Introduction

This chapter demonstrates the use of a qualitative method, narrative research in particular, within the context of career counselling. Such an approach was necessitated by the changing discourse in career counselling which requires more in-depth consideration of a client’s life experiences. Narrative research is an umbrella for a number of approaches that focus on individuals’ written, spoken or visual representations to tell their story (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Arguably, narrative research methods do not have a standard set of procedures due to the linguistically subjective nature of narrative approaches (Reisman, 2008). Narrative research is therefore both a method and the subject of study within a research study (Reisman, 2008). For this reason, any discussion of narrative approaches is intricately tied into a disciplinary, theoretical, social and individual context that provides a framework for the narrative to unfold within. This chapter uses the career counselling context as well as a case study to illustrate how the narrative approach facilitates positive career counselling. Ultimately, the chapter and case study highlight the artificial delineation in the researcher–practitioner divide. It demonstrates the utility of narrative research whilst at the same time illustrating the meeting of career counselling goals for the research participant.

Growing interest in qualitative approaches to career counselling

Coinciding with the dramatic changes in the world of work, interest in qualitative approaches to career counselling has increased markedly over the past 35 years or so (McAdams, 2001; McIlveen, 2012). This is reflected in the growth of narrative theories and the practical application of postmodern career counselling strategies and assessment instruments. There is general agreement today that ‘traditional’ (positivist) approaches to career counselling have largely ignored the importance of considering also the subjective aspects of clients’ ‘profiles’ (career-life stories).
According to McAdams (2001, p. 100), ‘[a]s personality psychologists began to turn their attention to people’s lives, they found notions such as “story” and “narrative” to be especially useful in conveying the coherence and the meaning of lives’. Cochran’s (1997) pioneering work contributed significantly to the acceptance of a narrative approach in career counselling. He devised and used new narrative strategies and techniques to enable clients to find meaning in their responses to career counsellors’ questions. He also used older narrative strategies and techniques to help clients achieve the same aim. However, it was Mark Savickas who brought about the defining changes in career counselling over the past decades and the eventual acceptance of a narrative approach in career counselling as equal to a quantitative approach. Savickas (2015) explains that narrative career counsellors should describe their clients as social actors (playing character roles), motivated agents (pursuing goals in a career-life context) and narrative authors (scripting their own performances). The process of scripting one’s career-life story enhances exploration of the personal meanings people attach to events and thus facilitates resolution of the many kinds of challenges they face. It also helps them discover meaning and the magic in their career-lives. Savickas’s conceptual framework aligns well with the goals of narrative research.

This substantiates the fourth wave (postmodern) view that the emphasis in career counselling has shifted from maturity to adaptability; from personality to identity; from being counselled in a passive manner to taking part actively in the process of life designing (Savickas et al., 2009) and life construction; from finding work to finding meaning in one’s career-life; and from fitting one’s life into one’s career to fitting one’s career into one’s life.

Increased acceptance and implementation of a narrative approach to career counselling

Amundson (2005) agrees with Savickas (1997, 2000) that a qualitative, postmodern approach such as the narrative approach (Cochran, 1997) can be best understood by using constructivist meta-theory as a lens to interpret advances in career counselling. Because the global economic meltdown has contributed to the demise of numerous career counselling and development support systems, people need to acquire the necessary skills to deal effectively with career-related transitions pre-emptively. A narrative approach to career counselling (in addition to a traditional style of career counselling) appears to be a particularly useful strategy in this regard.¹

Maree (2013) contends that narrative career counselling (Cochran, 2011) and career construction counselling (Savickas, 2002a, 2002b, 2007) both fall within the postmodern paradigm. Life design counselling (Savickas et al., 2009), on the other hand, augments the differential (matching) and developmental paradigms that held sway in the twentieth century. Developed from the naturalistic or interpretive research and praxis paradigm described by Savickas (2005, 2007) and Hartung (2011), postmodernism does not constitute a ‘new’ theory
or ‘approach’ or ‘conceptual framework’ in career counselling. It is simply an assembly of theories and approaches with similar features (Watson, McMahon, Mkhize, Schweitzer & Mpofu, 2011). It emerged from the belief that ‘reality’ is created by entities that differ in terms of personal, historical and cultural characteristics (Hergenhahn, 2005). It is argued that clients are infinitely more than the sum total of their test scores (Taber, Hartung, Bridick, Bridick & Rehfuss, 2011) and that the use of quantitative approaches in isolation ignores clients’ distinctiveness (Duffy & Dik, 2009).

Using the case study of Precious (pseudonym), a purposefully selected Pedi-speaking black woman, this chapter illustrates the use of a narrative method to meet both research and practice goals. Precious volunteered as the ‘client’ in a live demonstration during a two-day workshop on life design counselling for career construction. As a registered psychometrist, Precious has an honours degree in industrial psychology.

Data gathering strategy

The career construction interview (CCI) was used to elicit data and the ‘three early recollections’ technique was used to augment the CCI process (Table 12.1). The essential tenets and framework of the career story (construction) interview have been elucidated in many publications (e.g. Maree 2013, 2015b, 2016; Savickas, 2011a, 2012, 2015). Career counsellors construct their narrative based on five story-constructing questions pertaining to clients’ role models; their favourite magazines, television programmes and websites; their favourite story (book or movie or book turned into a movie); their favourite quotations; and their earliest recollections. Once a ‘sacred space’ (relationship of trust) has been established, clients are asked to recount their three earliest recollections (which can be regarded as metaphors that reveal their central preoccupations). The interview ends with counsellors asking clients if they have anything else to add. The intervention was aimed at enhancing the participant’s involvement in her career construction process and facilitating co-constructive conversation.

Ensuring the quality of the research

Trustworthiness was ensured through implementing various strategies during the data collection and analysis phases. More particularly, credibility was ensured through peer debriefing and participant review; dependability was ensured through verbatim reporting of the data and low inference explanations; and confirmability was ensured by avoiding selective use of the data. By detailing what I did, carefully describing my research method and context, and foregrounding my assumptions, transferability was enhanced (Creswell, 2013).

Crystallisation was utilised to bolster validity (Nieuwenhuis, 2016; Richardson, 2000). Instead of trying to uncover fixed, causal relationships, qualitative strategies were used to deepen understanding of phenomena. By conducting dialogue with the participant, I, as the researcher, corroborated what was shared with me. Crystallisation confirms and reflects the multilayered and complicated nature of
Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from the participant and steps were taken to ensure her well-being and anonymity, as well as to ensure confidentiality. In concluding the demonstration mentioned earlier, three participants were invited to reflect on their experiences during the data analysis process and help identify recurring themes and subthemes in the data.

Table 12.1 Career construction interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?</td>
<td>People are regarded as the sole experts on their career-lives. They are invited to communicate their goals and set the scene for counselling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whom did you admire or who were your three role models when you were young and why?</td>
<td>Role models represent people's self-concepts and central life goals. The traits they display have enabled them to deal with personal challenges and thus exemplify traits that can help people deal with central life problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your favourite a) magazine, b) television programme and c) website (or app)? Why?</td>
<td>Magazines, etc. indicate environments that fit people's lifestyles and in which they prefer to enact their selves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your favourite story – book or movie or book turned into movie?</td>
<td>The favourite story reveals characters who face problems similar to those faced by other people and shows how the characters solve the problems. This story thus demonstrates how people can best tackle central problems in their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your three favourite mottoes or quotations?</td>
<td>Favourite mottoes or quotations reveal people's advice to themselves at a given point in time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the first thing you remember about your life? What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things you recollect happening to you when you were young.</td>
<td>Early memories reveal key problems or challenges people face as well as their central preoccupations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After narrating their recollections, clients are asked the following question: 'Now imagine that these stories will appear in tomorrow’s newspapers. Each story will have a different headline, and each headline will contain a verb. You are invited to write these headlines.' Lastly, clients are invited to provide an inclusive heading for all three recollections.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by author, from Savickas (2011a, pp. 55–65)

the phenomenon studied (a woman who had indicated a need for career counselling). Crystallisation enabled me to go beyond merely reading gathered data to reflect on the participant's experiences during the data analysis process and helped me identify recurring themes and subthemes in the data.
to tell the other participants what Precious’s career-story meant to them personally. The participants were reminded that they were not allowed to breach confidentiality by, for example, discussing the case with anyone else. In addition to informed consent and the confidentiality of observing members, the case study also presented an interplay of both research and counselling ethical considerations.

First, counsellors who may want to use the technique are reminded to implement ‘standard’ measures to ensure clients’ welfare throughout the intervention. This includes obtaining verbal informed consent from clients 18 years and older and written informed assent from younger clients. Confidentiality should be guaranteed and maintained, and clients should be asked to confirm every facet of the information obtained during all phases of the intervention. The latter point is particularly important for both the client and in ensuring the credibility of the information generated from the research. Referred to as member checking, paraphrasing and checking interpretations are both a methodological and an ethical obligation in narrative research. Care should be taken to ensure that clients fully understand the intervention, and that sufficient time is allowed for clarification.

Second, counsellors are reminded that elicitation of the three early recollections may prompt deep-seated emotions and key life themes. If anything ‘major’ emerges during the intervention (e.g. the client starts abreacting or shows signs of posttraumatic stress or depression), the counsellor should be able to deal with the situation and, if necessary, refer the client to someone who is qualified to help him or her (e.g. a psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist). Our theoretical and conceptual framework as counsellors and our rationale are clear as are the outcomes that we hope to achieve. Our objective is to enable clients to narrate their career-life stories, authorise these stories and move forward. Ultimately, our aim is to empower clients to advise themselves, to choose and construct not only careers but also themselves, and, eventually, design successful lives in which they will be able to ‘hold’ themselves and others, make social contributions to society at large, and also make time for friends and family members. The envisaged outcomes are easily measurable, and colleagues are accordingly urged to conduct research, report on their findings and thereby advance knowledge in the field.

Third, counsellors should impress upon their clients that they (the clients) – and not the counsellors – are the experts on their own lives and that they will, while listening to counsellors read their career-life stories back to them, actually be listening to their own voices. This will empower them and help them accept responsibility for their decisions in the knowledge that they are free to make their own choices and that they are not subject to fate or circumstances beyond their control.

Fourth, the creation of a ‘safe’ or ‘sacred space’ (Savickas, 2011b) is essential to develop the therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client. Fifth, counsellors should continually evaluate clients’ actions and movement – that is, how their career-life stories are evolving. Lastly, counsellors should keep abreast of the latest developments in the field to ensure that they apply ‘best practice’ at all times.
Limitations
The subjective interpretations of the counsellor could be seen by some as a limitation. Moreover, more research in diverse and group-based contexts is needed, particularly in non-western and non-North American developing country contexts.

Case study results
Precious, a 33-year-old black woman, is uncertain about the ‘next step’ in her career. She successfully applied to study medicine at a South African university after school but did not do well and was informed that she would not be allowed to proceed with her studies after one year.

What nobody knew was that I lost my beloved father early that year. I was devastated but had no one to turn to. I became very rebellious. [Sighs heavily] I applied at another university just to learn that the only course available for me was industrial psychology. I know I could have gone into something different but I accepted that course. That was fine. It was a critical decision. [Presses lips tightly together] I completed my BCom degree and secured a great job. [Smiles; stops talking and remains silent for a few seconds; looks up] I became a human resources director at a relatively young age [30 years]. I was given freedom to ‘shape’ the institution. Employees rely on me. I feel valued as an employee myself; I believe my contributions are appreciated. [Sighs heavily again]

Precious’s responses to the questions in the career-story interview are given below.²

How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?
I feel unfulfilled . . . not in a good space. I am at a crossroads, already having discovered myself, my strengths . . . now what? [Sighs] My options are the following: just carry on with what I am doing. By that I mean that I have recently gone into training and development [TD] and I am led to believe that this is probably the better option with a view to the future. Maybe expanding the TD side so I do not just do delivering and training. However, forever presenting topics that I know well will not bring me fulfilment. What I have discovered is that maybe my future lies in the counselling side . . . should I follow that route? I just don’t know what that would mean in a work context because we have a number of contracted counsellors. Tell me: Do I go that route? Maybe design a programme for the youth? Do career counselling? Combine all three (training, development, and counselling)? [Sighs, then smiles wryly] I think I need to redesign my career almost. Studying? Definitely, yes, but part-time and it has to be something that I really wanted to do.
Role models
Whom do you admire or did you admire when you were growing up?
Moipone. [Frowns] She always wore pretty dresses; looked neat and beautiful. I so much wanted to look like her. [Sighs, bites her lower lip] I came from very poor background and I admired girls who dressed up in pretty clothes. I got one dress a year . . . at a young age, dresses get smaller, though!
[Sighs] I used to escape into the world of fairy-tale books. That was my escape. I would pretend to be one of the happy characters in the book.
Lebogang. She always brought lunch to school. It seemed so cool to have lunch at school; not to worry about being hungry. And to look important as a result of being able to bring lunch to school. When I think about it, I realise that most of my friends were from privileged, good schools, so I admired them. [Laughs gloomily] She was always happy. Talked about her happy family, shared happy stories with us. [Tears well up in her eyes] My dad was away from our house most of the time. We would only see him once every two months for a short while. I missed him . . . missed him a lot.
Oprah. I greatly admire the way in which she took herself out of a disadvantaged background and dismal poverty. I also admire the huge social contributions she makes. The manner in which she counsels others. In fact, I admire all ordinary people who rose from adversity and turned their suffering into something positive; into living successfully.
[Smiles] I know you said I should not refer to family members in this context but my father received his master's [degree] at the age of 50. I deeply admire that achievement; his resilience.

Magazines/television shows/websites
What magazine do you read regularly? What television show do you really enjoy? What is your favourite website?
[Sighs heavily] Mmmm . . . Destiny. I love reading the inspiring stories about people. I am very interested in the challenges they faced in the course of time. They also acknowledged the love and grace of God in process and that is important to me.
Survivor. [Sighs, looks down] What interests me is the way in which they fight their way to the top. How they establish relationships, bond and form alliances. Relationships and bonding and forming alliances helps people go to the top.
Any website where I can read up on how a person became rich and famous and able to help others . . . for instance the story of Oprah Winfrey.
Movie/book
What is your favourite book or movie? Recount the story.

[Sighs] Mmmmm . . . Why Did I Get Married? It is about different couples. Each couple has its own, different challenges. I am in my second marriage now and I could relate to one specific story about a guy who cheated on his wife. She was a nice, soft, forgiving person who finally got the courage to leave her cheating husband and find a wonderful man.

Mottoes
What are your favourite sayings or mottoes? Recount three sayings you remember hearing or create your own.

‘Touch a person’s heart and their hands fall into place.’ To me, this means that you can get anything out of anyone if you treat them kindly.

‘Your test in life becomes your testimony.’ In other words, you should try to turn your adversity into something positive. You can turn the situation around and give to others; change lives as a result of what you have gone through.

‘Life is what you make it.’

Precious’s three early recollections
Precious shared the following three stories with her counsellor.

Young girl unprepared for unfair treatment
[Sighs; looks to her right and turns her head downwards] One day, I was six years old, I [was] sitting on the school grounds with my friends. I did not have anything to eat. [Tears well up in her eyes] No, I had nothing to eat and was waiting for someone to give me something to eat. What I did not realise was that they had decided not to share their food with me any longer. One of them was saying: ‘We are not going to give you food any more.’ [Cries softly] Am I allowed to cry?

Emotions associated with this recollection: ‘Emarrassment and a sense of being treated in an unfair manner . . . almost betrayal (because I always believed that one should share when one has food to share).’

Vulnerable children lose their way because of unkind treatment
[Wipes tears from her eyes] First, some background: A neighbour always gave my sister and me a lift from school because my mother could not pay for transport. He would put us in the boot of his hatch-back. When the car stopped, we would get out and run away so nobody would see us.
Here is my story: One day, I was still six years old, the neighbour refused to give us a lift and we had to walk home . . . quite a long way and not a straight route either. We walked for hours and lost our way in the bush. By that time it was dark and my mother was very worried about us and started looking for us; I was the youngest child. We were terrified. By God’s grace we met this man; he asked us, ‘What are you doing here?’ We said we were lost and he took us to [the] nearest road or something; dropped us off near our home. [Sighs; tears well up in her eyes] I find it too difficult to recall more details. [Cries softly] I remember how Mommy sobbed.

*Emotions associated with this recollection: ‘Fear, anger.’*

Embarrassed child hurt by ignorant parents’ act . . . but survives
[Sits still, stares pensively in front of her] I was seven years old when this happened. One day, the principal walked into our class and started calling the names of people who had not paid school fees. I think they did that on purpose so you would be humiliated. He informed all of us that we would no longer be allowed to attend his school. We left school that day, went home and told Mother what he had said. Mommy insisted that we should go back to school. However, whereas previously when she would go to the school and discuss matter[s] with [the] principal he would allow us back, this time that did not work. We had to go back home.

[Stops talking; sits very still, stares in front of her] I don’t remember . . . we stayed at home for a while, then tried to go back to school but, eventually, had to leave that school for good.

[Sighs heavily] Looking back now, I am immensely proud of myself for having attained great heights. And I understand my passion for trying to help others like me.

*Emotions associated with this recollection: ‘Embarrassment. The feeling of being forced to do something against my will. The belief that I needed to pay for an adult’s act.’*

Sighing heavily, Precious provided the following encompassing heading for all three stories: ‘Surviving inferiority, humiliation and hurt kindled by adversity’.

Feedback commenced with a discussion and analysis of the three early recollections.

*Analysis of Precious’s three early recollections*
(Precious’s reflections on her stories are in inverted commas.)

Precious’s response to the initial question (and the feelings she is currently experiencing of being stuck in her work environment) reveals the challenge she is facing and also her strategy to deal with the challenge. She is seeking a fresh perspective on her career journey. Despite the fact that she is doing well
financially and has job security, she knows that she is not really doing what she ‘should’ be doing. Feeling unfulfilled in a detached teaching and training environment, she is at a crossroads: either carry on and be unhappy or start studying again to equip herself with the skills needed to work with employees in a more intimate and personal manner.

Precious’s first memory (of friends unexpectedly treating her unfairly without really understanding the hurt they caused her – a major life theme) reveals a key life challenge early in her life. She has learnt that life is not fair and that people cannot be trusted unconditionally. Currently, she believes that those in a position to promote her career do not understand her needs and, consequently, are letting her down by setting her on a career path that will deepen her feelings of unfulfillment and deny her the opportunity to realise her deepest need (i.e. her desire to counsel people facing a crossroads in their career-lives). ‘I felt so embarrassed about our poverty [another central life theme], which caused me to feel ashamed. I do not want others to ever feel like I did then.’

The first verb Precious used in her first recollection is ‘sitting’. She is not moving forward in the direction she would like to go. This verb explains why she is consulting the counsellor. She is keen to begin to make the contribution she believes she can and should make but she is ‘sitting still’. She is unsure about how she should engage with the career world to make her dream come true, and her advice to herself is to stand up for herself so she can begin to move forward in her preferred direction. While Precious recounted (narrated) these stories, the counsellor facilitated narratability by strategically and unobtrusively repeating recurring words, expressions and key phrases used by her. He was at pains to ensure that she clarified the meaning of what she was saying so that she could listen to and hear herself.

Precious smiled contemplatively and replied as follows when the counsellor invited her to reflect on her second recollection:

I am smiling because I keep asking myself: Why do people do things when they should know better? That disturbs me a lot; all the time. I live my life not to hurt anybody. I cannot hurt people. Even at work: I would rather take on other people’s work than see them suffer. [Another major life theme: her desire to help others who are in need] I actually went through therapy when I discovered that I held five jobs at work. I keep asking myself: Why do people make decisions when they should know better, like I did when I entered into my first marriage? Sometimes it makes me feel as if I am not ‘normal’.

Precious’s second recollection thus confirms the pain she experienced when she was let down by an adult; a person ‘in control’. She believes she is currently facing a similar situation: by not being given the opportunity to embark on a journey that will enable her to realise her dreams, she is bound to lose her way again. This will again result in her following a (career) path that resembles a kind of wild goose chase.
When the counsellor asked Precious to reflect on her third recollection (which reveals her advice to herself on how she could go about resolving the challenges uncovered by the first two recollections), she commented as follows:

I believe the emotions that I associate with this story say it all: embarrassment seems to be part of my life. Likewise, the feeling of being forced to do something against my will and the realisation that I often need to pay for an adult’s inappropriate decision.

[Sighs] Based on that, the positive side is that I just give. Even when I cannot really afford to give. On the negative side, I feel that I do not deserve . . . promotion, love, success. I almost feel guilty when I give myself something. I even have to fight with myself over my car, which, I believe, should be given to others who deserve it more than I do. My sister is just the opposite: she would just buy and buy. Then she hoards until she gives her stuff away. [Presses lips tightly together] She does not give despite having so much. I just want to give . . . and I now realise that I want to do so because of what I have been through. I want others to have, not only me. That is not me. I do not want to ever be selfish. I do not want others to suffer like myself.

Precious wants to provide a holding environment for others; to help others feel safe and secure; to feel ‘held’. She realises that the more she does so, the more she will be helping herself actively to heal the emotional scarring she suffered in the past. Precious is no longer willing to be forced to accept others’ decisions about what she should do, which caused her suffering in the past. She has made a conscious decision to put an end to that – in her own best interests but, more importantly, in the best interests of other people who are as vulnerable as she once was.

Analysis of the career construction interview

Precious’s responses to the questions asked in the course of the CCI confirm and support the themes and subthemes that emerged during the discussion of her three early recollections.

Role models

Her three role models (Moipone, Lebogang and Oprah Winfrey) not only confirm her key life goals, but also present the solutions she foresees to her central life challenges. She wants to rise above poverty and a troubled environment. She wants to dress well, to have a happy family, to feel important. Most of all, she wants to be able to help others who have suffered as much as she has (arguably her major central life theme). For Precious, it is crucial to ensure that the basic needs of others are met (another central life theme). It is important for her to be kind, caring, loving, compassionate, giving and to counsel others (yet another major central life goal). ‘This is so important to me.’

Account of a television series

Why Did I Get Married? deals with the challenges couples experience in trying to deal with the problems encountered in present-day society. Just as the husband
of one of the wives was unfaithful to his wife, her own husband had been unfaithful to her. Once again, the central theme of unfair and unkind treatment (even betrayal) and abandonment surfaces. Like the betrayed woman, Precious is a kind-hearted, soft, forgiving person who eventually mustered the courage to leave her cheating husband and find a new, wonderful man.

Mottoes
Precious's mottoes reveal her advice to herself at that point in her life. They shed light on possible ways in which she can deal with her central life challenges to heal herself and others; to find out what she can do to enable her to really live and not just exist. She wants to help others achieve their dreams by treating them with respect. She also believes that it is essential to turn her adversity into something positive and make it a gift to others. By turning her own troubled situation around and turning her pain into a gift to others, her life story will help change the lives of others as a result of what she has gone through. Lastly, she believes that her destiny is in her own hands. She does not want to blame others. Instead, she believes that she is self-sufficient and able to realise her dreams.

Favourite magazine, television show and website
Precious's responses to this question reflect the work environment in which she wishes to enact her self-concept. She wants to inspire people. She wants to understand the suffering of others and help them overcome stumbling blocks and realise their potential. She wants to display the love and grace of God in the process. She is also willing to ‘fight’ to realise her dreams. She is aware of the importance of good interpersonal relationships and of bonding with other people. She thus displays a keen realisation of the importance of acting in an emotionally and socially intelligent manner if one wants to be successful in the occupational environment. Lastly, she wants to become wealthy, but mainly because this will enable her to help others.

Sequel
In concluding the session, the counsellor told Precious that she reminded him of the author of a moving, autobiographical fairy tale that was about to be released.

Your audience and I are deeply moved by your touching and inspirational life story. We sense the presence of a genuinely compassionate, empathetic woman who realises that life is what one makes of it; whose test in life has become her destiny. A woman who knows how to elicit the very best from people. Her tale is entitled something like Setting the Fairy Inside Free, by Precious Maile [pseudonym]. What you have endured so successfully and courageously has now become your greatest strength and will enable you to help many thousands of people who are suffering not only survive but, in fact, turn their suffering into victory and a gift to others.

The counsellor and Precious then discussed possible options for dealing with the challenge she was facing. She showed little hesitation: she did not want to
leave her current job, but she had made up her mind that her real ambition was
to work with young people, especially those in disadvantaged circumstances,
to help them deal with their problems and offer them (career) counselling. To
achieve this aim, she would have to register as an educational psychologist. Her
biggest concern was: ‘I just don’t know how I will be able to study full-time to
first complete my undergraduate studies in education.’ She was greatly relieved
to learn that she would receive recognition for her current qualifications and
that she could study part-time at postgraduate level in order to qualify for admis-
sion to a master’s degree in educational psychology.

Her concluding comment was: ‘I am greatly relieved now, having “discov-
ered” that I will not be leaving my current employer and our employees in the
lurch while studying to become who I have always wanted to be.’

The career counsellor agreed that Precious’s envisaged strategy would enable
her to reconcile her wish to remain loyal to her current employer with her desire
to help other people. Staying on in her current working environment would also
provide her with an ideal holding environment. Applying her own career-life
story would equip her with the skills needed to negotiate challenging transitions
ahead and convert her own suffering and the suffering of others into victory and
meaningful social contributions.

(As an aside, the career counsellor referred Precious to both a clinical and a
counselling psychologist to help her contend with the unresolved issues [‘unfin-
ished business’] that emerged directly and indirectly during the elicitation of her
career-life story.)

Discussion

The findings of the case study reported on in this chapter confirm the findings
of previous studies (Barclay & Wolff, 2012; Cardoso, 2012; Del Corso & Rehfuss,
2011; Glavin & Berger, 2012; Savickas, 2015; Taber et al., 2011). They confirm
the usefulness of the narrative approach (i.e. the CCI as a particular narrative
strategy and an example of the broader life design counselling paradigm) in the
case of black African clients. The findings also indicate the usefulness of drawing
on the narrative approach and strategy as ‘a scaffold for making sense, declaring
purpose, forming intentions, and prompting action’ (Savickas, 2015, p. 27). The
client’s revitalised attitude and her readiness to deal with transitions in a more
adaptive way are evidenced by her eagerness to embark on her new studies: ‘I
regret the fact that I was not aware of the options open to me much earlier so
I could have begun with my studies in educational psychology much sooner.’

The emphasis the client placed on helping others and putting the interests of
others before her own is not surprising when one considers the role of ubuntu,
ujamaa and isinti (Ibdawoh & Dibua, 2003; Nussbaum, Palsule & Mkhize, 2010)
in African societies.

Whether narrative counselling can be applied successfully in research-based
and group-based contexts is discussed next.
The utility of narrative (career) counselling in group-based contexts and in research settings

Over the past 33 years, supported by 14 leading international career counselling scholars, I devised and developed the Career Interest Profile (CIP) (Maree, 2015a). This qualitative career questionnaire yields narrative information and enables career counsellors to uncover people's identity, their perceived strengths and weaknesses, their advice to themselves and their key life themes. Taken together with the Maree Career Matrix (Maree, 2016), the questionnaire exemplifies the global move away from using the ‘expert’ type of test-and-tell approach in relative isolation (still the dominant approach in large parts of the developing world in particular) in favour of an integrative, quantitative-plus-qualitative approach towards career counselling. This approach and strategy enables career counsellors to merge and integrate ‘stories’ (positivist) and ‘storied’ (qualitative) approaches to career counselling, individually and in group-based contexts, to provide contemporary career counselling to their clients. Clients are seen as authors of their evolving career-life stories, capable of displaying self-sufficiency, self-reliance, resourcefulness and adaptiveness. The CIP has been translated into various languages and has been used extensively in career counselling-related research, here and abroad (e.g. Di Fabio & Maree, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

Reflexivity and self-reflection in the context of narrative research approaches

The approach and strategy advocated here confirms Duarte and Cardoso’s (2015) and Barclay’s (2015) view that narrative career counselling enhances researcher reflection and promotes clients’ self-reflection and reflexivity. Moreover, it corroborates Maree’s (2015b) and Del Corso’s (2015) finding that career counsellors can facilitate clients’ self- and career construction by focusing on their deepest emotions and that meaning-making lies at the heart of narrative career counselling (Cochran, 1997, 2011). It also confirms Hartung and Cadaret’s (2017, p. 16) contention that ‘[i]n an uncertain and unstable world, individuals must now turn inward through self-reflection’. By reflecting on their thoughts and actions, clients are encouraged in a compassionate manner to reconsider their existing career-life stories and clarify the personal meaning they attach to events in their lives. Reflexivity promotes their self-understanding, improves their sense of self and inspires action and forward movement.

Conclusion

Ample evidence is available on the effectiveness of a narrative approach to career counselling. This chapter demonstrated the value of career construction in the case of a young black woman. In an earlier study, Maree (2016) provided tentative evidence of the longitudinal effect of career construction counselling on a mid-career black man. More particularly, the powerful effect of a narrative approach is shown in its ability to help clients uncover central life themes,
construct themselves, design successful lives and make social contributions. In a nutshell: narratology, in its ability to promote the discovery of central life themes and facilitate self-advise by clients as they draw on dialogicality (self-dialogue but also dialogue between client and counsellor) and enhanced authorship, can move clients forward as few other interventions (strategies) can.

Notes
1. Career counsellors who work from a postmodern (an umbrella term for a qualitative, narrative or storiad approach to career counselling) perspective are as interested in interpreting clients’ ‘objective’ test results as they are in interpreting ‘subjective’ aspects of career counselling.
2. The verbatim responses have been only lightly edited to preserve their authenticity.

References


