextual framework for young people's career explorations', served at the Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC) of the Psychology Department of Rhodes University on 6 April 2016. The project has been given ethics clearance.

Please ensure that the RPERC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Bohmke'.

Mr Werner Bohmke  
ACTING CHAIRPERSON OF THE RPERC

## **Appendix B: Recruitment E-mail**

Attention Manager:

I am undertaking a research study that focuses on the concept of youth career exploration for my Master's degree in Counselling Psychology from Rhodes University. The topic focuses on 'Factors that influence youth from disadvantaged backgrounds when exploring their future career and life aspirations'. I would like to recruit individuals that are involved in your programme to participate in a career exploration focus group. Not only will the focus group assist to answer the questions I have regarding the career aspirations of our youth but also to enable career discussions that would benefit the participants because they will have the opportunity to discuss career related information.

I have worked in the field of career counselling and guidance as a career advisor where I came across many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who never received proper introduction or guidance to career development during the early stages of their education. These young people also lack crucial career information needed to make the best decisions about their future. I am hoping that after the focus group discussions the participants that already had an idea about their future can feel more secure about their choice. In addition, those who were unsure about their choices would have acquired more knowledge in relation to who they are, the different study paths that are available to them and to learn the importance of choosing the right career.

I would like to request your assistance with the following:

- Participants (age 18-35) from your organisation to join the focus group
- Number of participants: 5-8
- Duration of the focus group participation: 5 weeks (the group will meet every Thursday from 4pm-5pm at your offices)

Below is the proposed structure of the programme:

Each week we will focus on a different theme used within a career model called "The Developmental-Contextual Framework of Career Development."

Each theme will comprise of activities we will complete within the group. The activities are subject to change when deemed necessary, due to the direction lead by the discussions held with the participants.

Materials and equipment that will be used for data collection are:

- Audiotape (to record the responses of the group)
- Questionnaires and/or activities that form part of the discussions (to create an interactive environment)
- Video camera (used with the permission of the participants)

Below is an example of the activity schedule outline:

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
Date time and	6- April 4pm-5pm	14- April 4pm- 5pm	21-April 4pm- 5pm	28-April 4pm- 5pm	6-May 4pm-5pm
Theme	Introductions (family of origin)	Extrafamilial network	Workplace and interpersonal relationships	Family of procreation (5-10years)	Context and social justice

Ethical considerations are explained below:

There will be ethical discussions regarding issues such as confidentiality, consent with the participants before they partake in the focus group. The data collected will be stored in accordance to the Rhodes University rules and regulations.

I would like to request permission for the above in writing from your organisation. I am required to submit proof of consent and permission from your organisation when submitting the research proposal and the completed research to the ethics committee.

For further clarity and information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Modipadi Phala

0825437097

**Appendix C: Consent Form**

**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa*

**PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT****INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**

☐ **Tel: (046) 603 8502** ☐ **Fax: (046) 603 7203**

**EXPLORING CAREER INFORMATION THROUGH THE  
DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXTUAL FOCUS GROUP WITH YOUTH FROM  
DISADVANTAGE BACKGROUNDS**

As a Masters Student in Counselling Psychology at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, I am conducting a research project that aims to facilitate career exploration through interactive learning, by means of group discussions. You are invited to take part in this research project. Please note that ethical clearance for this research project was obtained from the Rhodes University Psychology Department Ethics Committee (RPERC) on (17/03/2016), providing permission to conduct the research.

Your participation will involve attending five group discussions about career development, over five consecutive weeks. Each of the discussions will last for one to two hours, between (15:00-16:00) on Thursday afternoons. The focus group discussions will take place at your organisation. Participants will be asked to contribute through the exchanging of ideas and personal experiences surrounding career choice, career aspirations and career interest and to do various individual career exploration activities between meetings. I hope this will enable you to better understand your career choices and decisions. This research project requires that volunteers are over the age of eighteen. The focus groups will be conducted in English, however we will provide isiXhosa translation, and should it be required.

Your involvement in this study is entirely voluntary. This means that you are free to withdraw at any time and there will be no penalty for doing so. The focus group discussions will be audio and video- recorded, but only for the researchers' information. These recordings will not be used for any other purpose. While you may be asked to contribute to discussions surrounding themes of a personal nature, you may choose not to contribute about aspects of your life that you do not feel comfortable discussing.

Please note that the data from your participation will not be shared with your colleagues or the agency. The information will be presented in a written report, in which your identity will not be revealed. You may be sent a summary of the final report on request. If there is a translator present, that person will also abide by the ethical principles of confidentiality.

If you are willing to participate, please complete the tear-off slip below, and return it to the presenter. If you have any questions about the research project or require further information you may contact the following:

Modipadi Phala      Professor Jacqui Akhurst

Student Researcher   Project Supervisor   Tel: 046 603 8502   Tel: 046 603 7084

[modipadiphala@gmail.com](mailto:modipadiphala@gmail.com)

[j.akhurst@ru.ac.za](mailto:j.akhurst@ru.ac.za)

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I \_\_\_\_\_ (PRINTED NAME) would like to participate in the career discussion groups as described above. I understand the contents of this information letter and participating voluntarily.

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick here if you would like to receive a summary of the completed project report :

Email address for report: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D: Biographical Questionnaire**

**Biographical Questionnaire**

**April 2016**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Home**

Where is your home/where do you come from? \_\_\_\_\_

Home language \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have electricity at home? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have TV at home? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have tap water? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you own a mobile phone? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have access to the internet? \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Family**

Number of children in your family?

\_\_\_\_\_


Where do you fit in (oldest, youngest etc)

\_\_\_\_\_


**Appendix E: Career Family Tree Activity**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Graduating Class of: 2016



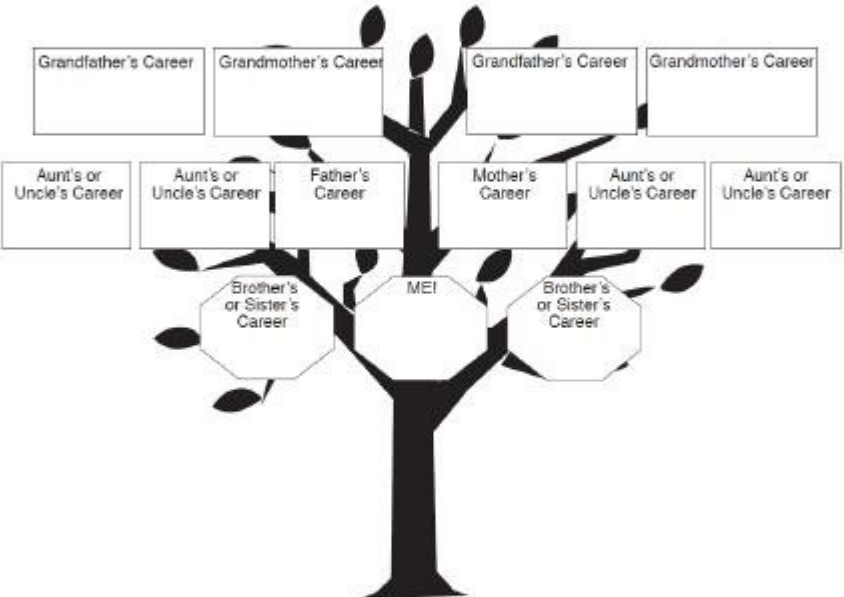
**CAREER CONNECTION**



## Career Family Tree Worksheet

Take a look at the careers chosen by your grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives.

It's fun to think about how family members' career choices have influenced their lives—and it may help you identify things you want and don't want in a career. Fill in each box with the career of the listed person. Add boxes for more aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and sisters if you can.



Are there career areas that several of your relatives have pursued? If so, list them here.

\_\_\_\_\_

How have your family members' career choices changed over time?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do your relatives tell you about reasons to choose or not choose careers like theirs?

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Career Cluster Interest Survey

### Career Clusters Interest Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Circle the items in each box that best describe you. You may make as many or as few circles in each box as you choose. Add up the number of circles in each box. Look to see which three boxes have the highest numbers. Find the corresponding Career Clusters on the pages immediately following this survey to see which Career Clusters you may want to explore.

<b>BOX 1</b>	<b>Activities that describe what I like to do:</b> 1. Learn how things grow and stay alive. 2. Make the best use of the earth's natural resources. 3. Hunt and/or fish. 4. Protect the environment. 5. Be outdoors in all kinds of weather. 6. Plan, budget, and keep records. 7. Operate machines and keep them in good repair.	<b>Personal qualities that describe me:</b> 1. Self-reliant 2. Nature lover 3. Physically active 4. Planner 5. Creative problem solver	<b>School subjects that I like:</b> 1. Math 2. Life Sciences 3. Earth Sciences 4. Chemistry 5. Agriculture	Total number circled in Box 1  <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px;" type="text"/>
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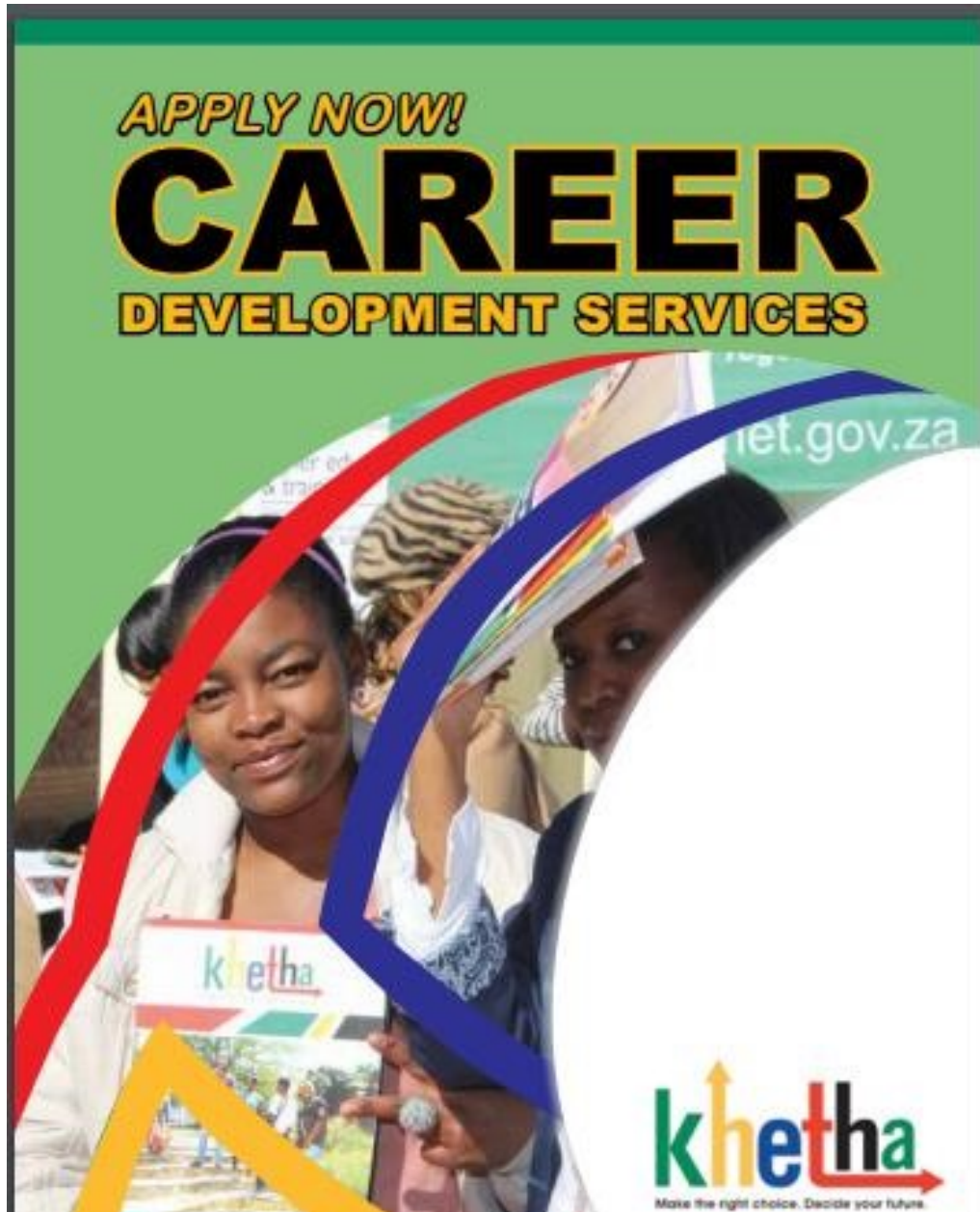
<b>BOX 2</b>	<b>Activities that describe what I like to do:</b> 1. Read and follow blueprints and/or instructions. 2. Picture in my mind what a finished product looks like. 3. Work with my hands. 4. Perform work that requires precise results. 5. Solve technical problems. 6. Visit and learn from beautiful, historic, or interesting buildings. 7. Follow logical, step-by-step procedures.	<b>Personal qualities that describe me:</b> 1. Curious 2. Good at following directions 3. Pay attention to detail 4. Good at visualizing possibilities 5. Patient and persistent	<b>School subjects that I like:</b> 1. Math 2. Drafting 3. Physical Sciences 4. Construction Trades 5. Electrical Trades/Heat, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration/Technology Education	Total number circled in Box 2  <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px;" type="text"/>
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<b>BOX 3</b>	<b>Activities that describe what I like to do:</b> 1. Use my imagination to communicate new information to others. 2. Perform in front of others. 3. Read and write. 4. Play a musical instrument. 5. Perform creative, artistic activities. 6. Use video and recording technology. 7. Design brochures and posters.	<b>Personal qualities that describe me:</b> 1. Creative and imaginative 2. Good communicator/good vocabulary 3. Curious about new technology 4. Relate well to feelings and thoughts of others 5. Determined/tenacious	<b>School subjects that I like:</b> 1. Art/Graphic design 2. Music 3. Speech and Drama 4. Journalism/Literature 5. Audiovisual Technologies	Total number circled in Box 3  <input style="width: 50px; height: 30px;" type="text"/>
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Source: Adapted from the Guidance Division Survey, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education (2005)

**Note:** This survey does not make any claims of statistical reliability and has not been normed. It is intended for use as a guidance tool to generate discussion regarding careers and is valid for that purpose.

**Appendix G: Apply Now Booklet**



## Appendix H: Information Leaflet

### Tips for planning your career

#### 1. Career decision-making process

It is important to be aware that choosing a career depends on various factors that influence you as an individual; such as; your *values*, *career vision*, skills, interests, as well as analysing where your strengths and weaknesses lie.

It is important to think about these factors when making a career choice:



Always bear in mind that constructing a career is an on-going process.

## 2. Career research

You need to think about how you would go about researching different career options and where to find information. Career research can be done in the following ways:

**Career resources:** You can consult online as well as manual career resources to gain more information e.g. Books: The A-Z of Careers. Internet: [www.pacecareers.com](http://www.pacecareers.com); [gostudy.mobi](http://gostudy.mobi); [www.ncap.co.za](http://www.ncap.co.za). [www.careerplanet.co.za](http://www.careerplanet.co.za) .

**Conduct interviews and do job shadowing** with people in prospective career fields. If you conduct an interview, make sure that you prepare questions in order to ensure that you obtain

all the necessary information to be thoroughly informed (find more information at CareerBuilder.com. or [www.careerhelp.org.za](http://www.careerhelp.org.za))

## 3. Study opportunities

Once you have made your career decision the next step is to identify certain career options and associated study programmes, and institutions of higher learning that offer the qualification you are interested to pursue.

Contact the higher education (tertiary) institutions, which you are considering. To gain more information about the recommended programmes, enquire about their different courses and programmes. Also, compare similar programmes presented by different tertiary institutions.

Make sure of admission requirements, cut-off dates for applications, as well as additional information, which is required with your application form (e.g. non-academic selection form, portfolio, application fees, and availability for audition, interview, or fitness test).

## 4. My Support System

Do you have enough support to complete your qualification e.g. financial assistance, family, friends, or church? It is important to think about how you will get the support you need while you are studying. Funding is available from different companies and government departments. You can check online for more info about funding. Alternatively, you can personally visit government department to enquire about the funding they offer to prospective students. You can visit [www.careerhelp.com](http://www.careerhelp.com) ; [www.nsfas.co.za](http://www.nsfas.co.za); [www.sabursaries.co.za](http://www.sabursaries.co.za)

## 5. Preparing yourself for the world of work

The transition from school or university life to the world of work

You should start now to prepare for the world of work. The preparation process includes understanding:

- 👉 The importance of making a career choice
- 👉 What skills you have and still need to develop
- 👉 What employers are looking for in employees
- 👉 How to become a brand
- 👉 How qualifications fit into the sectors and industries of our country
- 👉 Which sectors and industries exist in our country
- 👉 Which companies you are interested in working for
- 👉 How to search for a job
- 👉 The interview process works
- 👉 Work readiness programmes and placement programmes
- 👉 How to develop a career portfolio

Preparing yourself for work opportunities will help you to think about how your studies link with your career; how to do career research and reflect on your self-confidence and the impact this has on your studies and career

## **6. Think about some of the proactive ways of looking for a job**

**Job-search essentials:** Have a career plan – your career plan should guide you when searching for jobs

- 👉 Preparation – do proper research about the labour market, job opportunities and companies
- 👉 Job search resources/tools- there are various ways to search for job opportunities such as internet, newspapers, word of mouth, job agencies etc.
- 👉 Prepare a well written CV and cover letter- job requirements differ, always customise your CV for all job applications
- 👉 Interview skills- always thoroughly prepare, and practice for job interviews
- 👉 Job search action plan- set a step-by-step job search plan and evaluate it frequently
- 👉 Networks- build and maintain meaningful connection around you and in the work industry.
- 👉 Self-knowledge- knowing yourself and your capabilities will help you to convince people why you are the best candidate for the job

If you feel that you need further discussions about career decision making, personal problems or to take a psychological assessment test, you are welcome to contact the Rhodes University Psychology clinic for psychological services.

You can reach them in the details below:

Tel.: 046 – 603 8502

Fax: 046 603 7203

Email: [y.scheepers@ru.ac.za](mailto:y.scheepers@ru.ac.za)

## **Appendix I: Career Manual**

### **Career Manual**

This is a Career Development training manual for practitioners working with young people in a group context: utilising the developmental-contextual framework of career development (Vondracek et al., 1986); within an overarching framework of Action Research as a framework for exploring career information through focus groups sessions.

### **About this manual**

It has been noted that there is a limitation in terms of the career education intervention suitable to explore career issues and decision making of the culturally diverse young people from economically disadvantaged background in South Africa. The manual is intended to provide career practitioners with the skills needed to facilitate career education using the developmental-contextual framework of career development (Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenburg, 1986) within an overarching framework of Action Research using focus groups as a basis. The developmental-contextual framework of career development is a loose structure that could be customised for different contexts. This is not meant to be a one-size fit all approach to career development.

### **Aim of the manual**

The purpose of the manual is to assist practitioners to facilitator's career development with the practical implementation of the FGS using the developmental-contextual model of career development and action research as a primary framework. Because career development is not only offered by professionals, it also offered by people in various context. The focus here is to translate a community-based intervention into a manual so we can train potential practitioners to facilitate career development with groups using an approach that could be deemed ideal. The manual provides career practitioner with instruction to facilitating career

decision making and exploration in a group setting. The benefits of this framework are that the facilitator is able incorporated and integrated other theories, assessments measures and resources/tools in order to assist groups holistically. The framework can be used in multiple context and in a variety of ways. The manual is meant to train and provide practitioners with a basic structure to follow when facilitating career education. The intention is to assist young people to engage in career discussions about their, interests, personalities, career influences, employability, world of work, resources etc., with their peers. The aim is that they learn from each other and obtain valuable information that will assist them in their career decision making process and to achieve their career goals to following in satisfying career paths.

### **Target group**

This manual is meant to train potential career practitioners who are interested in offering career counselling, guidance or advice to individuals using a contextual approach. Career development services are offered by various individuals in different context with different training, and educational levels (those with and/or without qualifications) and some people might not have a psychology background. People who are not psychologist can be trained to use this model, but it crucial that they are properly trained. Because the facilitating to some extent relies of the persons experience and training. Even though the this approach does not necessarily require phycology expertise, nonetheless it would be beneficial if individuals have or would receive training in basic counselling skills, have presentation skills, interpersonal and communication skills, experience working with individuals in an academic or community context, open-minded, flexible, willingness and interest to learn.

### **How to implement the framework**

Preparations prior the FGS

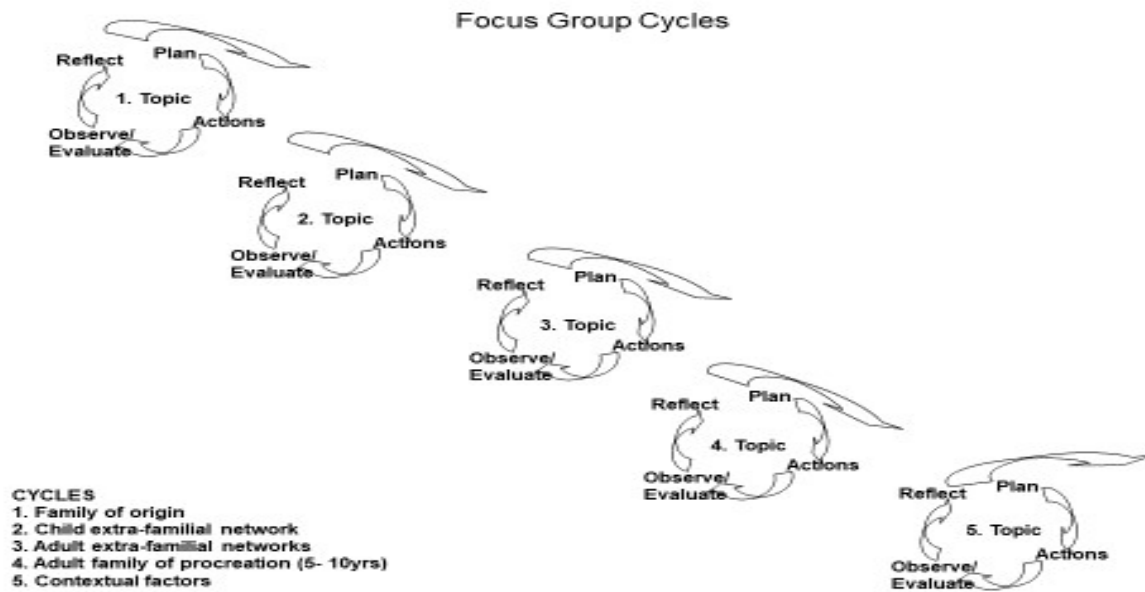
- The practitioner needs to think about when using this approach.

- The groups demographic.
- Environment: check available and reliable resources and services group member can use in their community.
- Conduct needs analysis and outcomes for the group - prior knowledge and what knowledge do they have about career decision making.
- Decide on the number of people to partake in the group discussion.
- The duration of each group session (1 -2 hours per session) or will it be a short term (week(s) or longitudinal study for months or longer)
- Timeframe
- Have an introductory group session aside of the main focus group sessions to go over important information such as consent, rules and explanation about the reason for using this approach.

**Outline of the FGS:**

When Implementing this framework both the FGS process, and the content process happens simultaneously. The approach uses the developmental-contextual model of career development in which both the micro and macro systems involving the interaction between the person and the environment are discussed in a series of group sessions carried-out using the action research model comprising of four phases (namely; planning, acting, observing, and reflection) in a series of flexible cycles, which are holistic. See the diagram below for the preparation of each cycle:

Diagram 1- Focus Group Cycles

**Process:**

- **Planning:** what would be the outcomes of each session, what needs to take place in each session to assist the group members to explore and discuss career issues such as activities, resources, materials, questions etc.
- **Acting:** what would materialise during each session, bearing in mind the flexibility of the framework, which allows deviation from the initial outlined plan.
- **Observing:** this assist to assess, monitor the impact on the intervention, to check if there is a need for change, this helps individuals to think and preparation for the next session.
- **Reflection:** to look at what had worked, the positive, negatives, challenges so to make the necessary changes and be aware of the group's development and progress.

**Content:**

There are topics/activities discussed during each group cycle. The FGS are non-linear and not limited to only five sessions, they can be extended based on the outcomes of each FGS. The

topics/activities are flexible and subject to changes depending on what transpires in each session. A topic in each session is interactive and standardised and follows the same cycle and format.

Various activities, and resources can be applied in each session with the need for flexibility and improvement. The sequence and topics dispersal will depend on the information the facilitator would like to elicit, or provide to the groups but mainly from direction the groups are leading the discussions.

The cycle assists the practitioner to track the group's development, with each session building on from the previous session, which is why there needs to be collaboration between the practitioner and the group members to lead, direct, and negotiate the kind of materials/activities required for the next session as well as to assist the practitioners to understand the group better.