Career counselling an African immigrant student in a USA school setting: Merging transition theory with a narrative approach

M. J. Mims
University of Nebraska at Kearney
United States of America
e-mail: mimsmj@unk.edu

G. A. Mims
University of Nebraska at Kearney
United States of America

L. A. Newland
The University of South Dakota
United States of America

Abstract
A global professional discourse has emerged among career specialists inviting a critical examination of conventional career theory and calling for innovative, postmodern approaches that capture the complex, unique and evolving needs of diverse and disadvantaged students. Using a narrative case study the authors evaluate and describe the application of Schlossberg’s Transitional Theory to the career development of an African immigrant, high school student in the United States. Transitional Theory posits that throughout their lives, people experience transition requiring an alteration in patterns of behavior and thinking and necessitating new coping strategies (Schlossberg and Leibowitz 1980, 205). The transitional, narrative data were gathered over time using interviews, head notes, observations, and assessment reports (Creswell 2007, 73). Contextual influences and themes that shaped the student’s ‘storied life’ are described in light of Schlossberg’s theory constructs of situation, self, support and strategies for meaning-making and career growth.

INTRODUCTION
While career development researchers and practitioners in South Africa differ in their opinions as to the extent in which Western career theories are applicable to a new South African society, most have called for innovative, postmodern approaches to career counselling (Maree and Beck 2004, 80; Maree, Ebersohn and Molepo 2006, 49; Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 2; Naicker 1994, 27; Stead and Watson 1994, 234). The impetus for reform stems from complex sociopolitical transitions within the country as well as the global paradigm shift towards postmodern models of counselling.
and psychotherapy. Maree and Molepo (2007, 62) reported inequalities in access to career counselling for disadvantaged non-white populations in South African schools. Mkhize and Frizelle (2000, 1) argued that self-contained individualism that ignores social and institutional barriers permeates most of career development research and practice in South Africa. For the vast majority of the South African Black population, the long endured colonialism and oppression cannot be ignored as it relates to marginalization and exclusion of career opportunities and possibilities (2000, 2). Furthermore, South African scholars recognize the disconnection between the modernizing country’s labor demands and the career aspirations of its young people, both the privileged and the disadvantaged (Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 2; Naicker 1994, 27).

In response, new vocational guidance approaches have emerged which recognize cultural diversity and context through emphasis on self-construction and life planning (Savickas, Van Esbroeck and Herr 2005, 82). Naicker (1994, 27) challenged career educators and counsellors to move away from rigid social control, mechanistic and behaviorist training in order to meet the relevant social and educational needs of the disadvantaged. Stead and Watson (1994, 235) postulated that traditional career approaches continue to evolve toward an interactive context between the individual and the environment cautioning, ‘... researchers to test the extent to which these theories can be applied in the South African context rather than to dismiss them out of hand’. However, other practitioners have suggested that hermeneutic and dialogical approaches might better serve individuals who are navigating their lives and careers in an increasingly unpredictable and uncertain world (Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 1; Thrift and Amundson 2005). Such re-conceptualization has led to a holistic, voice-centered, meaning-based, relational career-development approach uncovering unique career narratives such as the importance of family and community, gender and cultural stereotypes, stage of life challenges, and future aspirations given the context of current situation (Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 13; Peavy 1995, 4). Maree and Beck (2004, 83) juxtaposed traditional and post-modern approaches to career counselling to indicate how the divergent approaches might enhance one another. Maree and Molepo (2007, 62) examined meaning-making, writing life stories, and applying lifestyle and biographical analysis as an effective postmodern approach for career counselling with disadvantaged learners.

Similarly, in the current study, the authors demonstrate a narrative approach enhanced through the application of Transition Theory to address unique career development needs and issues for African immigrant students to the United States who face the demands of a new culture and identity. The utility of the transition interview is an emphasis on narrative qualities for meaning-making and identification of contextual influences that shape the ‘storied life’ to form a more holistic and integrative picture of the client (Brott 2004, 190).
NARRATIVE APPROACH TO CAREER COUNSELLING WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Like South Africa, the application of narrative therapy to career counselling is fairly new in the USA. Clark, Severy and Sawyer (2004, 30) combined strengths of various traditional career theories with a narrative approach to group counselling to facilitate college students from diverse cultural backgrounds to explore cultural influences on their career development. Campbell and Ungar (2004b, 30) developed a narrative therapy approach to career counselling which emphasized several key aspects of the story, including knowing what you want, what you have, and what constrains you, and then mapping your preferred story, growing into your story, and growing out of your story. They capture the salience of the storied career narrative, indicating that it encompasses all that people do with their lives rather than just their career choices. They describe the paradigm shift from ‘gathering information’ to ‘generating a different experience’ (Campbell and Ungar 2004b, 35). However, information gathered from traditional career-counselling models can be used secondarily to enhance the ‘storied self’ rather than a ‘psychometric self’ (Brott 2004, 199; Campbell and Ungar 2004a, 23; 2004b, 32; Peavy 1995, 4).

The application of narrative therapy to disadvantaged learners is particularly useful as it encourages acceptance of uncertainty and a positive attitude toward instability. In addition, using case study methodology within a narrative framework is appropriate, because case studies are preferred when ‘how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context’ (Yin 2003, 1). Narrative counselling is a process directed by the learner but framed by the counsellor, and this article will investigate how narrative counselling may shape learner career goals. The case study allows the researcher to follow the learner over time to uncover themes and meanings of a personal story as well as preferred career directions.

From a postmodern orientation, career counsellors deconstruct the cultural assumptions that are a part of a client’s lived experience and come to an understanding of how dominant and oppressive social practices have affected them (Stebleton 2007, 298). Students immigrating to a new culture, who may be economically disadvantaged, benefit from career development models that go beyond traditional trait-factor assessments and skill improvement plans. A growing number of immigrant children and youth have entered the United States over the past 20 years (Vernez and Abrahamse 1990, 1). Many of these children have to bridge differences in academic preparation between their country of origin and the host country. For example, they may have to learn English as well as the host country’s cultural customs and norms. In addition, they are confronted with unpredictable contextual factors including political and economic forces, prior work experiences, and the importance of familial influence (Vernez and Abrahamse 1990, 1). African immigrants and refugees have had to make a dramatic transition from disadvantaged educational systems to the U.S. educational system where they are often lost in a new
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language, new culture and once again, find themselves a member of a non-dominant group. The narrative perspective and transition theory both recognize the cultural socialization which informs individual beliefs about the world and values. Therefore a merger of these two perspectives seems to match the career needs and concerns expressed by nontraditional, disadvantaged learners from diverse backgrounds.

AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

According to U.S. census data (as cited in Stebleton 2007, 308) African immigrants are the fastest growing immigrant group. The importance of contextual issues was also raised by Stead (1996, 273) who warned that most career theories do not adequately consider the numerous barriers faced by both American and South African Black adolescents when deciding on a career.

Stebleton (2007, 292) outlined the unique career counselling needs and issues of African immigrant college students. He identified three primary factors that influence African immigrants’ decisions about work:

1. the long history of colonialism and slavery that informs the African immigrant’s identity narratives relative to racism and discrimination;
2. the influence of contextual factors (e.g., war, fleeing country of origin, political strife, natural disasters, etc.) that promote an ongoing state of living in uncertainty; and
3. the experience of negotiating cultural clashes between the African and Eurocentric, Western worldviews and bi-cultural ethnic identity development.

With the awareness of these influences, immigrant students articulate their preferred futures, thereby transforming their lives and career paths.

TRANSITIONAL THEORY

Nancy Schlossberg (1981, 5) operationalized a transitional theory of human development for individuals in crisis. Central to her theory was the ‘notion of variability’ which called attention to variables which influence resiliency and life management. Her later work incorporated an understanding of how adults develop through life changes (Evans et al. 1998, 108). Her model is also applicable to career development (Williams 1999, 1). Watson and Stead (2002, 30) advocated for a career development framework that is more inclusive and incorporates societal factors which is a major strength of transitional theory. Transitional theory provides a framework for students who have few resources at their disposal, and offers several practical benefits for them, including

1. assisting students in developing career goals;
2. gathering the resources and skills to attain that goal; and
3. forming social and family support groups to provide momentum towards that goal (Schlossberg 1989, 51).
Williams (1999, 6) also suggested that transitional theory could form the core module of a career development program by helping clients through a current career crisis, summarizing previous education, life, and career exploration, preparing clients for future changes, and developing transitional management skills. Toward that end, student may examine past, current, or future transitions and the resources available to them at each transition point.

**FACTORS THAT IMPACT TRANSITION**

Schlossberg identified four major factors which impact transitions: situation, self, support, and strategies. The first factor, situation, calls for examination of the current crisis to clearly define the issues. The second factor, self, is an exploration of individual strengths and liabilities relevant to the present crisis, as well as characteristics that have been used in the past. The third factor, support, examines support and resources available from family, friends, and community. The final factor, strategies, explores techniques that the individual will use to confront the crisis and work towards a beneficial goal (Schlossberg 1989, 66). The strength of the model, when applied to career counselling, encourages the students to examine their situations, characteristics, options, and past experiences to see how they might improve their career options. This assists them in making progress towards an identified goal such as gaining employment or developing the skills for a career.

During the initial phase, students answer questions through a personal interview or through journaling. Using a narrative framework, students can develop a deeper understanding of their situation. It is important to note that Schlossberg developed these four factors, not as sequential stages of development, but as individual factors that can be strengthened independently from one another. When working with economically and disadvantaged youth it is important to give them options which meet their individual needs. This framework would allow youth to prioritize the areas they would like to improve.

**MERGING TRANSITION THEORY WITH A NARRATIVE APPROACH**

Schlossberg’s Transitional theory is a contextual-developmental framework that provides a narrative structure for application to career development. The framework incorporates cultural values, social and political influences, as well as family and community considerations (Clark et al. 2004, 25). Savickas (2000, 60) stated the story of a person’s career insights should embrace all the elements of self in the world of work, family, and the varied roles within the community, thereby allowing the student to capture the aspects of the story that should be celebrated and honored. Brott (2004, 190) discussed narratives as a ‘shift from finding a job to finding oneself’. Schlossberg’s theory is a useful intervention framework for career counselling, since a large number of transitions occur within the teenage (13–19) years. The vital connections across the career-life-work boundaries are highlighted.
Career counselling an African immigrant student in a USA school setting ... by transitional psychology (Williams 1999, 2). While transitional theory has been applied to a greater degree in crisis and business management, Donald Super (1990, 169) recognized it post hoc as a major role is his development of the life-span model of career development. The strength of the transitional theory for career development is that it is applicable in a wide variety of situations, especially diverse and disadvantaged populations such as African immigrants whose futures are uncertain and influenced by cultural clashes. Narrative career therapy emphasizes empowering clients to overcome dominant problem-saturated stories with unique, more favorable stories about themselves. Integrating transitional theory with a narrative approach provides a strong theoretical base and a semi-structured interview for enhancing storied career narratives, particularly in regards to increasing contextual awareness and minimizing oppressive influence for vulnerable groups.

STUDY PURPOSE

This clinical case contributes to the growing literature on postmodern career approaches with diverse and disadvantaged clients. Specifically, this study explored the application of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory integrated into narrative career counselling interviews with an African immigrant high school student to generate a career plan. Two broad goals of this study were: (a) evaluate the application of merging transitional and narrative therapy in providing career counselling for an African immigrant student in US; and (b) describe specific outcomes for the disadvantaged learner relative to transitional theory constructs of situation, self, support and strategies integrated with a narrative therapy approach that impacted the career development plan. The study addressed the following research questions:

- In what ways does Schlossberg’s transition theory complement narrative therapy to facilitate career counselling with an African immigrant student in the US?
- How do student narratives of situation inform career decisions and planning?
- How do student narratives of self inform career decisions and planning?
- How do student narratives of support inform career decisions and planning?
- How do student narratives of strategies impact career decisions and planning?

METHODS

A narrative case study approach was used to best illustrate the application of Schlossberg’s transitional theory to the career development of a disadvantaged youth. Creswell (2007, 54–57) presents general procedures in using a narrative approach, including

1. determining if the narrative approach is appropriate;
2. selecting individuals with relevant life experiences and gathering their stories;
3. gathering information about the context (personal, cultural, historical);
4. analyzing the stories and then ‘restorying’ by reorganizing them into a framework; and
5. collaborating with the individual(s) to negotiate the meaning of the stories.

These procedures were followed in the present study. In addition, the case study approach was applied to more fully explore one case over time, using interviews, observations, documents, and assessment reports as sources of data (Creswell 2007, 73). The case was chosen through ‘purposeful sampling’ to illustrate the multiple contextual factors and processes impacting a refugee learner’s career development in the United States (Creswell 2007, 75). This case was bound by time (4 years) and place (a single high school). ‘Direct interpretation’ was used to analyze the data, and ‘naturalistic generalizations’ were developed (163). Interview responses were analyzed for themes, which were examined in light of Schlossberg’s theory.

Learner background
In this article we follow an Ethiopian refugee in the Midwestern United States named Gloria* (*note: identifying information has been changed). Gloria came to the United States as a refugee when she was 12 years old. She came with her mother and 5 other siblings, and was the second child. Her father was killed in Ethiopia when she was a young girl. Her mother worked two low paying jobs to support the family. Her academic background was limited because she had spent five years in a refugee camp in Africa without a school. Similar to other refugees who had little if any educational opportunities in refugee camps, Gloria, age 16, was older than a typical freshman when she entered the school counsellors’ office. She was an energetic student, though a great deal of her effort was directed at simply maintaining her studies.

Gloria attended high school in a medium Midwestern United State city, where approximately 18 per cent of the students are refugee, immigrant, or minority students. All students were required to attend career development sessions within their core classes as part of their educational curriculum. Individual career counselling sessions are used in conjunction with additional information such as current grades, academic assessments, and information from students’ cumulative files.

Ethical considerations
The case study was conducted in a high school setting for clinical practice and educational purposes rather than for research purposes. Thus the data used for this study were pre-existing through head notes and clinical progress notes. Ethical considerations were addressed at multiple levels. Permission to analyze and report the case study findings was sought and granted by the educational authorities, parents, and the participating student, who was 20 years old at the time of verbal consent (at the conclusion of her counselling sessions). Parental consent for educational services,
testing and outcomes is automatically collected as a part of the school district’s enrollment process. The researcher stipulated that all identifying information would be carefully disguised or omitted so that the student was not identifiable and confidentiality would be maintained. There is no identifying information to link this case’s results with a particular student. Counselling ethical guidelines were followed throughout the counsellor and client interview to ensure the student’s well-being. In addition, following a close examination of all ethical principles, permission to use the pre-existing interview data was granted by the first author’s Institutional Review Board.

Interview goals
Gloria’s initial discussion with the school counsellor was to gather information regarding careers because she felt lost in planning her future. Gloria identified two basic areas in which she wanted the counsellor’s assistance. First, she wanted help with establishing a career goal in a specific field. Second, she needed assistance finding a job in that selected career field. She was unaware of current job opportunities and expressed confusion when her classmates discussed career options.

Counsellor impressions
When reviewing Gloria’s situation, the school counsellor felt that a traditional career counselling approach would not be applicable and may further disenfranchise Gloria from career exploration. With English as a second language and significant gaps in her education, she had many previous struggles with testing which left her feeling intimidated and unsuccessful. Even if she had been open to formal assessment, the results of a computer-scored career instrument such as Holland’s Self Directed Search (Holland 1994, 10) may have suggested a large number of potential careers that have little meaning for Gloria since she lacked general career knowledge. Gloria also expressed concerns that her family did not support her search for a career and did not have monetary resources to fund a post-secondary education. There was strong family pressure for Gloria to simply quit school, find a paying job, and work to support the family. In fact, family discussions regarding her job training were met with sarcasm from her older brother who was currently working and contributing to the family income. The school counsellor proposed the transitional career approach, emphasizing the narrative interview as a starting place, with a career plan as the intended outcome.

Transitional/narrative interview
This case study follows Gloria through a total of 3 sessions with her school counsellor. The initial interview was completed in two 50 minute sessions and provided complex transitional information and rich narratives related to her subjective career path. The interview questions in the categories of situation, self, support, and strategies are discussed below. A third session was held to construct a plan for her career
development in which the student and counsellor collaborated on her objectives, a plan of action, and a timeline. Over the next 3 years the counsellor saw the student individually for an additional five times and then in classroom career development activities an additional three times.

Situation. In applying transition theory to career development, the practitioner begins by examining the environment of the student and the impact of environmental forces on career goals. The interview questions were designed to lead the student to interpret and give meaning to her own circumstances, allowing her to share her life and stories in her own voice. As the narrative progresses, the interviewer draws specific attention to the student’s desired goals for future jobs or careers. In connecting Schlossberg’s Transitional Theory to career development the counsellor used a series of questions that allow both the learner to share her perceptions and stories while also bringing into the conversation information, services and resources that would be helpful to the learner. Listed below are questions that were asked of Gloria which allowed her to probe deep into the topic of career development and allowed the counsellor to have some teaching moments:

• What helped you begin thinking about careers at this point in your life?
• What career choices are available and voluntary?
• What career choice are limited and imposed? By whom?
• What reactions do you have when you look at careers choices?
• What is the community’s or environment’s attitude towards jobs and gaining new skills?
• What have your thoughts been about careers in the past?
• What career exploration have you done in the past?
• When do you hope to start your new path towards a career?
• What is your timeline for this career exploration?
• How do you see your life changing if you achieve your goal?
• What are some of the things that you see yourself doing in future jobs?

Self. Many theorists have discussed the insights that can be gained through the use of student self-evaluation (Holland and Gottfredson 1990, 389; Super 1990, 250). This part of the interview begins by having the student generate a list of personal strengths and weaknesses, and further questions then expand the student’s thoughts to deepen insights. Gloria was able to verbalize her perceptions of herself as a person when she answered the following questions:

• What do you see as your strengths?
• How do these strengths add to the quality of your life?
• What do you see as your weaknesses?
• How do these weaknesses create distractions in your life?
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- What options do you see for yourself?
- How would you describe your view on a continuum of optimistic on one end and pessimistic on the other?
- What is one thing in your life that you are proud of?
- How have you have been successful in school? In your community?
- What are your personal and demographic characteristics (gender, age, health, socioeconomic status, race, etc.)?

**Support.** According to Schlossberg (1981, 10–11) support can be split into two areas, social and institutional support. Social support is further divided into three subtypes: intimate relationships, family units, and network of friends. Institutional support would include community support and organized services. Organized services consist of academic instruction and groups that provide technical training, scholarships, informational materials, or job opportunities. Each of these types can be divided into three facets: types, functions, and measurement.

![Conceptual diagram of social support types](image)

**Figure 1:** Conceptual diagram of social support types

Figure 1 graphically represents Schlossberg’s conceptualization of support and specific areas of impact. In transitions there are times when people are not able to identify their support and this figure allows a person to see the interaction of the support and how it can build from one level to another. The framework’s individualization allows participants to see the wide variety of support that can be offered in personal career development, and allows the counsellor to introduce community resources to the student of which the student was previously unaware. Affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback are all examples of non-tangible support that can be given to strengthen the position of the student. The student is also encouraged to explore
potential individuals who may be of assistance in reaching a goal. As each goal is addressed, support might be needed from different subgroups of supporters. In order to assist Gloria in identifying the individuals in her life who would be able to give support, and also community resources that would provide her support, the following questions were asked:

- Who supports you in working towards your career goals?
- What are their levels of support?
- In what ways do they give you support?
- Who doesn’t support your career aspirations?
- What ideas do you have about your support that explain your efforts to change?
- In what ways do people hinder your efforts to change?
- What groups would assist you in moving towards your career?
- What additional information do you know about which might be helpful for you as you explore career options?
- How might this support change over time?

**Strategies.** Pearlin and Schooler (1978, 4) described a number of strategies that lead to resiliency. They identified coping responses as essentially falling into three categories: those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing the stress of the changes. Schlossberg (Evans et al. 114) endorsed Pearlin and Schooler’s resiliency model, suggesting that effective coping skills, flexibility and the use of multiple methods are important for personal adaptation to change. This model, when applied to career development, examines new strategies to increase student progress towards a career path and identifying steps to move toward that stated career. The counsellor asked Gloria the following questions to access her current strategies as well as to provide information that could be useful in her plans to create her personal goals:

- What direct actions will be taken?
- What self-defeating behaviors will be reduced or eliminated?
- How will you know if positive or negative movement has happened?
- What is your plan to gather additional information?
- How will you handle the changes?
- How will you creatively cope to change the meaning of the situation?
- What plan have you adopted to changing roles?
- How will others know you have implemented your plan?
- Who will notice this change first?
• What will this new plan tell them about the kind of person you are?

RESULTS
Results of the study are presented in the following order:
1. ways in which Schlossberg’s transition theory complemented narrative therapy to facilitate career counselling with an African immigrant student in the US;
2. impact of the use of transitional narratives on the categories of situation, self, support, and strategies;
3. impact of personal and community support on the creation of a career development plan of a learner with limited resources.

Usefulness of transitional theory merged with narrative therapy
The results of this narrative case study provide practical illustrations of how transitional theory and narrative practice combine to impact this African immigrant student’s career development. Grounded in a strong theoretical framework, the transitional, narrative interview provided new insights and alternative strategies within the learner’s social political realities. The questions posed by Schlossberg’s theory captured specific information for each component of the model while continuously changing the client’s perspective. Gloria was able to express her ‘lived story’ thereby giving meaning to her own life while drawing attention to her goals. Throughout each phase of the process, Gloria’s reflections led to deconstructing and reconstructing her vision, goals, and actions. The process facilitated Gloria’s understandings of individual and collective strengths and barriers in her career path. She was able to negotiate major life transitions while linking her life story to career aspirations. The narrative approach guided by reflection on the situation, self, support and strategies encouraged an active, discovery process for both client and counsellor.

Situation. Gloria used goals questions to start her narrative about her situation, which included her own characteristics, her family, and her ethnic community. Her narrative included strengths she could draw upon and challenges in which she wanted help in facing. The strong interconnection between her family and ethnic community played an integral role in her career development. She was transparent regarding fear that her career options were very limited. She felt negative about the lack of career support she received from her family. Gloria reflected on the few resources available for refugees after high school, since most social service programs assist refugees with settling into the communities but thereafter provide no additional funding or support for post-secondary education. Gloria stated ‘Even after coming to the “land of opportunity,” I feel like those opportunities are still hidden from me’. She also expressed discouragement that her teachers expected so little of her, as if she could perform only at a minimal level. Based on these narratives, goals were developed to help Gloria navigate the cultural clashes between the American Dream and her family’s traditional gender role and job expectations. She identified
the ‘most’ supportive persons in her life to begin building a network of support within her ethnic community, family and the school. Resources were identified such as her minister, her English teacher, and an elderly neighbor also from her village. Gloria learned how to access these resources effectively by frankly discussing with them her goal of going to college and directly asking them to help her prepare for the next step in her education. Gloria’s description of her family’s expectation and her living environment set the tone of the narrative and gave indications as to how her story could be used to strengthen her abilities and to attain higher-skilled careers. The goal of changing Gloria’s perception of herself was attained as she was able to see with the help of the situation questions that she could have a different role in making future decisions.

Self. Gloria most easily discussed her personal and demographic characteristics because basic data reporting was familiar and culturally acceptable. However, she was initially hesitant to identify strengths, partly due to cultural norms of collectivism rather than individualism and partly because she had not been asked such questions before. The school counsellor provided a few examples of strengths he could identify based on their previous conversation, such as showing determination to gain an education, speaking directly about her desires, and having the courage to follow through on her goals. She was perceptive of weaknesses, but needed some direction clarifying whether the deficit was a personal, family, or community weakness. For example, instead of discussing her personal ability to use English language skills, she stated that her English class was bad. She saw her academic skills as a major weakness in reaching her goal of attending college. Gloria’s eagerness to share her survival story was a major strength. Her life had been filled with violence and trauma and yet she incorporated these events into her narrative as opportunities to develop her life skills. For example, Gloria has a strong sense of determination and would not let the negativity of her past interfere with her drive to succeed. ‘I know that I have the strength to survive anything, after what I have been through growing up,’ was one statement from Gloria. When applying this determination to a career development program, it was easy to see that Gloria would be willing to put time and effort into learning the necessary skills. Many employers would be willing to hire a young woman with such a high level of dedication. One goal of the transitional career development process was attained as Gloria was able to clearly look at her support system now that she had a better understanding of herself.

Support. Gloria’s narrative regarding family support was fraught with conflicting messages between the African and Western worldviews and the stress of balancing a bi-cultural ethnic identity. Gloria initially focused on the lack of support that she was feeling in all aspects of her life. From her family, she received little support as a woman in developing a career or even basic life goals. Gloria had difficulty discussing how her family would positively impact her work development due to the lack of monetary support. In fact, Gloria expressed concerns that once she began earning an income, she would have little freedom to apply any monies/resources to further career training because her family would expect her to contribute her earnings
to the family expenses. Gloria expressed concern that her ‘family sucked dry any hopes or dreams’. Her older brother expressed the opinion that ‘she was thinking that she was too good to work at any job that would make money’. Gloria was however able to name three friends as outside supporters, but they were also in the same weak position for change. While school was a strong support system, she indicated that there was little time or effort dedicated towards the students’ developing careers. The teachers appeared to be overworked and there seemed to be a primary focus on the basics of education. Gloria wanted her teachers to push her harder academically and to work with her on setting goals for succeeding beyond the survival levels for a refugee.

Straddling two worlds places Gloria in a bind as she strategizes to marginalize her family and African cultural expectations of collectivity and economic responsibilities by seeking alternative support networks from friends and educators. Vernez and Abrahamse (1996, 64) stress the importance of family background and family attitudes toward education in determining their children’s eventual educational attainment. For instance, high school graduates whose parents have higher income, higher levels of education and higher educational expectations for their children are more likely to pursue a college education than others (Vernez and Abrahamse 1996, 65). Gloria’s preference for future and identity narrative may be indicative of a stronger alignment at this point in her development with the dominant USA culture. At the same time, she also attempts to diversify from conformity to a career path and reality dominated by traditional gender role and socioeconomic restraints.

Strategies. By the second session of the interview, Gloria had already developed a number of alternatives open to her. ‘I now realize that I have to be specific in asking for help and be direct with the person that I am asking help from,’ Gloria stated. She identified a number of areas in which she had already started to improve, such as talking with her teachers about a career. Gloria realized that her academic skills needed improvement so she set a goal of giving more time to her studies. She was aware that a number of people in her life had negative attitudes or were unsupportive so she developed a plan to strengthen her support network of friends. Gloria knew her career selection would need to begin and then progress in steps due to her limited resources. She also formed a plan to write a more positive narrative with her family.

Development of a career plan. The career plan was a single sheet of paper that outlined her goals and then listed actions needed to reach her goals. For example, one proposed action was to discuss specifically with her mother the following: ‘If I attain more education, I will be able to get a higher paying job so that eventually I can help my younger siblings in furthering their education’. This was a blend of individual and family priorities from both her cultures. Another action was to seek specific support from close friends and teachers.

Gloria realized she would need to combine her limited resources. One of her strengths was her desire to gain additional education. She also realized her close friends were her major support in obtaining an education. Gloria discussed, first with the counsellor, and then with her friends, the need to form a supportive network.
She made an agreement with her friends that they would commit to encouraging each other to improve their English skills. Each girl would exchange written work and books in addition to providing feedback to one another, assisting each member in improving their academic and language skills. Gloria reported that while these discussions were initially held in Amharic, their native language, the group soon changed to English since they wanted to improve their English skills. As the group developed their English skills, a teacher took note and offered additional assistance. Each student knew they could depend on each other for mutual support, and knew which teachers would provide additional assistance. Viewpoints and information were openly shared and respected. Their academic skills were improved over time and access to additional support from the community was given in the form of scholarships. Family members could see the changes in Gloria’s attitude and began to believe she would continue to be successful in her educational pursuits and in her family life. At the end of four years, Gloria was able to graduate from high school and had made strides in attaining an education sufficient for her to be successful in a college setting.

**DISCUSSION**

This case study illuminates the career development challenges of an African high school student from a lower socioeconomic status immigrant family to the USA. It is typical of the experiences of many low SES, minority background students observed over time by a school counsellor who worked with disadvantaged students. The strength of the transition framework merged with a narrative approach is that it allowed the student to voice her own perspective to create a clearer view of their options preceding change. Social interactions and personal connections are often salient in the lives of those in poverty (Payne 1998, 8). In Gloria’s case, she utilized her connections with others to improve her academic skills in order to access resources beyond her limited environment. The framework provided friendship support for Gloria when her family would or could not encourage her. She created avenues to seek resources to which she had limited or no prior access. A traditional career search would have generated a list of careers involving no personal connection to the student. A skills assessment would have generated information about the areas Gloria was lacking, but would not have created any suggestions for improving her skills.

The results of the transition interview with an African immigrant high school student complements findings from previous case studies (Maree and Beck 2004, 86; Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 8; Stebleton 2007, 297) which highlight the significance of sociopolitical contextual factors, access to resources, family and community influences, and ethnic identity in the career development. Specifically, like the other case studies, the current student narrative illustrated the cultural clash between collectivist and individualistic perspectives. The significance of finding strengths in former adversity and integrating those into a success narrative was also a common theme. A unique finding of the current study is that the transition interview helped the
student identify and develop coping skills and solutions she could use for her current career dilemma as well as future career challenges and broader life transitions.

Limitations
There are a number of limitations regarding the current case study. First, this case is based on one school counsellor’s clinical observations and subjective interpretations from working with an adolescent African immigrant over a 4-year period. Other researchers could conduct the same interviews and interpret the results somewhat differently. Second, the narrative expressed by the student in this case was specific to her background and perceptions, and may not be representative of the larger population of immigrant and disadvantaged high school students. Third, although the strategies outlined may well serve career development practitioners in South Africa, it is important to note that Africa’s culture is heterogeneous, and a ‘one size fits all’ approach would be highly inappropriate. And finally the integration of transitional and narrative approaches followed in this case study can be strengthened as the practitioner becomes more proficient at generating transitional, systemic, and narrative questions to allow the learner to probe more meaningfully into ‘lived experience’ and context.

CONCLUSION
This study responded to a call for innovative approaches to career counselling for diverse populations, especially those incorporating postmodern assumptions (Maree and Beck 2004, 80; Maree et al. 2006, 49; Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 1; Naicker 1994, 27; Stead and Watson 1994, 235). Previous literature applied a hermeneutic-dialogical approach (Mkhize and Frizelle 2000, 2), narrative approach (Clark et al. 2004, 26; Maree et al. 2006, 49), systems theory framework (Campbell and Ungar 2004a, 20; Campbell and Ungar 2004b, 28; McMahon 2005, 29), traditional approach juxtaposed with a post-modern approach (Maree and Beck 2004, 81), and constructivist perspective (Peavy 1995, 1) to career counselling. The current clinical case demonstrated yet another alternative model merging Schlossberg's (1981, 5) broader human development model, Transition Theory, with narrative theory as a more inclusive, holistic and contextual approach to career counselling. Career Counselling with disadvantaged populations is not limited to refugees from Ethiopia or youth spread through the countryside of South Africa. A disadvantaged youth who has limited access to resources may live in an inner city neighborhood or an extremely rural village, within the United States or throughout the world, regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or country of origin. The strength of this model is that it can be applied to assist the individuals to look at the issue, gather the internal and external resources, and to construct a plan to step closer to the desired outcome.

The transitional framework applied to this case study illustrates that narratives can be used to strengthen the multiple work roles and identities as suggested by Stebleton (2007, 298). Gloria was able to illustrate her many roles of daughter, sister,
worker, and family member. Career stories (Savickas 2000, 59) and life stories (Brott 2004, 190) were similar narrative activities that allowed the student to place her valued thoughts into a format beyond the traditional assessment technique.

**Recommendations**

More research is needed to identify the strengths of the transitional theory approach to career counselling with individuals who are striving to develop career options within a context of limited resources. There is a need for more research which examines the ethnic identity development of adolescents and the social and cultural influences on career development. This case study was presented to assist practitioners who are currently working with disadvantaged youth to access this framework in order to organize the many intersecting needs of the individual, his or her family, the community, and the broader culture.

**REFERENCES**


