

“Telling tales”: understanding and practising narrative career counselling

YIF Symposium on Career Management

Professor Hazel Reid

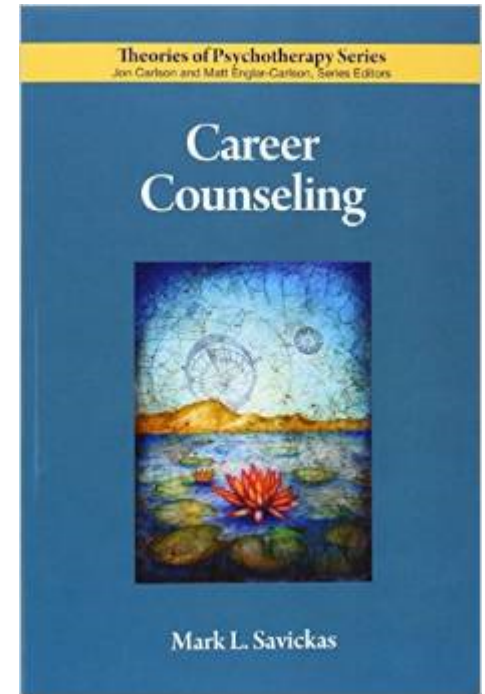
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A bridge between theory, research and practice

Aim: to explore the place of narrative careers counselling for career management

- Reflect on what is meant by 'established' approaches
- Consider the current context for careers work
- Indicate the relevance of this approach in career management for a range of settings & clients
- Introduce the narrative approach (the career construction interview) developed by Savickas



Established approaches

- The historical, cultural and social context for the development of theory
 - Matching/Trait and Factor
 - Developmental theories
 - Opportunity structures
 - Many others: eg Planned Happenstance (Krumboltz)
- What is the world of work like today and why might we need a shift (paradigm shift?) of approach in careers work?

Background to 'constructivist' approaches: a need for a paradigm shift?

- Modernity, postmodernity, liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) ~ change and more change
- The narrative turn
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Attention to language and context in a changing world
- Narrative - based in social constructionism



Entering a hall of mirrors?

- Constructivism – individual and cognitive (rational)
- Constructivist – interpersonal and relational (emotional)
- Social constructionism - the way our experiences are constructed, in context, rather than determined in advance
- *Psychosocial* – my preferred term for describing the approach



Turning to narrative and biographical approaches – why this, why now?

- Discontinuous nature of employment
- Impact of migrant populations
- Storytelling is universal as a method of understanding
- Narrativity is evident in different communities of practice
- A life ‘story’ as part of considering a life future
- Not about ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’
- Established approaches have their place – at the point of readiness
- Yet, building less ‘reductionist’ models in practice is easier said than done

Settings for narrative career counselling

- School/college
- University
- Work place
 - Early career development e.g. apprenticeship/graduate trainee/intern
 - Mid-career onwards
- For those not in employment
- And ages?

Constraints to innovation: 'busyness' vs deep listening

- Attentiveness and time
- The meaning of events
- Dealing with uncertainties
- The reality of targets – constraints – 'safe' transitional spaces
- A playful space
- A need to practise
- **Can use parts rather than whole model**



From theory to practice

- In 1-1 work, but there are other ways of ‘doing’ narrative work
- Can fit into a staged model for shaping ‘interventions’, e.g. Egan’s 3 stages
- Moving from ‘telling a story’ to identifying patterns - towards career hopefulness
- Patterns – more illustrative and tentative than themes
- Growing body of research evidence of the effective use of narrative in practice
- My own research – 4 projects, in brief

Derived from the work of Mark Savickas

- Savickas, M.L. (2011) *Career Counselling*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ~ (2009) *Career counselling over time* (Psychotherapy in six sessions video series). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ~ (2006) *Career Counselling* (Specific treatments for specific populations video series). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

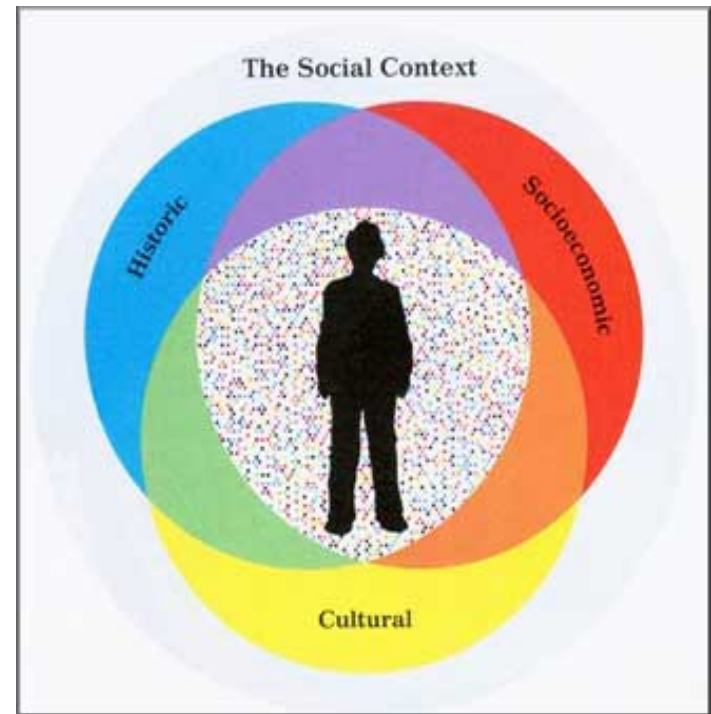


Practical points to consider

- Time, **if also exploring stories**, 50 minutes seems average
- The need to contain troubling stories
- Not for every client – part of the toolbox – but, not arriving with prepared stories
- The idea is not to replace an existing way of doing things with another exclusive approach – flexibility is key
- Questions need explaining / framing carefully and responses need developing (not a check list) – rapport essential
- Probe the story for the detail, not just naming the event.

Contextual points to consider

- The need for *psychosocial* understanding
- Cultural preparedness
- Neoliberal discourses around individual resilience, adaptability and employability
- High levels of youth unemployment
- Career as a middle class concept?



“Telling tales”

What do we see when we look at photos of ourselves as children? We can recognise the place or the new outfit, but there is a sense of separation – how is the child related to who we are now? We recall past events as fragments, but there is also a sense of continuity.

- Who gets to ‘author’ the story?
- ‘NEET’ as an essentialising label (White and Epstone’s work)



The Narrative Career Counselling model

Adapted from the Savickas approach

A systematic approach – ‘fits’ with a 3 stage model, but the language and content differs.

Beginnings – negotiating a contract

- How can I be useful? (not ‘how can I help you?’)
- Tell me why this is important now
- Explaining the format, number of meetings, note taking etc
- Confidentiality
- Agreeing the topic / agenda

Exploration: “We were experimenting together”

Middles: exploring the story. Using the 6 questions alone (next slide) introduces something new and engaging – you do not have to go deeper.

- A space to play with ideas ... An invitation to ...
- ‘I’d like to try something different...’
- Genuineness and honesty – ‘The reason I asked that question is...’
- ‘It may help us to think about ...’
- ‘How would you feel about having a go at ...’

Exploration: 'pre-occupations'

1. Role models when young - 'cool characters' – who did you look up to? Can be a cartoon or TV character, a 'star'. Often a teacher – but other than family (3)
2. Magazines / TV shows (other media) - current
3. Hobbies / free time interests
4. Books – all time favourites (Films)
5. Favourite saying or motto (t-shirt message)
6. Favourite school subjects / and those disliked...



Exploration: 'rehearsing the problem'

Early recollections from childhood – if it is helpful to go deeper

- The 1st story – what happened next
- Asking for two more stories
- *The client reflects on the meaning, begins the 'identification' by turning the stories into headlines for a newspaper*
- Listen for the first verb – the first thing they say – note it down
- Summarising & then the client identifies the patterns and together - relating these to potential interests

Endings

- What are the goals that follow – what action is required?
- So, what has been achieved today?



How do you approach the 'so what' stage, after the questions and stories?

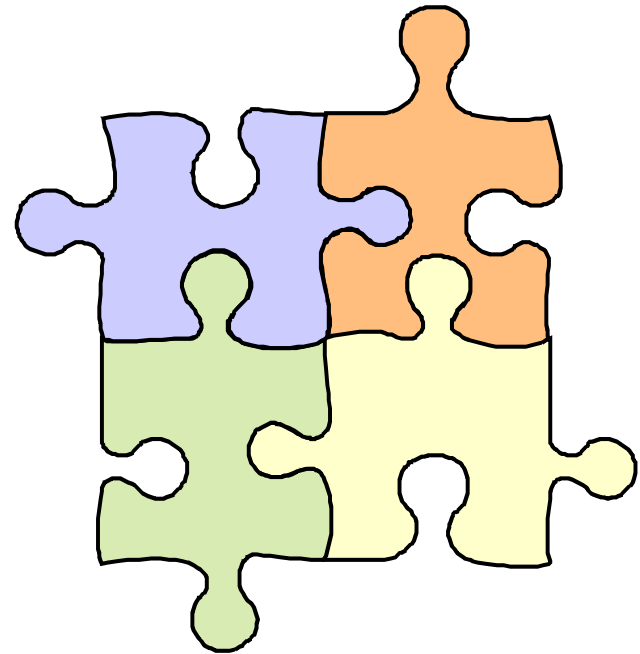
- Questions that encouraged the client to identify patterns and themes
- Not about practitioner' analysis
- Headlines – often turning points
- Using silence
- Remember it's not “tell me all about your childhood”!
- Flexibility and adaptability.



Follow up - can be 'phone/email

Following a period of reflection – putting it all together, including the reality check

- What did we get wrong?
- What are your current reflections?
- What are the goals – are these different now?
- What further action is required?
- How will that be reviewed?
- What else needs to happen?



Comments

Practitioners:

- A powerful way to get young people to think in deep and unexpected ways
- Gets to the root of the indecision and leads to more positive outcomes

Clients:

- Yes definitely useful, given me lots to think about – opened my eyes
- Wow, I've never thought of that before – **and it all came from me!**

How do the questions and stories lead to clues for career thinking?

1. Opening statement and counselling goals
2. Early recollections – *pre-occupation* that illuminates the life theme – they are what the client needs to hear now
3. Favourite saying – elaborates the life theme and relates to the current problem
4. First story and role models – connects the issue to a potential solution
5. Role models – to understand specific characteristics and qualities the client uses, can use
6. Overall stories suggest areas for career development – **hearing advice to self**
7. And linking with potential next steps

Positioning within a narrative approach, along a spectrum

- Narrative/story
- Meaning and identity
- Constructivist
- Slow time / play
- Emotions / empathy
- Subjective *biographicity*
- Opening up space for creativity
- Targets and Outcomes
- Behaviourism / focus
- Realist
- Fast time / seriousness
- Cognition / logic
- Objective distance
- Instrumental – ‘what works already’

In a career we try to...

... 'actively master what we passively suffer.'

How does this relate to my story, I asked myself?



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