

Stages of Career Development During Childhood

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Childhood vocational development remains, to some extent, an unexplored space. Existing literature focuses on what children know about careers, and where that information came from, with little regard to the processes children go through to develop that knowledge. Multiple literature reviews (Hartung et al., 2005; Watson et al., 2015; Watson & McMahon, 2005) have summarised existing theory and findings, hence this paper will not attempt to recreate their work, but instead focus on using Career Construction Theory to synthesise the literature and make suggestions for a series of stages of that can help us understand vocational development in childhood.

Childhood vocational development takes the form of meaning-making, where children explore the world of work within their context as an actor, agent, and author, to construct a narrative about what their career may look

like. The development that takes place during childhood provides the foundation for their first significant career transition choices; they do not come to their decision as they prepare to leave school as a 'clean slate', rather, they bring embedded ideas, their vocational identity (VI), and the career adaptability skills they have developed to date.

There is an argument that career interventions should begin earlier than they currently do to counteract the development of bias and create a solid foundation for career decision making (Kashefpakdel et al., 2018; Percy & Amegah, 2021). However, if we are to design appropriate and impactful interventions we must first understand how children develop the skills they need to explore their options and manage transitions (Akker et al., 2006; Biesta, 2010). Other psycho-social theories provide a framework through which we can explore common

patterns of childhood development and, aligning these theories within the context of Career Construction Theory, we can begin to understand how children develop their vocational identity and career adaptability. All children develop at their own pace, and if we want to create flexible interventions that respond to a diverse range of needs then a contextual lens is required, and the Systems Theory Framework of Career Development provides this (McMahon & Patton, 2019). With a stage-based structure to work from, we can begin to develop interventions which can be used to validate and adjust the framework.

The Literature

A common trend within the literature on pre-adolescent career development is a call for more research which is not followed by comprehensive or significant interventions. Watson et al. (2015) conducted the most recent significant review of the literature and focused on work which took place between 2015 and 2005 (when the previous significant reviews took place - Hartung et al., 2005; Watson & McMahon, 2005). Their review was comprehensive, and covered four major areas of investigation; advances in theory, implications for practice, diverse settings, and policy implications. As with the previous reviews, they found significant gaps within the existing body of research, most significant of which for our purposes is that evidence-based

interventions were few and far between, short in duration and lacking in follow-up, and focused on children aged over 8 years old.

Watson et al. (2015) specifically set out to investigate practice in a diverse range of contexts, and while they achieved this in terms of cultural/regional diversity, they acknowledge that they were unable to find sufficient research into disadvantaged groups. This is unfortunate, as in order to create interventions or define stages which do not 'skip over' marginalised groups we need research which specifically addresses their needs and context (D. Brown, 2016). We have moved past a time when we believed children were incapable of integrating their sense of self with their context (Patton & Porfeli, 2007), and in the absence of specific career development literature which includes the needs of diverse and marginalised groups, a multi-disciplinary approach which considers work from the broader fields of education and child psychological development can provide valuable insights.

Hartung et al. (2005) explored the maintenance of the 'moratorium of childhood' and how this impacts on the number of interventions taking place. The desire to separate children from the world of work remains strong, and researchers often use terms such as 'career-related learning' to counteract any reluctance within educational

institutions (Hutchinson, 2013). While Hartung et al. (2005) consider five comprehensive dimensions of career development (including exploration, awareness, interests, and career adaptability), the use of only two age groupings, and a lack of studies from the younger age group limits their findings. In addition, much of the literature they draw on is from the 1970's (or earlier), and could be considered outdated, especially the literature which refers to the impact of gender on career development, as the social context has moved on significantly in the past fifty years (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Watson and McMahon (2005) took a lifespan approach and used 'learning' as a unifying theme for their literature review. They explored literature from the previous thirty years and found that much of the research which took place during that time did not take the form of interventions to validate theory with younger age groups, but instead explored the impacts of intersectional oppression and/or parental aspirations on child career aspirations. The lack of theoretically underpinned, holistic research makes it difficult to understand the 'why' and 'how' of career development; instead, the focus remains firmly on the 'what'. As Watson et al. (2015) found, this approach has persisted; for example, one of the most comprehensive recent investigations surveyed

over 20,000 children between the ages of 7 and 11 and asked them to draw what they wanted to be when they were older, and where they heard about that job (Chambers et al., 2018). While informative (the work clearly identified the disconnect between jobs pre-adolescent children want to do and the labour market), the aim of the research is clearly to investigate 'what' is happening, rather than explore why children feel this way, or how they come to feel this way.

Career Development Theory

There are a multitude of career development theories which address the career development of children, however, the majority of these theories hypothesise about what children say they want to do, rather than the developmental process. Some look at the choices children make (Gottfredson, 2005; Roe, 1957), while others race past childhood to get to the adult stages (Super, 1953). Career Construction Theory (CCT) differs as it explains how through dynamic, interpretative processes we are able to understand ourselves, decide where we want our careers to go, and 'make meaning' out of our combined career experiences at any stage (Savickas, 2013). Building on a constructivist framework, CCT uses a flexible conceptual lens to explore how we *construct* a representation of our career through narrative. When combined with the Systems Theory Framework (STF), a metatheoretical

framework that helps us to understand the complex interplay of the individual within their dynamic context (McMahon & Patton, 2019), CCT can be applied across cultures, contexts, and, most importantly for our work, age groups.

CCT postulates that people make themselves into 'who' they are – they go through a process of cognitive and behavioural self-making, and that this process in relation to vocational experience is what creates a 'career'. To do this, our psychological self performs three functions; self as an actor, self as an agent, and self as an author (McAdams, 2013). Savickas (2020) suggests that we all develop the three functions throughout our childhood; first, as a baby we learn to act as an individual within the family context, then we develop agency in primary school as we extend our self into school and the community, and finally, during secondary school we begin to author our own story.

While all three functions of actor, agent, and author play a vital role, it is the self as agent which has most impact on career decisions and behaviour. Acting as an agent, individuals adjust to change at three key stages of their career; in the transition from school to work, during mid-career transitions, and during unexpected or traumatic transitions (i.e., redundancy). An individual's level of career adaptability will inform the success (or

otherwise) of each transition, and this career adaptability is comprised of four dimensions of coping resources; our concern for our future, our control over our future, our curiosity in what may be possible, and our confidence to pursue our aspirations (Savickas, 2020).

Hartung (2016) uses CCT to explore the role of childhood as *career construction's opening act*; the place in which children begin the process of making themselves into the people they will become. He considers the development which takes place between the ages of three to fourteen years and looks at how childhood is packed full of experiences, events, opinions, and learning, all of which is brought to bear on their first significant career choices. While Savickas (2013) postulates that children only function as an 'actor' until they reach adolescence, Hartung takes the position that children (from age three years) perform all three roles in a rudimentary way.

The things children choose to do, such as the activities they engage with, the toys they play with, and the clothes they prefer construct the 'self' and are refined as they develop towards the adult actor they will become. As an agent, children 'play with possibilities' as they develop their aspirations and build ideas about what their future may look like. This first forays into self-agency lay the foundations for their career adaptability as

they develop independence gradually. Children are masters of stories, in fact, much of their first experience of language (particularly in text) takes the form of narrative, and they begin to tell their own personal story from the earliest days (Lysaker, 2018). Ask any 2 year old, and they will be able to tell you all about their beliefs, preferences, and ideas with as much passion and confidence as an adult; refining their story over time, improving the spelling and adding nuance (Wells, 2009).

Howard and Walsh (2010b) cross disciplines to apply cognitive development theories to create a model in which we can explore the way children develop their skills in choosing and securing a career. The Model of Children's Conceptions of Career Choice and Attainment (CCCCA) uses theory and research from other domains of child development to organise children's conceptions into three developmental approaches across six stages of development, and their work is explicit in defining how children think, feel, and explore their options at each stage. Like the literature reviews previously discussed, the authors frequently referred to studies which were conducted pre-2000, and referred to only one recent qualitative study in their stage outlines (Schultheiss et al., 2005). The model, however, is valuable in that it relates cognitive development to common childhood behaviours, activities, and experiences, and

provides a basis we can expand upon to go beyond childhood choices and towards vocational development.

Theories of Childhood Development

There are three theories of childhood psychosocial development which are particularly relevant to this project: Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, and Erikson's Psychosocial Stages. All three theories look at how development takes place and progresses in identifiable stages as children construct their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Piaget's theory explores how children move through four phases of cognitive development and positions the child not as someone who is less intelligent, or has less capacity, than an adult, but simply thinks different. Rather than seeing the progression as the accumulation of intelligence, his theory looks at how the way they view the world develops from a narrow, black and white worldview to a much more nuanced, complex, and dynamic 'adult' interpretation (Piaget, 1964). While Piaget's theory has aged somewhat, and psychological research may have moved on with the recognition that cognitive processes are more complex than he would have us believe (Bjorklund, 1997), Piaget can still offer a broad

set of assumptions or guidelines we can use to understand childhood development.

Bandura is less explicit about specific stage-based development, but his Social Learning Theory has applicability in terms of understanding how children learn about careers and develop self-efficacy (Bandura, 2005, 2017). Bandura explored how we can learn through observing others, and this is particularly relevant because many children learn about the world of work by observing other people at work.

In developed countries where children are excluded from the workplace in any significant way until the cessation of their formal education, children have limited options to learn about work and careers other than through observation (Mortimer & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Patton & Porfeli, 2007), but Bandura gives us three kinds of observational learning which can be used to inform career interventions: watching a *live model* such as during work experience, accompanying a caregiver to a workplace, observing a caregiver work at home, or observing people working in the community (shop attendants, doctors etc.); observing a *symbolic model* such as a movie or TV show, either fictional or non-fiction, where people work; and, finally, *verbal instruction* such as reading about jobs, or university courses, or

listening to a podcast about work (Bandura, 2005).

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development cover infancy through to late adulthood, and each stage is marked by a 'psychosocial crisis', the outcome of which dictates the progression of the following stages (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). His stages place children within their context, and therefore can help us understand the activities, beliefs, relationships, and experiences children face at each stage. The stages are applicable across a diverse range of cultures, and he considered the impacts of race and ethnicity within his theory (Syed & Fish, 2018). For example, his first stage (Hope: trust vs. mistrust) highlights the importance of the relationship between the infant and the primary caregiver and explains that infants build their understanding of the world and themselves from their interactions with their caregivers, and this phenomenon is cross-cultural (Keller, 2022). Recently, researchers have begun to explore how Erikson's work complements Career Construction Theory, as it helps us understand how crises experienced at each stage contribute to our 'self-making' and life narratives (Maree, 2021).

Savickas has developed hypotheses by applying Erikson's theory to career development, and these hypotheses suggest that people who have more success at each of

Erikson's stages and a "highly crystallized" identity also have more success in selecting, securing, and managing their career (Watkins & Savickas, 2014, p. 84). They suggest that these people will have improved access to world of work information, be able to match their skills to jobs with more accuracy, feel more confident in their choices, and as a result they will be more satisfied with their career and more productive and engaged. To date, much of the work integrating CCT with Erikson's theory has focused on the Identity stage (stage five - ages eleven to nineteen years); for example, the Vocational Identity Scale developed by Holland, Gottfredson, and Power (1980) attempted to create a way to measure the impact of the success of this stage on Vocational Identity Development. As success in earlier stages is hypothesised to impact on the outcomes of later stages, it is therefore necessary to understand how the development which takes place in earlier stages impacts on the Identity stage.

Defining the Stages

To arrive at a distinct set of stages or levels for childhood career development, we must consider both when to start and when to stop, and how to separate each stage. As we want to integrate our findings with the theories of both Piaget and Erikson, and we also want to draw on the conclusions of the CCCA, we must consider how each of these models is

constructed to ensure applicability with our own model.

When to Start

Piaget and Erikson begin their scales in infancy, as this period is when the child is first aware of their surroundings and beginning to make sense of the world. Other research often begins around age two, with the rationale that this is the age at which children develop a sense of identity as independent from their primary caregiver (eg. Howard & Walsh, 2010; McAdams & Olson, 2010). Choosing to mark birth as the beginnings of career development may be controversial as it seems to directly fly in the face of the long established moratorium on childhood (Zinnecker, 1995), however it is at this stage when the first inklings of preferences, behaviours, and traits are being formed, including alignment with gender norms, which are one of the most significant factors in career choice (Chambers et al., 2018; Sodano & Tracey, 2007; Watson & McMahon, 2005).

Anyone who has raised a toddler will know that clear preferences for certain toys, clothes, and activities are formed well before the age of two, and that these preferences are often rigid (Serbin et al., 1994). In addition, parents begin to typecast their children well before birth (sometimes even before conception) into pink baby girls and blue baby boys, to the extent that parents

who know the sex of the baby may treat the foetus differently even while it is still in the womb (Rippon, 2019). Therefore, our model shall begin at birth.

When to End

One aspect that makes Erikson's work so useful is its continuity and integration across the life span; what happens in stage one has an impact on stage two, as well as on stage eight (Maree, 2021). This alone is an argument for extending the stage model to the full lifespan but there is, however, a large body of work within the field on both late adolescent and adult career development, with relatively little investigation into what happens in the earlier stages, and to avoid the risk of losing focus it is therefore necessary to limit the scope of this project. Both Piaget and the CCCA cease at the commencement of adulthood, or around 18 years of age, and this coincides with the end of secondary school in many developed cultures. It is worth noting that children in developing cultures may cease education (if they ever started it) and commence full-time work or motherhood around the onset of puberty (Arthur, 2005; International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, 2021), and in this context the stages may be compressed or the final stages eliminated, depending on the individual and their situation.

The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (STF) is a meta-theoretical framework we can use to explore the range of influences on an individual's career development (McMahon & Patton, 2019). Through the STF, we can explore how the start and end age of each stage may be influenced by a range of factors; for example children who are disabled may progress differently through some stages and interventions can be developed which allow them to reach individualised goals for each stage, working with their educators and caregivers (Watson et al., 2015). Therefore, we will conclude our stages at around the age of 18 to 20, which is generally the oldest age at which children are considered to have progressed to adulthood, while being explicit that a STF lens must be applied to development at an individual or group level when designing or evaluating interventions.

The Stages of Childhood Career Development

To identify the career development processes which are taking place throughout childhood, first we establish what existing research tells us about the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes which are taking place. This knowledge can then be applied to the key dimensions of career development as outlined in CCT, and through this process we can reach a hypothesis about childhood career development.

The key dimensions include the child's development of a psychological self as actor, agent, and author, the creation of a Vocational Identity (VI) and progress in the four areas of career adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence). It is important to note that there is a significant

amount of overlap between the skills they need to manage their career and those skills they need to manage all of their life; 'career' is intrinsically linked with 'life', and choices made about career will impact on almost every area of life (Nota et al., 2020; Savickas, 2015).

Figure 1

The Stages of Childhood Career Development

Stage	Status	Age
The First Stage	Infants and Toddlers	0-3 years
The Second Stage	Preschool	3-5 years
The Third Stage	Primary School	5-11 years
The Fourth Stage	Middle School	11-15 years
The Fifth Stage	Senior School and Tertiary Education	15+ years

The First Stage

This stage begins at birth and continues until the child has developed a sense of self as an independent being, usually around the age of two, however this may extend if the child is limited in social interactions and/or slow to develop basic self-management skills, such as walking, talking, or eating. Infants spend most of their time with their primary caregiver(s), which may include mothers, grandmothers and aunties, and other children (Keller, 2018). They are busy forming an attachment to their caregivers, distinguishing their caregiver and themselves from others, and building their motor skills (Piaget, 1964). From a very young

age, children begin to observe their surroundings, and this observation morphs into exploration through imitation (Meltzoff, 1999), and they also begin to understand object permanence, a precursor to understanding hypothetical thinking (Munakata et al., 1997; Piaget, 1964). Both Erikson and Piaget identify the development of a sense of self as a key cognitive process of this stage (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Piaget, 1964). Actions are guided by feelings rather than thoughts, although towards the later stages of this age a child will begin to string simple thoughts together (Wells, 2009).

Children at this age begin to make meaning through the use of language, which allows them to compare and contrast items and objects, and, in order to make meaning of *themselves*, they compare themselves to other people and things around them to define their place. So, for example, they learn that they are not the same as the family pet dog, and that there are different rules for them compared to the dog. They also learn that they are a 'boy' or a 'girl' through factors such as colour (Jonauskaite et al., 2019), expectations (Mondschein et al., 2000), and common toys (Boe & Woods, 2018; Reich et al., 2018), and that their gender gives them a different set of rules and expectations. This is significant because we know that gender plays a very significant role in career choice throughout life - in fact, in studies it's been shown that gender is the most significant factor for pre-adolescent children, and that they select careers based on a gender spectrum in preference to any other factor (Chambers et al., 2018; Howard et al., 2015; Sodano & Tracey, 2007).

A child in this stage is unable to understand nuance - if they are a 'boy', then that is a concrete fact, and it is irrefutable (Howard & Walsh, 2010a). They must conform to the expectations of that role, in the same way that once they realise that they are different to the family dog, they must conform to expectations and no longer eat out of the dog

bowl. Asking a 'boy' to do something that they consider to be a characteristic of a 'girl' would be like asking them to eat from the dog bowl.

While they begin to understand logic, nuance, and reasoning down the track, these beliefs about what makes them one gender or the other often become ingrained, and difficult to adjust later in life, which not only explains the continued gender bias we see towards specific occupations, but also the lack of progress many interventions deliver, despite the best intentions (Jeffries et al., 2020; Roberts, 2018). Interventions that take place post the First Stage are fighting against what has already been established.

Career Development in the First Stage

Development is not absent at this stage; however, it isn't intentional or aware and career development interventions should focus on avoiding the creation of negative bias within the child, rather than building knowledge or skills.

Actor, Agent, Author

The development of the psychological self as an actor begins in this stage, where children are acting in the truest sense of the word; trying on roles, behaviours, and ways of being, and this process leads to the creation of identity (Savickas, 2020). Their actions, however, lack intent, and they are unable to use agency to direct their career

development. Authorship in the First Stage can be imagined as the creation of a picture book reflective of their life story to date.

Usually grouped by themes, words are composed in order of importance to the child, and their authorship will be informed by their early experiences and preferences. This authorship extends to how they write (and think) about themselves, so their narrative includes words they use to define themselves, like 'strong', 'fast', 'funny', 'good', 'bad', and so on, and there is evidence that infant oral narrative skills are strongest in cultures with strong oral history traditions (Suggate et al., 2018). The story they write may be rudimentary, but it creates the pool of characters and words from which all future stories will be drawn (Reese & Robertson, 2019).

Vocational Identity

Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) suggest that successful VI development requires three things; person-in-context functioning, integration of VI into overall identity, and prioritisation of vocation over other life roles. No one would suggest that an infant or toddler is able to do any of these three things at this stage, however it does not follow that the child is not building the foundations of these three skills.

During this stage, children are learning to function as an individual part of the family unit. Their investigations and actions help them learn where the line is between themselves and the others in their unit, which is essential for person-in-context functioning (Craig, 2009; Savickas, 2020). While it is much too early for any sort of delineation between identity and VI, identity development is taking place at this stage, however it will not stabilise until much later (around ten to twelve years) (McAdams & Olson, 2010). Babies and young toddlers try out attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and traits on the people around them, and refine them in response to the feedback they receive (Piaget, 1964). This identity is not yet fixed, which means that a quiet infant may become more confident and talkative in preschool (or 'come out of their shell') if they are surrounded by louder peers, but in general, traits formed during this phase may remain stable (Howard & Walsh, 2010a). Many career interventions aim to draw from an individual's identity to determine suitable careers, and it is likely that the identity they begin to form in the First Stage will impact the career choices they make down in the future (see Costa et al., 1995; Holland et al., 1980).

Career Adaptability

Children in the first stage are unable to develop career adaptability. They lack the ability to reason or visualise future

possibilities and are unconcerned about their career. They are unable to perceive anything which might block them from obtaining the career of their choice, however this is not the same as feeling as though they have control over their future, and while their curiosity is strong and instinctive it is not purposeful or directed. They also have no clear sense of self-efficacy, and no actual 'confidence' about their prospects.

The Second Stage

Once children begin to explore more of the world around them, and when they have developed their own sense of self and rudimentary identity, they move to the second stage. They may explore more widely in a variety of formal and informal ways; at preschool or in school-preparation programs, in play groups or during religious meetings, in childcare, or in informal activities with other children in the community (Tobin et al., 2009).

While they are still close with their primary caregiver, they also spend time with other relatives, particularly in cultures which share parental responsibility through the extended family, and with their siblings and cousins, and they may also spend time with peers, especially if they spend much of their time in formal education or childcare settings. Play becomes more purposeful, as they prepare for the commencement of formal education,

and much of their play revolves around educational play, such as playing with blocks or with various role play scenarios, and they learn about the concepts they will need for the next stage, such as colours, shapes, animals, and letters (see Department of Education and Training, 2009).

Children are encouraged to undertake more complex physical activities, although the nature of these activities differs between cultures, as well as fine motor activities like sorting or drawing activities, where they are building the skills they need to write (Keller, 2022).

At this age, children are generally more responsible for their personal needs, and will be expected to dress and feed themselves. This responsibility is important because they are gaining independence and learning how to make their own choices, both skills they will need down the track (Maree, 2021). Erikson's second stage is focused on this goal, and he believed that children who fail to establish a sense of autonomy during this stage may struggle with their confidence in later stages and doubt their choices (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

Piaget explains that this stage is key for their endeavours to 'try on' different ideas, behaviours, personalities, even 'uniforms' to see what fits (Piaget, 1964). Identity

formation has much more scope to develop, and can do so through social interactions with peers, rather than being limited to the immediate family, which is why this stage cannot really begin until the child participates in activity outside the home. During this stage, children are exploring, learning, and testing their wider environment. The attitudes, beliefs, and competencies from earlier are solidified and refined in response to their wider frame of reference - so behaviours that developed at home but which are less socially desirable in the community may be discarded or adjusted to meet the social expectations of their peers and new significant adults, such as their teachers (Savickas, 2020). External feedback may also challenge their confidence levels, and they often begin to compare themselves to other peers (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). Formal assessment may have commenced; for example a recent review of the early childhood education system in New South Wales, Australia found twenty two different assessment tools in use within the system, and children may be aware that their individual outcomes differ from those of their peers, especially when additional common interventions such as speech therapy are recommended (Harrison et al., 2019).

Children in the Second Stage employ subjective and unsystematic thinking, which limits their ability to use reasoning (Amsel, 2011). Research shows that children generally

(although not always) fail false-belief tests before the age of four, and they assume that everyone shares their thoughts and beliefs (Baillargeon et al., 2010; Wellman et al., 2001). They believe that things happen by 'magic', and they fill the gaps with their imagination, which they imagine is just as likely to be real as the truth (Howard & Walsh, 2010b).

Career Development in the Second Stage

The Second Stage is where more solid foundations begin to be laid for future career development. It's an age of exploration, where new opportunities to mix and learn outside of the family home give children the chance to refine their identity and explore new life roles as they become aware of the future, and observing their caregivers at work marks the start of observational learning (Bandura, 2005).

Actor, Agent, Author

Access to new environments like playgroup, daycare, or early education give children new amphitheatres in which to refine their acting skills. They can also apply more thinking to their acting, although it's not yet systematic or reasoned, and they respond to external feedback from carers and peers.

The refinement in their ability to act also unlocks the ability to employ an early form of agency. They begin to make their own

choices; they choose their preferred activities and items, and select their own friends from a pool of peers, as they learn how to be an agent for themselves (Serbin et al., 1994). Their first forays into agency are often clumsy and linked closely to their desire to comply with their identity, for example Western children who identify as girls during the Second Stage often idolise Disney™ princesses and may prefer to wear role-play items such as 'princess dresses' in preference to other items of clothing (Golden & Jacoby, 2018). Some expressions of agency are more permissible than others, and external feedback from caregivers and peers leads to the creation of boundaries around permissible vs. non-permissible agency. For example, agency which aligns with gender norms is often praised and allowed (i.e. insistence on wearing clothes which align with gender) but children who employ agency which differs from normal expectations of child behaviour are discouraged (Gidziela et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 1987).

As their language becomes more robust, children also develop the skills to author more complicated stories. They can't yet read or write, but they can tell you about themselves and their lives; what they like, where they go, what they do, who else is in their lives, and, in some cases, what they want to be (Clark & Statham, 2005; Dayan & Ziv, 2012; Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al., 2019). The

Second Stage can be visualised as an early picture book, one with a simple story with a plot and challenge to overcome which helps them understand more complex stories and character development in later stages.

Vocational Identity

Throughout the Second Stage, children use role play and imagination to act out possibilities and 'try on' alternative futures, albeit within a world shaped by their context. Their early experiences with work, such as through observing parents working, contribute to the development of their VI, however children lack the ability to reason at this stage and cannot correlate their experiences with reality, leaving imagination to fill in the gap (Bandura, 2005; Howard & Walsh, 2010b).

The black-and-white assumptions they reach can be difficult to unwind later when the child has access to logic and more accurate information, especially if the assumptions are not challenged. Instead, children may continue to fall back on their first understanding and use this to inform future career decisions as a type of anchoring heuristic, even believing that they have intrinsic abilities and interests which are part of their VI (Bandura, 2014).

VI doesn't just form based on interactions with actual careers and workers, it can also

form based on interactions with toys, educators, and other events in their life. As children play and interact with a range of environments, their preferences inform the choices they make, which are then transferred to their VI (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). So, a female child in Stage Two who enters the preschool classroom for the first time is drawn to the other little girls who are playing in the home corner and makes friends there. The group of girls establishes a pattern of playing in the home corner, where they can interact with cooking implements and baby dolls. Over time, her memories of pleasurable experiences in the home corner reflect not just her friends and interactions with them, but she makes meaning out of her time there and assumes she will also enjoy keeping home as an adult, and possibly becoming a mother (Golden & Jacoby, 2018; Serbin et al., 1994).

It is within this context that children have their first experiences with the world of work, and the outcome of these experiences informs their VI development. As an example, let's examine the types of engagement children have with the police force in the Second Stage. In some contexts, proactive policing organisations send members of staff to visit children in their preschool or playgroup sessions, where the children have the opportunity to ride in the car, see their uniforms, and hear first-hand about the

positive work the police may do (L. Schwartz, 2010).

Other children in disadvantaged communities may be more likely to witness confronting interactions between police and members of their community which negatively impacts on their perception of policing as a career path (Berkman & Esserman, 2004; Goff et al., 2014).

Career Adaptability

The Second Stage brings an awareness of the world of work which did not exist previously, and children begin forming the foundations of their future career adaptability skills as a result. They are now aware that work exists, and that work is something they will likely do one day, but they are still applying magical thinking to their work conceptions, and as a result the concern they display about their future career is not linked to reality but rather based around physical or visual aspects of the career (Howard & Walsh, 2010b; Rosengren & French, 2013). This means they may believe that to become a doctor you need to be wearing the right white coat and have a stethoscope but have no awareness of the years of medical training you must also undertake.

Children in this stage often conflate career choice with an expression of their identity; the child who believes they are brave and strong may aspire to become a super hero or

fire fighter, while the child who loves dancing and believes they are graceful may want to become a ballerina (Chambers et al., 2018; Sodano & Tracey, 2007). They lack the ability to reflect and question these beliefs, just as they lack the ability to question whether their preference for the colour blue has anything to do with their biological gender, which means that while they don't feel that they are in control, they also can't perceive a lack of control.

The Second Stage gives us an opportunity to broaden their horizons; while they are curious and explore at random, they have not yet started to limit their exploration, as they will do in later stages. Having 'chosen' a career path (such as doctor or sportsperson) doesn't impinge on their ability to learn about other careers and ways of being. Their curiosity is passive – they aren't actively or systematically exploring in their areas of interest, rather they are curious about what is put in front of them (Amsel, 2011). They also lack the ability to reflect, which means they cannot apply their findings to what they know about themselves beyond how they perceive themselves to be or question the integrity of the presented knowledge (Beck et al., 2006). This has two implications; first, the information they receive needs to be complete, accurate, and unbiased, and we also need to help them develop a robust and non-biased view of themselves in relation to careers.

Their self-efficacy can vary widely, depending on their context and experiences, and can range from accurate to far-fetched. They are building the fundamentals of self-efficacy at this stage, the foundations upon which all else will be built (Bandura, 2014; Savickas, 2020). This means that if the foundations are faulty, all future self-efficacy will be impacted by the quality of the foundations. It's at this stage that they first experience opinions and feedback from the wider world, and this feedback is used to evaluate themselves and form their ideas around self-efficacy. So, a neuro-diverse child, or a child who has not learnt to control themselves well by this stage may struggle to sit still in preschool. They are more likely to receive negative feedback and be considered a disruption to the class, and they can internalise this information, so even though their ability to sit still has no bearing on their potential, academic or otherwise, they do not understand this to be the case (Auerbach et al., 1996; Dreyer, 2006; Turk & Campbell, 2002).

The Third Stage

Once the child has separated from their caregiver to join their peers for the majority of the day, whether that is in the classroom or the workplace, and developed inductive reasoning, they leave the Second Stage behind. Unfortunately, around 10% of all

children aged 5 to 11 are involved in child labour, and as such a great number of children skip the classroom and go straight to the workplace in developing countries (International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

In this stage children spend more of their waking hours with their peers and teachers than they do with their family, and children who attend school also participate in other community based activities, such as playing sport and attending religious groups (Piaget, 1964). They also generally take on more responsibility, which may include caring for the basic needs of their pets or livestock, maintaining their own living space, and ensuring they have the clothes and equipment they need to learn (Rosati & Rossi, 2003; Shoesmith et al., 2020). This change gives them many more opportunities to learn how to behave independently from their parents, as they socialise and explore their wider world.

Children at this age use inductive reasoning and the beginnings of logic, and this gives them more skills to stay safe without parental supervision. Raven's Progressive Matrices note steady progress in deductive reasoning ability during the Third Stage, as children make more informed and accurate decisions about complex scenarios (Raven, 2000). At the same time, they are also now able to

visualise the future, and while they still struggle with hypothetical scenarios, their thinking becomes more organised (Amsel, 2011; Beck et al., 2006).

Erikson talks about this stage as a question of capability; their new inductive reasoning skills and ability to project forward give them the capacity to question their own capabilities, and wonder if they will be able to succeed in the future they can now envisage (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). They are becoming even more aware of themselves as individuals, and as they are able to recognise their own abilities in comparison to their peers this informs the level of self-efficacy they develop. The Third Stage marks the commencement of standardised and regular testing for many children, and this formal feedback combined with external third party encouragement (or lack thereof) impacts on their confidence (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Maree, 2021). Erikson describes how primary school gives children multiple regular opportunities to achieve recognition, through art, music, academic achievement, and social prowess, and that if they are given this recognition then it will encourage industry. Being unable to meet expectations, or a feeling of low adequacy compared to peers can lead to disappointment and a lack of confidence, which may evolve into disengagement if left unaddressed (Fredricks et al., 2019).

This stage is also about their social capital; where do they fit, and what power do they have? The last stages of their identity development take place towards the end of this stage, as they refine the behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes they wish to internalise in response to the social feedback they receive (Herr et al., 2004; McAdams & Olson, 2010).

Career Development in the Third Stage

This is the stage where children begin to test their boundaries and understand their limits with regards to their career possibilities, and this makes the Third Stage critical for their career development.

Actor, Agent, Author

Development of the psychological self progresses substantially during this stage, as children refine their acting as part of their identity development, and continue to develop their ability to act as agents when making choices about their work, subjects, activities, interests, and level of participation, and these choices are likely to impact on future career decisions (Bandura, 2014; Dweck, 2002).

Authorship in the Third Stage is reactionary; as part of their identity development, they begin to tell stories about the things that are happening in their lives, for example, disengagement from school can be

understood as a form of authorship.

Behavioural disengagement starts to kick in around Year 3, which is around mid-way through this stage (Kettlewell et al., 2012).

Early dis-engagers are often the kids who couldn't sit still, keep up, or follow the rules for one reason or another. Teachers, despite their best efforts, may begin to become frustrated and even prejudiced against these kids, and interventions, where they take place, serve to reinforce the sense of exclusion and difference that the child feels. The child then begins to write their own story and disengages from school; school is 'boring', the teachers 'don't like me', and there's 'no point' (Conner & Pope, 2013; Fredricks et al., 2019).

Vocational Identity

By the start of the Third Stage, children begin to understand that they may know things that others don't know, and that they may have different beliefs, values, and aptitudes from others (Beck et al., 2006; Sodano & Tracey, 2007). This knowledge combines with their ability to use inductive reasoning to help them develop hypotheses about who they are, and who they could be (Hayes & Heit, 2018). The Third Stage gives them space to start to choose more of the things they do and are involved in, which helps them define their budding vocational identity and begin to specialise in a very rudimentary way (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007).

The evidence suggests that VI formed by the end of the Third Stage will remain relatively stable throughout the life course, and be used to inform future career development (Savickas, 2020; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). Interests which have developed by the end of this stage often persist into adulthood; the child who is interested (or not interested) in technology by the end of this stage, for example, is unlikely to develop a strong interest for technology in the future (Platt & Parsons, 2018).

Career Adaptability

The increased ability to compare themselves to peers during the Third Stage has implications for the development of their career adaptability skills. As their conceptions about career pathways become more realistic, they often begin to question how their skills and strengths may equip them for specific careers and limit their ability to obtain others, and the aspirations of caregivers may also begin to carry more weight (Cuervo et al., 2019; Tsvirikos et al., 2015).

While they are becoming more and aware and concerned about their future, they are also losing their perceived sense of control. We often see children begin to rein in their aspirations at this stage, as they move towards more realistic careers and away from the grandiose and fantastical imaginings they

had before (Howard & Walsh, 2010a; Platt & Parsons, 2018). This process is compounded if they have crystallised their aspirations and VI, particularly towards the end of this stage, and they may begin to make decisions about their pathway which further solidify their VI (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). Confidence is created when children have safe, supported opportunities to test their capabilities (and boundaries), and children without access to these opportunities may struggle to build confidence and accurate self-efficacy (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

The Fourth Stage

The Third Stage ends when children go through three changes; first, they begin to be affected by the onset of puberty, second, they develop deductive reasoning and hypothetical thinking ability, and finally, they move from their socio-educational context of primary school, with its craft and playtime, to formal academic education, vocational trade-based learning, or work, either as a caregiver, or outside the home (Sawyer et al., 2018).

Affluent parents use this time to further improve their child's social capital, and will provide an environment where the child can focus on the acquisition of skills and knowledge without any need to earn an income (Zinnecker, 1995), but others will be required to take their first steps into the

workforce in the form of actual paid employment, either full time or in combination with education, or through taking on responsibilities at home, such as working in the family business or farm, or taking on caregiving responsibilities (International Labour Office and United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

The family and primary caregivers may take a backseat at this time, as adolescents develop strong relationships with chosen peers, although selected adults retain an important role as guides and role models (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). These adults play a role in the adolescent's decision making process and may guide or dictate depending on the cultural norms and the nature of their relationship (Haywood & Scullion, 2018).

Key among the changes which take place at the start of the Fourth Stage is the shift in reasoning ability (Jeon et al., 2020). Piaget calls this the stage of "formal operations", which means that children can use reasoning and logic to combine ideas and go beyond the obvious (Piaget, 2006). Hypothetical thinking requires the ability to make inferences about imagined scenarios, then apply those inferences to real-world consequences, and it is this kind of thinking which transforms how children see the world (Amsel, 2011).

Whereas previously they explored at random, now they can apply logic to accurately (or, at least, somewhat more accurately) evaluate possibilities and review situations, which means they make better decisions (Patton & Porfeli, 2007). For example, studies into children's ability to reason about hypothetical medical scenarios found that children are able to make adult-like decisions from the age of around twelve (Glauser, 2019; Hein et al., 2015; Levine & Johnson, 2020; Weithorn & Campbell, 1982).

Piaget's theory marks this change in thinking as the defining factor of the period, because at adolescence, imagination comes under the control of logic and reasoning (Piaget, 1972). They're not changing *how* they imagine, just what they do with it. This ability to hypothesise also transforms how they think about the future; rather than an opaque ideal, the future becomes something that can rationally explore, albeit in a limited way, and they use hypotheticals to explore their own strengths and limitations. This is why it is around this age that we start to see children's career choices become more realistic, as they rein them in to meet reality (Chambers et al., 2018; Howard & Walsh, 2010b).

This increase in reasoning ability also changes the way in which children explore their boundaries. Younger children will explore randomly to find their limits, but adolescents

explore theirs more systematically (Amsel, 2011). They develop hypotheses, evaluate their likelihood, then test them out, and this boundary testing helps them build their confidence. Erikson refers to this stage as the period of identity development, and career development researchers often focus on this period as the time when vocational identity becomes crystallised (Maree, 2021; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Erikson believes adolescents need support and encouragement in order to feel safe as they explore and develop their identity and become independent beings. To do this, they need to be given the opportunity to experience success in a variety of tasks which become more complex over time, so that they can find their limits, explore their strengths, and make decisions about who they'd like to be (Erikson & Erikson, 1998).

This focus on self-exploration and boundary-testing means that the Fourth Stage can often be a difficult one. Disengagement is at its peak at the end of this stage, and some adolescents may be questioning why they are continuing with school as a result (Fredricks et al., 2019). The need to establish a sense of independence and test boundaries can stretch relationships with caregivers, and strained relationships may make it more difficult for adolescents to find the support and encouragement they need to tackle increasingly complex activities and develop

confidence in their abilities (Haywood & Scullion, 2018).

Career Development in the Fourth Stage

While the vague 'someday' of previous stages shifts to a looming 'tomorrow', the Fourth Stage brings systematic exploration and hypothetical thinking which children use to explore their possible futures.

Actor, Agent, Author

This is the stage of social exploration, and their acting takes place within their social framework as they build stronger relationships with peers while caregivers take a back (although still very important) seat (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Howard et al., 2015). Children may begin to use their agency to affirm their social place; for example, they may choose to associate with peers who perform to a similar standard academically, socially, or in extra-curricular activities (Coleman, 2010; Youniss & Smollar, 1987). This process creates perceived social barriers around their career aspirations – they tend to follow the path they think they should be following, and a similar path to the one their friends are on; Gottfredson describes this as the process of *orientation to social valuation*, where they rule out certain jobs because they are either too aspirational, or not prestigious enough (Gottfredson, 2005).

As an author, hypothetical thinking brings a richness to their narrative, as they are now

able to imagine what their future story may be. They can now purposefully incorporate future-thinking into their story, which tells not just where they are and where they have been, but also where they are going.

Vocational Identity and Life Theme

The Fourth Stage marks the first time that young people use systemic, proactive exploration to refine their career thinking, and this process enables them to begin to crystallise their Vocational Identity (Hartung et al., 2005). They are able to comprehend and understand the implications of their context, abilities, and values for their career choices, and we see a shift during this stage away from fantasy careers towards realistic pathways (Howard & Walsh, 2010b).

VI development isn't guaranteed or linear, and Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) outline multiple possible routes VI development can follow, starting at adolescence. A lack of expectations and role models can maintain the VI diffusion of childhood, or societal pressure (especially from caregivers) can pre-empt VI foreclosure. Throughout this stage, adolescents often reconsider their options and question their beliefs, and this can trigger a VI 'crisis' which prompts them to explore and align their VI with their options throughout the Fourth and Fifth Stages (and potentially beyond this into adulthood).

Career Adaptability

As their transition draws closer, adolescents face increased societal pressure to make decisions about their future. They are no longer only concerned about making money, but also about their ability to find a job, and they are also thinking about the opportunities different jobs present (Howard et al., 2015), which suggests that, compared to the Third Stage, children feel more concern about their future than they did in the past. At the same time, their ability to hypothesise and understand their own strengths (and limitations) strips away any vestiges of the illusion of control, which gives way to an awareness of barriers they may face (Howard & Walsh, 2010b).

Adolescents display more variability around their levels of curiosity and confidence, for example Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) describe how in some cases foreclosure of VI can stall curiosity and career exploration, leading to incomplete decision making and reducing the child's chances of vocational success.

Likewise, their progress towards developing their identity and self-efficacy impacts on how they align their competencies with career pathways (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). This is the stage during which children are ruling out some jobs, based on their perceived social valuation (Gottfredson, 2005), and when we

combine this knowledge with research that shows that interests and competency perceptions generally stabilise during this stage, it becomes apparent that the two are linked and relate to career confidence levels (Sodano & Tracey, 2007).

The Fifth Stage

The start of the Fifth Stage is marked by two things; a future-focused mindset and an ability to evaluate systemic-level information. Many late adolescents and young adults have more choice over what they do each day, from the subjects they study, to the work they do, and the people they spend their time with, and this newfound feeling of control can counteract feelings of disengagement (Fredricks et al., 2019; Juntunen et al., 2019). Adolescents who are pursuing an academic pathway may prioritise their studies above all else (Pilcher & Torii, 2018), while others may be commencing an apprenticeship, entering the workforce, or taking up domestic duties as a parent. Part-time or full-time work becomes the norm in many cultures, and adolescents may participate in both formal and informal community activities (Mortimer & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Their sphere of influence also shifts as their key relationships change in preparation for separation from the family home. Relationships with friends, colleagues, peers,

and classmates rise to prominence, and the young person may form close ties which will extend into the next phase of life, while at the same time their relationship with their caregivers undergoes a transformation (Howard et al., 2015). This is because the young person makes decisions about their transition as part of a team in conjunction with their primary caregivers; they work together to decide what the young person should do next. Team may be a misleading word, as what takes place is often fractious and conflict-bound, as the adults in the team balance their need to protect and control the child with the desire to not harm their relationship, which often leads to less than desirable behaviours on both sides of the equation (Haywood & Scullion, 2018).

This stage is essentially about them finding their own limits across several spheres. In late adolescence, the young person has more scope to explore and decide upon their own boundaries socially, financially, academically, and vocationally, and this process crystallises their identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). Erikson's theory posits that Role Confusion occurs when this process is interrupted, either because the young person is not allowed to develop their own boundaries, or because they fail to do so.

Piaget separates this phase (fifteen to twenty years) out as the "beginning of professional

specialisation”, because it’s during this time when we begin to lose some ways of thinking while we prioritise others (Piaget, 1972, p. 11). This process is what allows us to build careers which are based on our interests and abilities; we don’t have the capacity to become experts in every arena, so we must preference one or two over the others. This is the stage of in-between. They do not yet have the full freedoms and liberties as adults, but it is also essential that they have opportunities to explore more freedoms than they have in the past. As their circle widens, they will explore further and in directions of their own choosing, but still need to know they can return for feedback and support from time to time (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Maree, 2021).

This widening of perspective also gives young people the ability to look beyond their own concerns and consider systemic factors. Howard et al. (2015) found that before this stage, children were not influenced at a systems level, for example by labour market information, and this goes some way to explaining why so many younger children persist in their desire to become YouTubers or professional sports people in the face of overwhelming odds (Chambers et al., 2018; McMahon & Rixon, 2007). Adolescents in the Fifth Stage become increasingly concerned with world affairs and issues such as climate change, especially if they engage with news and current affairs (Sciberras & Fernando,

2022), and they also display more appropriate dietary choices as they age (Pearson et al., 2009).

While some young people will have become completely independent by the end of this stage, many children across cultures will continue to rely on their caregivers well into their twenties (and beyond) (Sawyer et al., 2018). Parents often retain control over careers, partners, finances, and further education, and the age at which children leave home is also rising, as young people struggle to establish themselves financially – 55% of Australians aged eighteen to twenty nine live with their parents (Wilkins et al., 2021).

Regardless of the strength of the ties which remain, or the form that they take, children must have established key control over their identity to move forward from this stage, and they must also be in control over decisions about where they live, how they source their income, and what they do. It’s for this reason that the age at which children complete the Fifth Stage varies so widely; while some have moved on at seventeen years, others remain firmly stuck until they are in their mid-twenties or even later.

Career Development in the Fifth Stage

While this is not the last stage of development throughout the lifespan, it is the last stage of

what would be considered 'childhood' career development. It's a stage of individual development, and the needs of each child differ depending on their context, abilities, self-efficacy, and stage of VI development. At the same time, children during this stage are expected to be proactively working towards the transition from school to work, and may be feeling significant pressure from caregivers who are keen to steer the child whilst also transitioning to an adult-to-adult relationship (Haywood & Scullion, 2018).

Actor, Agent, Author

By the end of the Fifth Stage, we expect that young people will have established themselves as independent actors and have solidified their identity (Savickas, 2020). They know the type of role they wish to play and use their growing agency to take steps towards their interests and chosen specialisation. Children from collectivist cultures, however, where family often take a strong role in the decision-making process may find they have less agency than others and some children who have commenced work or caring roles are also limited in their ability to enact their agency. This may mean that the Fifth Stage takes longer to complete for these children, or remains stalled in a space where they are not able to move forward with independent career development (D. Brown, 2016; McMahon et al., 2008).

This end of this stage also marks the shift from multiple narrators to one key narrative, as young people are able to write their own career story. The continuation of the story becomes in-and-of-itself a driver of career-decisions, rather than a narrative retelling of what has or may take place. This may have positive and negative impacts, for example, individuals may continue a limiting narrative of disadvantage, or pursue an aspirational narrative of success, and narrative-based interventions may begin to take place (R. H. Rice, 2015; Savickas, 2020; Winslade & Monk, 2007).

Vocational Identity

VI becomes focused on practical decisions, and by this point systemic-level information often refines their VI; for example, a student who has a VI aligned with a career in nursing may conduct some investigation and find that their local university offers a course in paramedicine but no nursing degree, which in turn shifts their VI. During this stage, young people may resolve their VI crisis and begin to make positive and informed career decisions, but those who don't may stagnate and delay decision making, leading to VI confusion and career dissatisfaction (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). For this reason, interventions during the Fifth Stage should give young people the tools, opportunities, and information they need to resolve their VI crisis.

Career Adaptability

While the Fourth Stage marked the beginning of real differentiation among individuals in terms of their Career Adaptability dimensions, the Fifth Stage is marked by the same sort of level of individual development that we see in adults. Their development will relate directly to their context, which means that those already working and with little agency over their career paths are not likely to have a high level of Career Adaptability, while young people with crystallised VI, strong self-efficacy, and positive role models may already have well developed Career Adaptability (McMahon et al., 2008; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007).

During this stage, the dimension of concern matures to incorporate contextual, societal, and lifestyle issues, as it does in adulthood, however their specific context and circumstances impact on its level of development; so, for example, a child who is aware that there is strong demand for entry-level employees in their location and has no aspiration to tertiary education may be unconcerned about their career as they feel confident they will be able to find a job once they leave school, while a child with high career aspirations may be very concerned about their career (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

Well-supported young people who have had opportunities to develop their VI and self-efficacy, and with a solid understanding of the local labour and training market may feel a high level of control, but without these opportunities they may feel a lack of control (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). In the same way, control may be negatively influenced where young people who feel overwhelmed by the impacts of the pandemic and the proliferation of low employment data in the media (Shipley & Walker, 2020).

Interestingly, curiosity may be seen as a detriment to career decision making at the 'business-end' of education. High curiosity and continuing exploration may feed VI stagnation, which in turn delays the process of making career and further education decisions (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2007). On a practical level, students who have crystallised their VI may have less access to career exploration activities, as career service providers manage limited resources and consider that they are not a priority for interventions while they focus on young people who have not yet made a decision (D'Angelo & Dollinger, 2021; Keele et al., 2020; S. Rice et al., 2022). This may increase the incidence of VI foreclosure amongst school leavers, and lead to delays in Career Adaptability development.

Implications for Interventions

Identifying the shape of development which takes place throughout childhood enables us to design theory-based interventions which go beyond treating children as 'small adults'. A common theme across the developmental stages of childhood is the need to avoid the creation of negative stereotypes and bias which limit future career options, and which begins to take place from the earliest stage. For this reason, interventions at all ages should be evaluated for the potential to reinforce bias or career stereotypes, and steps should be taken to ensure young people have access to information about a wide range of career paths as they build the foundations of their VI.

Before the development of reasoning and hypothetical thinking in the Fourth Stage, children lack the ability to accurately align their strengths with career pathways or systematically explore future options. Interventions which take place before this stage, such as those within preschool and primary school, should instead focus on broadening horizons and informing children about a range of aspects related to each career, including tasks, skills, and work environments, and move away from a focus on uniforms and props (Howard & Walsh, 2010b).

We know that identity and interests stabilise towards the beginning of adolescence, and career development interventions which increase the accuracy of their self-concept at this stage provide a stronger basis on which future career development can be built. Interventions could focus on giving young people regular opportunities to explore new, diverse interests, and take a strengths-based approach to raise awareness of the transferable skills they will eventually use in the workplace (Bennett, 2002). Localising interventions through context-appropriate adjustments and local labour market information can break down misconceptions around the likelihood of success in various career pathways and improve alignment between aspirations and employment opportunities.

There are also implications for adolescent and young adult career development programs; these stages bring to light the underlying processes which take place before young people reach their first transition and could inform the revision of existing programs.

Waiting until children reach an imminent decision to deliver career-related learning limits our opportunity to counteract bias or develop awareness of diverse career pathways, but interventions which are aware of the processes which have taken place up to this point can play a role in unpacking

stereotypes and expanding horizons. It is clear that childhood is the 'opening act' of career

construction, and as such is worthy of further investigation (Hartung, 2016).

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