

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR: Prof Mark Watson is a distinguished and emeritus Professor in the Department of Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth. An Honorary Professor in the School of Education of the University of Queensland and a research fellow at the University of Warwick. Prof Watson was a BA rated scientist with the National Research Foundation of South Africa. Please help me welcome Prof Watson.

PROF WATSON: Well hello everybody. This is a bad time to be coming up, it's getting close to lunch. Restlessness starts, but you need to know right at the beginning, that I am very nervous. And I will tell you why I'm nervous, because I've listened to one speaker after the other and realise what an important day this is for you as career development practitioners and here I stand and I'm going to tell you there's limits to what you can do. And here I stand and I'm going to tell you that the South African context is a difficult place to be a career development practitioner in. But having said that, thank you for inviting me to be a keynote at the career development practitioner congress.

My focus today, is on describing rather than prescribing, systemic issues that relate to policy development and delivery of career education in South Africa. Thus I do not believe I have the answers, but I do believe that if we don't raise pertinent questions, how will we know what answers we should be seeking? In my previous keynote in 2012 for the then National Career Guidance Conference on career guidance policy and delivery in South Africa, one of the questions I posed was, what systemic issues face career guidance policy and service delivery in South Africa? Sadly, it seems to me that the answer today remains much the same as that provided 7 years ago.

Today, in the brief time I have with you, I would like to identify some of those systemic influences that are at the core of career education development in South Africa at the present time. These macro-systemic influences reciprocally interact with individual career development in our country.

Thus Perian Smith, to Americans, writing about career development in the South African context, say the following: *“The philosophical tensions that lie at the heart of career choice and poverty in South Africa, is namely the struggle between individual and structural attributions.”* Let us examine some of those structural, that is, systemic influences that are impacting on individuals’ career development in South Africa. Here I would like to briefly talk about the impact of economic realities on our understanding of career education in South Africa, as well as how that might impact on our concept of decent work. Now I know we’ve had some stats this morning and I’m most relieved to see I’ve got the same percentage as one of the earlier speakers.

Time Magazine’s cover of May the 13<sup>th</sup> this year, visually depicted our country as the most unequal country in the world. The challenge for us in seeking to define career education in South Africa, is considerable. Consider for example and came into it from a slightly different angle, the latest stats South African quarter labour 4th survey for 2009. This is what we read there, as we read it as career development practitioners. Unemployment, the broad definition has increased to 38%. Close to half of South Africa’s population of 55 million, live in chronic poverty. 33.2%, that’s 3.4 million, between the ages of 15 and 24, were not employed, not in education, not in training and that figure rose to 40.7%. That’s 20.3 million, if the upper age bracket was raised to 34 years. We are functioning as career development practitioners in this environment.

So David Brustein, that eminent American psychologist who developed a theory called The Psychology of Working, I asked him to talk about the South African economic context and in 2017, this is what he concluded after looking at our situation; that it has raised significant questions about the utility of conventional wisdom in career psychology and unemployment studies, much of which is rooted in western knowledge bases. This brings us straight to the concept of decent work. Here we have Prof Maree working in this

field and this year, David Brustein described decent work as the following: *“A hallmark of an aspiration of foundational baseline.”* And aspiration is my emphasis and *“an ideal that is becoming less possible for increasing numbers of working people across the globe.”* Simply put, decent work is something we should aspire to. It is the ideal, but clearly it is challenged by national realities.

Let us turn again briefly to the other critical macro-systemic influences on career education in South Africa. Let’s talk about politics and policies. Our South African history has been a deeply troubled and traumatic one and apartheid terrifically illustrates how grossly distorted the definition of career education in South Africa was, what can only be termed, negative activism. It was a definition that represented marginalisation, discrimination, under-resourcing and under-development for the majority of South African students. It perpetuated the definition of career education, perpetuated the political needs of a minority and in so doing, it amounted in what Tony Watts famously described South African career education in the 80’s, as social bookkeeping. Balance your numbers where you want them, have the right people in the right professions of the right colour career education.

But the point I want to make today and I don’t know if I’m going to come across this controversial. I’m sure I’ll hear from somebody at lunchtime, but let me give it a shot okay? We need to be wary, in the present times, that we don’t move from that historically centralised concept of career education, to a centralised monopolised definition of career education. This is specifically the case when we position the role of education within the broader field of education. Perian Smith, in considering the career practitioner role in South Africa, rhetorically asked, whether career practitioners can transform South African education; whether career education, in and of itself, can resolve reading, writing, mathematical and scientific deficits and they concluded that in South Africa career activities and instructions in themselves, cannot fill these huge voids. It’s not your role.

All this calls for us not to repeat historical distortions in the reconstruction of career education, more specifically, not to repeat the fact that both policy and practice was topped down in its design and implementation. For the fact is, that we have ignored the ground

and further, that we limited the ground that we did focus on. We do not have a grounded approach to career guidance service delivery. In this regard, the more recent concept note for a career advisory panel with its focus on stakeholders, holds much promise. It's the way to go.

So now, I'm heading towards my conclusion already okay? In conclusion, let us consider some positive aspects of the way forward. When Prof Stead and I were developing our third edition of Career Psychology in the South African Context, we invited international career experts to write chapters, provided that they related their content to the South African context. So we sent them packets of things to show them what was actually happening here and then said okay, take this viewpoint that you know for internationally and try and apply it here.

Some of my earlier quotes today come from those authors. Perian Smith saw considerable potential for the future of career education in South Africa and while they acknowledge that they could not redress major educational deficits, they believed it could be part of career components of anti-poverty initiatives throughout the educational pipeline. Endorsing this pipeline metaphor, Lappen et al, in a book on children's career development that Dr McMahon and I recently edited, there you see the book on the left-hand side, they stated that career exploration and development, play important roles in facilitating children's academic, motivation and self-regulatory growth. It's got a lot of potential. It can't solve their reading deficits, but it can be a huge motivational thing once it's connected to subject. So that takes the concept of career education right down to the primary school level. That's where it should start.

So in the second edition of our South African career text, the one before that one, Acaster Mkhize, Prof Mkhize, from KwaZulu-Natal, provided constructive criteria that we can consider in our reconstruction of career development. They said these were valuable criteria for the reconstruction of career education of South Africa. They believed and I don't think we got there, that career education should consider its theoretical base; that it should consider whether it's going to be a supplementary activity, or a mainstream activity; that it should consider a facilitative, rather than a didactic teaching methodology. It's not a subject

you're supposed to teach, you're supposed to explore with the learners. And the career education should have greater involvement of the community and other stakeholders.

So my final note is this: No one is better situated than ourselves to find innovative, indeed indigenous ways of deconstructing and reconstructing career education in South Africa, so that it can assist in addressing macro-systemic influences on individual career development in South Africa; that such an effort could attract international attention, seems guaranteed, for, the story of South Africans is the story to which other people around the world can relate. Yet it brings those experiences into remarkably forceful light that can instruct, if not inspire, the rest of the community in career development and counselling. I thank you.