Exploring Group Life Design with teachers in the context of poverty related psychosocial challenges

[ID]Rubina Setlhare, [ID]Lesley Wood and [ID]Lukas Meyer
COMBER, Faculty of Education, North-West University, South Africa
rubinask@uj.ac.za

"A root that gives life is being found from mud" [Research participant].

Working in challenging contexts can impact negatively on a teacher's sense of purpose and efficacy. This article explores the potential of group Life Design (LD), a narrative constructivist career counselling process, for supporting ten South African school teachers working at an under-resourced school with understanding their career aspirations and their personal and professional identity. The group LD process formed part of a participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) project. This article focuses on teachers' experience of the group LD process. Participating teachers reflected in writing and during group discussions on their experience of the LD process. Qualitative data generated from transcriptions of their discussions and written reflections were thematically coded. Findings suggest that the group LD process encouraged participants to reflect on themes from their life narratives to encourage agency for pursuing their future personal and professional goals. Through the LD process, the teachers acknowledged personal and professional assets, from past and present narratives which could motivate them during challenging times. The LD process ignited agency for action to achieve career and personal goals. Participants designed future life maps and also explored pathways for collectively improving their support to learners.

Keywords: Group Life Design; poverty; psychosocial challenges; South Africa; teacher efficacy

Introduction and Literature Review

If teachers are capacitated with appropriate skills and knowledge, then feelings of efficacy and competence are fostered (Loots, Ebersöhn, Ferreira & Eloff, 2012; Mwoma & Pillay 2015; Nel, Lazarus & Daniels, 2010). Challenging socio-economic realities in the communities in which learners reside pose a significant challenge to learning and teaching, and are an obstacle to teachers meeting their professional career goals (Wood & Goba, 2011). This in turn, negatively affects teacher motivation and efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) and cannot be separated from personal goals and identity (Guichard, 2005). In the context of this study, teacher efficacy refers to the teacher's belief in their capacity to plan, organise and carry out activities to attain their professional goals (Bandura, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In this article, we report on a qualitative research project, which explored the potential of a group-based Life Design process, for supporting teachers who experienced a loss of efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). An increase in teacher efficacy is positively related to career adaptability (McLennan, McIlveen & Perera, 2017), defined as "the self-regulation strengths or capacities that a person may draw upon to solve the unfamiliar, complex, and ill-defined problems presented by developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions, and work traumas" (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012:662). The facilitator of the group LD process is a registered educational psychologist and lecturer in educational psychology at an institution of higher education. While offering therapeutic services to individual educators and learners at a school in a peri-urban context, she realised the need to go beyond individual therapy sessions with teachers to address the impact of poverty-related challenges affecting their sense of efficacy at the school. Teachers at the school had sought individual therapeutic interventions for challenges stemming from financial problems, work-related stress, trauma, HIV and AIDS, grief, and relationship problems. They also requested assistance with giving support to learners facing poverty-related psychosocial challenges. The facilitator observed that these teachers were committed to supporting the learners, but that the lack of infrastructural and financial resources at school level hampered them in doing this. Teachers often used their own personal funds and time to support learners and this placed financial and psychological pressure on the teachers and their families. In addition, demanding workloads and extra-curricular school activities lead to teachers feeling demotivated and in need of support to prevent burnout. Teachers who volunteered to support learners thought there was little acknowledgement and support for their pastoral role in caring for learners with poverty-related psychosocial challenges.

Teachers' emotional exhaustion, linked to role overload, compounded feelings of poor efficacy. This situation is not an isolated one, as literature confirms that teachers working in such contexts of poverty face severe threats to their emotional health and perceptions of self-efficacy (Mwoma & Pillay, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Smit, Fritz & Mabalane, 2010; Theron, Geyer, Strydom & Delport, 2008). Although much has been written about in-service teacher development to increase self-efficacy and address the problems facing South African schools (Jansen & Blank, 2014), this study adds to the body of knowledge through the adoption of a participatory approach, strengthened by an intervention not normally applied in a group setting within a school context. In response to the teachers' obvious need for support, the facilitator suggested they embark on a

participatory action learning and action research process, starting with a group LD process to enable them to first develop their sense of self-efficacy to better cope with the challenging demands of their career. The following research question was formulated:

> *"How could a group Life Design process support teachers to develop their sense of self-efficacy to better cope with the challenging demands of working in an under-resourced school community?"*

We will now explain the research paradigm and methodology followed by an explanation of the process and findings.

Research Paradigm

LD, a narrative social constructivist career psychology process, originated within career counselling to help people plan their work lives and secure meaningful employment (Savickas, 2011). Career counselling has evolved over the past few decades and is now about designing a life narrative and identity where work goals, social roles and life purpose are meaningfully integrated according to life themes (Hartung, 2011). The LD process encourages social and cognitive reflexivity (Cook & Maree, 2016) in the life-long iterative process of re-discovering personal and career identities (Guichard, 2005) particularly during periods of transition (Savickas, 2011). Participants apply the insights and competencies (Hirschi, Herrmann & Keller, 2015) that they have discovered during the self-constructing (Guichard, 2005) and career constructing process, to achieve personal and professional goals when faced with both life opportunities and life challenges (Savickas, 2011).

LD aims for participants to experience lifelong career satisfaction and foster career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) by reflexively exploring their personal and professional identities in a continuous process of self-construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction (Cook & Maree, 2016; Savickas, 2011). Past narratives are deconstructed for the value they have to inform and guide the way forward. An ability and willingness to iteratively reconstruct their life and career narratives as needs, interests and contexts change constitute the cornerstones of the LD process (Savickas, 2013). Traditional LD entails an LD facilitator working with an individual as the central focus, to enable the individual to 'contain or hold' themselves (Savickas, 2011) during periods of personal and career transitions. The theme or golden thread then becomes a guide for approaching life and making decisions.

The LD process typically follows six steps, which start with the LD counsellor and client establishing a working alliance and collaboratively exploring the client's narrative history and context for the identified problem, which emerges from the narration, while highlighting the client's core and peripheral roles in the various contexts. Individuals thus explore their identity and function within the roles they played. After articulation, the narratives become more explicit or concrete, allowing the individual to objectively view the narratives from new perspectives. This new perspective allows the individual to revitalise previously silenced stories to re-author and revise for the future. The individual is now able to place the problem within the newly re-authored perspective allowing for a new narrative to be built on the problem story. The individual articulates and commits to their potential in the new role(s) and identity. They are assisted with reflection and articulation of their experience and expectations, where their reflection on past experience and current reality informs future expectations and their new role(s) and identity. The action stage now follows on from the commitment. A new narrative is created through a collaborative plan for moving from the current to the desired reality. This step includes both how to deal with current and potential future obstacles, as well as enlisting the support of significant others for the new narrative. The LD counsellor at this stage needs to check with the client regarding whether or not their objectives for counselling have been met. A written summary of the action plan and the new identity statement crystallises the identified sustainable strengths, and provides clients with a tangible way forward that the client can refer to in periods of transition. The success of the process is gauged through short- and long-term follow-up, so as to study the outcomes and also provide additional consultation for clarity, support and maintenance through transitional periods (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroek & Van Vianen, 2009:246–247).

Di Fabio and Maree (2012) explored group-based LD counselling with reference to the global economic reality, where individual career counselling is affordable only to a minority. The support and guidance offered through the subjective reflections of participants in a group LD process add value to the process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction, as compared to the individual LD process (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012). A group LD process was used to support teachers working at an under-resourced school to understand their own personal and professional identity, following the six steps as explained.

Life Design Process and Activities

The six-step process for this group LD research project started with a balloon exercise as metaphor for lost dreams (See Table 1). The exercise served as an ice breaker and later also provided a stimulus for individual participants to reflect on their current career reality, compared to their previous goals and dreams (Cook & Maree, 2016; Savickas, 2011). When they reflected as a group on the balloon

activity, group members became aware of each other's dreams, both those achieved and broken.

The next activity, the lifeline turning point exercise (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013) encouraged reflection on past life events. The participants created a metaphor such as a river or road, to highlight significant turning points (events) which had influenced their life (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013). Participants then shared these experiences with one another through verbal reflections and responses to clarifying questions. The objective of the exercise was to both foster relationship and understanding, and then to acknowledge the individual participant's life experiences. By reflecting on these experiences participants gained insight into how they addressed past challenges. This awareness had the potential to inform the way forward. The LD facilitator assisted the participants to identify evidence of their own past strengths within their realities, which the participants draw on as resources as they navigate their way forward to achieve the planned future life narrative. With LD, it is not only the individual who is brought into the narrative but also the family, and other significant people in the participant's past. The family genogram as a technique originated in the field of family therapy and is used in the LD process to identify intergenerational career themes or threads (Fritz & Beekman, 2007). The aim is to identify family members who influenced the participant, and to look for similarities between those individuals and the participant, thus examining identity formation as it relates to those who are familiar, or family members. The genogram technique encourages the individual to connect personal dreams with the themes appearing in the genogram. With the LD genogram, the participant also identifies a life motto or theme to reflect on as they construct their future life narrative. The motto becomes a beacon to guide the participant in times of transition (Savickas, 2011). The LD activities ended with participants designing individual future life maps. The life map included a future timeline with short-, medium- and long-term goals and participants discussed in pairs how they hoped to achieve these goals. Table 1 below, summarises the process and purpose of the LD activities in this study.

Table 1 Summary of the Life Design activities

Activity	Process and value for individual or group
Balloon exercise as metaphor for lost dreams	Participants worked outside in pairs wearing casual clothes. They were given a water-filled balloon to pass between each other, each time moving one step away from each other. The balloon may have fallen and burst at any point. This served as an enjoyable ice-breaker that encouraged further conversation when participants regrouped. During the group discussion the balloon symbolised their life and career dreams from adolescence to the present. This helped them reflect on their current career trajectory, compared to their previous goals and dreams. They then reflected on this activity with the group.
The lifeline turning point exercise (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013)	The participants created a metaphor like a river or road, to highlight significant turning points (events) which had influenced their life (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013). They then shared this with other participants who give verbal reflections and asked clarifying questions. The objective of the exercise was to initially foster understanding and to acknowledge past life experiences.
Family genogram	The participant created a family genogram for as far back as he could recall, to find common interests and career ideals with other family members.
Future timeline	Participants were requested to create a future timeline with short, medium and long term goals and discuss in pairs how they hoped to achieve these goals. The activity ended with individuals writing down what they would like to see written on their tombstones after they have passed on.

Research Participants

The facilitator presented the proposed linked PALAR-LD project to the entire staff of an under-resourced high school in a peri-urban area of South Africa with the permission of the principal. The presentation involved an explanation of how the PALAR-LD process would encourage teachers to reflect on their personal and career goals and how the process might enable them to be more confident in fulfilling these roles. Five female (one white, four black) and five male teachers (five black) initially volunteered to be part of the project.

Data Generation

Data was generated from participants' taped verbal reflections within the group and individual written reflections on the LD activities post-sessions. The use of verbal and written reflections by all participants ensured crystallisation of data (Mertens, 2010).

Data Analysis and Interpretation Style

The data were coded thematically according to Tesch's steps for qualitative data (Tesch, 1990:58) independently by the three researchers who then met to reach consensus on the final themes, which were then confirmed with the participants. Direct quotes of the participants were taken from their written reflections and from transcriptions of their verbal discussions to support the themes, which were also controlled against literature.

Rigour of the Study

The research process was followed systematically, with academic rigour, following a PALAR process (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). In this PALAR process, the

participants met regularly as they engaged in a systematic and empirically sound inquiry into how to identify, address and resolve the contextual issues, starting with a group LD process for understanding their own personal and professional aspirations. The research findings were verified with participants in a group session before being published.

Ethical Considerations

This group LD process was conducted according to the ethical requirements of the Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University, who approved the research project. The facilitator's adherence to The Health Profession Council of South Africa's ethical code as a registered educational psychologist also ensured ethical practice in the interest of participant wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2008).

Results

We will now focus on the participating teachers' own experience of the LD process and the potential value of the process in their current reality and for the future. The verbatim quotations that support the discussion are given with participants labelled A to L to ensure anonymity. Spelling and grammar in the quotations appear as in the original data.

Theme 1: LD Helped Improve Teacher Sense of Self-efficacy

Reflecting on the group LD process, created the space for teacher participants to reconnect with their lost dreams, by reflecting on where they came from and comparing this to the current reality for informing way forward):

> "I can use the balloon activity to measure my ability and achievements from the moment I set my goals to where I am right now and possibly the future [...] Sometimes you can set yourself goals and they are not always according to your expectations due to some obstacles on the way" (Participant E).

While these reflective processes were sometimes emotionally challenging, they helped to create awareness of the self that participants previously did not have:

> "Those activities have helped me a lot because some of the things that I did not know about myself I now know them and I need to know more about them" (Participant H).

> "This balloon activity made me feel a bit sad 'cause my balloon did not last; same as my dream did not took off the ground 'cause of listening and respecting my parents' view, but I am the one suffering at the present and I feel that I am not where I am supposed to be" (Participant B).

The reflexive process encouraged participants to appreciate and contextualise past challenges and reflect on themes from past successes and disappointments that could be taken forward, not only for themselves, but for family members and their learners as well:

> "The turning points activity made me feel that a person can be from a poor family, but when growing up life becomes better if you are positive and act positively. Even if it's hard [...] I can use this activity to teach learners that life has to go on [...] A root that gives you life is being found from mud" (Participant H).

> "The turning points activity made me reflect my milestones and it made me to count my blessings and I recognised that my blessings are more than my downfalls and suddenly there was a light shining on me. We should do [The turning points activity] with the learner to can press on when they find themselves in depressing situations" (Participant K).

The reflection on their past promoted a sense of personal responsibility for ensuring that they themselves and their learners will not be deterred from achieving their personal and career dreams. They acknowledge their potential as teachers to achieve their goals which had earlier seemed much more difficult to achieve in the face of the poverty-related contextual challenges:

> "This balloon activity made me feel you may choose a career but become unable to proceed ... It might not only be that you were useless but because you don't have a good guidance, you need a mentor or a support to what you want to be" (Participant H).

The LD activities promoted feelings of teacher efficacy. Their lost dreams were rekindled in spite of the inadequate educational support structures, which had significantly eroded their belief in their agency:

> "This [LD process] made me feel confident that I can act as the "Middle Man" to assist [the learners] with the challenges they face daily ... how to confront them and to give advice on further assistance they can obtain, whether that is psychological, medical or otherwise" (Participant L).

Their own forgotten dreams were brought to the fore to remind them of the capacity they have for overcoming challenges, as well as to assist others based on their own life lessons:

> "I feel renewed as I had to reflect on the past where my life started, the different life stages that I went through, inclusive of my own achievements and challenges. It is therefore both exhilarating and saddening at times" (Participant L).

> "This activity gave me a new outlook on my job. I now am revitalized to do my job [...] Other teachers should also participate" (Participant F).

It could be argued that their career adaptability and career optimism were increased, two constructs that contribute to self-efficacy (McLennan et al., 2017). The passion for teaching was reignited and feelings of overwhelming frustration now seemed less debilitating.

Theme 2: Group LD Deepened a Sense of Personal and Group Identity and Promoted Relationship Building

The group process helped the participants to understand each other's unique and common challenges on a personal and professional level:

"*I can use the balloon activity when I want to convey a message to an individual or a group […] at work or on a personal level at home to demonstrate the importance of closeness […] the closer we were to one another the balloon was safer. I learnt that proximity is key in every situation […] closeness to one's family, friends, colleagues, etc. More activities that are similar to this one should be developed to encourage people to learn and think more about ways to handle different situations or challenges*" (Participant L).

Existing collegial relationships among the participants were deepened by the process as well as relationships with learners and significant others. The realisation that painful life experiences were not unique to individuals encouraged empathy and a safe and confidential space for all to share their personal narratives without reservations or feelings of insecurity:

"*This Turning Points activity made me realise other people have gone through similar challenges but differently*" (Participant C).

"*This Vision activity made me feel happy, 'cause I could say my viewpoints easily*" (Participant B).

The group process initiated a network and flexible support structure that participants could depend on when individual participants had to support learners with challenges and reflections during the group LD process.

"*In the past I thought you can't go to ask anybody [...] because they don't cares [...] now I know especially with a boy I can go to Participant B or E*" (Participant F).

"*This activity made me feel very active again, because I was beginning to have burnout. I can use this activity when there are learners who feel that there is no hope in their lives. As a group we need to support to each other in handling these learners*" (Participant E).

Through the lifeline exercise, teacher participants found support from each other and shared successful experiences which promoted feelings of competence and improved self-efficacy):

"*We are working well as group members and I do believe if we really can hold each other's hands we can be able to make many people to work with us, [...] and identifying the types of places whereby our learners are living and how we can improve those places and everything. Even the parents we can invite them to join us and it can be a success, if we all work together here*" (Participant H).

Even though the Group LD process involved reflecting on painful life experiences, participants experienced it as cathartic and later felt confident and motivated enough to extend support even beyond the school community:

"*It arouses a mixture of feelings within me. I can use this activity in the future when I need to encourage a friend, a colleague or loved one who has lost hope about their life to soldier on despite the worst-case scenarios in their lives*" (Participant L).

Participants said that the group LD process created the space for them to learn about each other's deeply personal experiences in a safe space, where their privacy and integrity were protected. Within this space participants deconstructed their past hurts and with the facilitator and peer support co-constructed an integrated "self" which included home and career realities:

"*Some of the turning points in my life are not good or maybe I should say I don't like to talk about [...] but I must say that it's good it happened the way it did because I can't imagine having to spend many years in a marriage with somebody who does not appreciate you*" (Participant L).

The process also strengthened a sense of belonging and personal identity by making participants aware of meaningful roles for themselves at home, at work and within their community. Peer support has proven to be a valuable medium for increasing collegiality and job satisfaction (Cravens & Drake, 2017):

"*The Genogram conscientised me about the importance of family e.g. staying together and taking care of each other*" (Participant L).

"*This balloon activity made me feel good in a sense of being free and content. We should continue doing such activities so to learn more on knowing how to go about helping others*" (Participant K).

A group identity was formed on the realisation that others understood the individual's professional and personal challenges. Where teachers previously worked in isolation in their individual attempts to provide support to learners, the relationships were deepened and extended during the LD process:

"*We are working well as group members and identifying the types of places whereby our learners are living and how we can improve those places [...] Even the parents we can invite them to join us there and it can be a success. If we all work together here*" (Participant H).

The group process was not always easy, as participants reflected on both their past successes and failures and through acknowledging past mistakes they were able to plan better for the future:

"*most of the things that you* [LD facilitator] *did* [LD activities] *they do boil back to me as the teacher, even when I want to put the blame on kids, when I want to put the blame on parents, but at the end of the day, my role as teacher, I didn't do it*" (Participant D).

By acknowledging where they had fallen short in the past, participants were able to feel less overwhelmed and with support from colleagues commit to achieving the goals they had previously set for themselves, with the realisation that regular reflection is required to adapt to changing realities:

"*I can use this* [Future Timeline] *when I want to keep track with my set goals to see which ones I*

achieved and those that I didn't manage to achieve. I can always chop and change where necessary e.g. changing plans about what I thought in the past. It is important to plan ahead what one needs to achieve in future e.g. about work, family life, community member, a role model and so forth" (Participant L).

This realisation seems to suggest that this participant had increased her career adaptibilty.

Theme 3: The LD Process Helped Participants to Develop Leadership to Support Learners and Contribute to Community Development

Leadership was encouraged on both professional and personal levels, where teacher participants not only looked at their own development, but had begun to think about taking action to develop the school community:

"I can use this [Future Timeline] *to encourage learners to plan and enjoy life, make a better future with themselves. I would like to say God has given me life and secure me to do this work for many years"* (Participant H).

Participants took ownership of the role they could play to contribute actively to their families, learners at school and the wider community. They started to sound like action leaders (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). Their envisaged leadership did not entail control and management of the way forward, but entailed encouraging others to be agents of change for themselves

"There are many more things to be done to our learners to give them light on skills and attitudes, how they have to live to overcome the problems they come across [that] *they can't solve with their grannies* […] *A confident educator make a confident learner"* (Participant H).

"I can teach learners […] *they may also achieve a goal if they are responsible. Their achievement can be through their decision-making and problem solving skills* […] *I can use the balloon activity to motivate kids and reflect on them that what they are dreaming of can be achieved or can change because of life different situations and environments"* (Participant B).

"I want to teach learners about taking responsibility of their own actions i.e. to be independent thinkers […] *brainstorming ideas and taking action* […] *are the most effective teaching methods"* (Participant L).

Discussion

We now briefly discuss our research findings as compared to the expected outcomes of the six-step process of Savickas et al. (2009). We explore how the various themes identified from the LD process enabled teachers to understand their own personal and professional identity, and so to increase self-efficacy to deal with the challenges of working in an under-resourced school community. Our findings support recent research indicating that there is a positive relationship between increased self-efficacy and career adaptability in teachers (McLennan et al., 2017), rendering them better able to meet their professional goals in spite of contextual challenges. The research results suggest that participants were able to apply the insights from the LD process for reconstructing the self (Guichard, 2005; Hirschi et al., 2015), as evidenced through their heightened sense of morale, encouragement and rekindled sense of purpose, and for reformulating personal and career goals (Savickas, 2011). This promoted a sense of personal and professional efficacy (Bandura, 2006), where the participants started to acknowledge their capacity to attain their professional goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In spite of challenging contextual demands, LD aims not only to link career and identity, but to integrate all spheres of life, and the participants reported they were better able to create meaningful roles for themselves at home, at work and within their community (Hartung, 2011). The study suggests that participants made meaning from their narrated stories which they could then use to make future personal and career decisions. The renewed belief in their individual and collective agency (Luszczynska, Schwarzer, Lippke & Mazurkiewicz, 2011) encouraged participants to start planning the way forward to carry out activities to attain the goals (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) they set for themselves as individuals and as a collective, following the group LD process. As far as we could establish, results of LD with a group of teachers in an under-resourced school have not been reported before in South Africa. Our findings differ from research which suggests that contextual challenges necessarily lead to teachers being demotivated to the extent that they are unable to take action (Iwu, Gwija, Benedict & Tengeh, 2013; Mwoma & Pillay, 2015). The findings also supported recent research that processes designed to increase self-efficacy, such as LD, contribute to an increase in career adaptability and career optimism (McLennan et al., 2017).

The reflections by participants on the process spoke directly to the role of teachers as change agents, who encourage learners to solve their own problems. Although there is ample literature to support the value of self-reflective forms of teacher development (Moon, 1999), this study emphasised the need for first using a psychological intervention, in this case Life Design, to increase teacher self-efficacy, before expecting them to be able to take action to improve their professional practice. The suggestion of teacher participants to involve parents and other community stakeholders aligns with principles of action leadership for building positive human relationships and networking toward solutions that will work best for the common good (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). Evidence of the sustainability of the learning and how it was integrated into the everyday practice of the school is the subject of a future article currently in press.

Conclusion

Although this was a small, contextualised study, whose findings cannot be generalised, it does offer evidence that where contextual challenges had led teachers to lose sight of their goals and dreams, the group LD process enabled the teachers to collectively explore their life narratives to reconnect with their past personal and career goals and to integrate the past and current narratives to guide the way forward. The LD process allowed the teachers, working as a group, to identify their support needs and this provided a platform for deeper relationships and empathy between the members. The collaborative process strengthened the teachers' sense of self-efficacy, making them more able to adapt to challenging career demands. This is a necessary first step before embarking on a PALAR process to identify and address contextual psychosocial challenges within their learners' reality. The group LD process encouraged the teachers to reflect on their personal and professional strengths within their individual narratives. The study highlighted how the LD process allowed the teacher participants to reconnect with their lost dreams and forgotten goals, thereby promoting self-efficacy. Collaborative reflection on their past narratives helped to increase their sense of self-efficacy and career adaptability and promote their ability to be action leaders. While this research article reflects on the LD process at one particular South African school, findings may encourage teachers in other contexts to explore the group LD process to understand and address their own personal and career challenges, particularly where contextual challenges erode their professional and self-efficacy. The findings clearly suggest that by implementing a group-based LD process, teachers were better able to understand their personal and professional identity in the context of an under-resourced school community, and as a result, be in a better position to translate this learning into their work to collaboratively embark on ways to support learners with psychosocial challenges. The collaborative LD process followed in this study also may prove useful for expanding the current research into social-cognitive career theory, which is strongly focused on improving teacher self-efficacy.

Acknowledgements

Note

i. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

References

Bandura A 2006. Guide for constructing self-efficacy scales. In F Pajares & T Urdan (eds). *Self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Cook A & Maree JG 2016. Efficacy of using career and self-construction to help learners manage career-related transitions. *South African Journal of Education*, 36(1): Art. # 1225, 11 pages. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v36n1a1225

Cravens X & Drake T 2017. From Shanghai to Tennessee: Developing instructional leadership through teacher peer excellence groups. *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies*, 6(4):348–364. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLLS-12-2016-0062

Di Fabio A & Maree JG 2012. Group-based life design counseling in an Italian context. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(1):100–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.06.001

Fritz E & Beekman L 2007. Engaging clients actively in telling stories and actualising dreams. In K Maree (ed). *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Guichard J 2005. Life-long self-construction. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 5(2):111–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-005-8789-y

Hartung P 2011. Career construction: principles and practice. In K Maree (ed). *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Hirschi A, Herrmann A & Keller AC 2015. Career adaptivity, adaptability, and adapting: A conceptual and empirical investigation. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 87:1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.11.008

Iwu CG, Gwija SA, Benedict HO & Tengeh RK 2013. Teacher job satisfaction and learner performance in South Africa. *Journal of Economics and Behavioral studies*, 5(12):838–850. Available at http://digitalknowledge.cput.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11189/1498/Iwu_Chux%20Gervase_Gwija_Saphetha%20Appie_Benedict_Henrie%20Olumide_Tengeh_Robertson%20Khan_Teacher%20job%20satisfaction%20and%20learner%20performance%20in%20South%20Africa_.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed 5 November 2017.

Jansen J & Blank M 2014. *How to fix South Africa's schools: Lessons from schools that work*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Bookstorm (Pty) Limited.

Loots T, Ebersöhn L, Ferreira R & Eloff I 2012. Teachers addressing HIV&AIDS-related challenges resourcefully. *Southern African Review of Education*, 18(1):56–84. Available at https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/19626/Loots_Teachers%282012%29.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. Accessed 5 November 2017.

Luszczynska A, Schwarzer R, Lippke S & Mazurkiewicz M 2011. Self-efficacy as a moderator of the planning–behaviour relationship in interventions

designed to promote physical activity. *Psychology & Health*, 26(2):151–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2011.531571

McLennan B, McIlveen P & Perera HN 2017. Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy mediates the relationship between career adaptability and career optimism. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 63:176–185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.12.022

Mertens DM 2010. *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moon JA 1999. *Reflection in learning & professional development: Theory & practice*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.

Mwoma T & Pillay J 2015. Psychosocial support for orphans and vulnerable children in public primary schools: Challenges and intervention strategies. *South African Journal of Education*, 35(3): Art. # 1092, 9 pages. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v35n3a1092

Myers JE & Sweeney TJ 2008. Wellness counseling: The evidence base for practice. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 86(4):482–493. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2008.tb00536.x

Nel W, Lazarus S & Daniels B 2010. Education support services policy and practice in South Africa: An example of community psychology in action? *Education as Change*, 14(S1):S17–S31. https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2010.517910

Savickas ML 2011. *Career counseling*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Savickas ML 2013. Career construction theory and practice. In SD Brown & RW Lent (eds). *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley &

Sons.

Savickas ML, Nota L, Rossier J, Dauwalder JP, Duarte ME, Guichard J, Soresi S, Van Esbroek R & Van Vianen AEM 2009. Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3):239–250. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.004

Savickas ML & Porfeli EJ 2012. Career Adapt-Abilities Scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(3):661–673. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.011

Skaalvik EM & Skaalvik S 2010. Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(4):1059–1069. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.11.001

Smit B, Fritz E & Mabalane V 2010. A conversation of teachers: In search of professional identity. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 37(2):93–106. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03216924

Tesch R 1990. *Qualitative research: Analysis types & software tools*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

Theron L, Geyer S, Strydom H & Delport CSL 2008. The roots of REds: A rationale for the support of educators affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. *Health SA Gesondheid*, 13(4):77–88. https://doi.org/10.4102/hsag.v13i4.406

Wood L & Goba L 2011. Care and support of orphaned and vulnerable children at school: helping teachers to respond. *South African Journal of Education*, 31(2):275–290. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v31n2a484

Zuber-Skerritt O 2011. *Action leadership: Towards a participatory paradigm*. New York, NY: Springer.

Zuber-Skerritt O & Teare R 2013. *Lifelong action learning for community development: Learning and development for a better world*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.