Defining career through life story inspires clients to author narratives of preferred ways of being. Life story narratives are illuminated in the storied approach (Brott, 2001, 2004, 2005) as a dynamic process of co-construction, de-construction, and construction. Counseling techniques and interactive activities engage clients and counselors as collaborators to explore and set action steps with client as life story editors in living a life as the interaction of life roles across the life span.

**Embracing a Dynamic Definition of “Career”**

- **Adaptability** (adapt ability) ~ readiness to cope with predictable tasks and unpredictable adjustments (Savickas, 1997)
  - positive uncertainty (Gelatt, 1989) because future is unpredictable & constantly changing circumstances
  - “good enough” = good options rather than maximum benefit
- **Cultural sensitivity**
  - “what does it mean to you to be [single mother, male, Latino, unemployed]?”
- **Idiographic assessments**
  - emphasis on the individual rather than broad generalizations
  - ipsative
  - subjective constructions
- **Work** is a means to an end (Chaves et al., 2004)
- **Work** is an emotional issue (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002)
- **Working** has the potential to fulfill one’s needs (Blustein, 2008)
- **Career** is negotiated within a social context through an evolving narrative (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004)
- **Career counseling** to co-construct meanings and understandings of the client’s life and work (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum 2004)

Help clients develop a career by giving voice to the storied narrative of living a life across various life roles.

**Essential Wellbeing**

(Rath & Harter, 2010)

*social wellbeing*  *financial wellbeing*  *physical wellbeing*  *community wellbeing*  *career wellbeing*

Three recommendations for boosting career wellbeing (most essential of 5 elements):

1. Every day, use your strengths.
2. Identify someone with shared mission who encourages your growth. Spend more time with this person.
3. Opt into more social time with the people and teams you enjoy being around at work.

**Life Story Through Life Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relating</th>
<th>Valuing</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Pleasuring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relationships: family, school, peers, adults</td>
<td>center of personality; authentic self; finding meaning; making a difference; actualization</td>
<td>home &amp; classroom duties; internships; employment</td>
<td>play, activities, hobbies, clubs &amp; teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal and informal; experiential; knowledge &amp; skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Life Story Apprenticeship**

A period of time where you learn a trade (education, life skills) in a real world setting (school, home) from masters (teachers, mentors, coaches, family). It begins in the family of origin to learn ways of speaking, behaving, and getting to know the environment and continues during formal school years in learning a trade (develop a life story). Life story apprenticeship involves gaining knowledge, developing skills, and earning qualifications (high school diploma) through practical, classroom, and life experiences.
Co-Construcion ~ discovering the story
- Client/Counselor collaboration
- Uncover the meaning-making themes across life roles
  - Strengths
  - Relationships
  - Passions

De-Construction ~ opening up space
- Looking for exceptions
- Inviting others’ perspectives
- Understanding motivations & needs
- Revising schemas as ways of knowing

Construction ~ authoring life story narrative
- ‘essential career wellbeing’
- Strengths
- Passions
- Decisions to be made
- Barriers + resources
- Actions to be taken

Techniques: Card Sorts
  - Life Line
  - Life Roles
  - Themes in Play

Techniques: Possible Selves
  - Happenstance
  - Career Style Interview
  - Résumé Analysis

Techniques: Goal Map

Life Story Narrative

These are the stories that illuminate our lives. The stories we author based on experiences, preferences, and themes that guide our approach to life across all our life roles. These are our stories about living a life.

Resources & Suggested Readings


Defining Career Through Life Story

International Career Development Conference
PACE Career Centre &
International Association for Educational & Vocational Guidance
Cape Town, South Africa
20 October, 2011

Presenter
Pamela E. Brott, Ph.D., NCC
Associate Professor of Counselor Education
Virginia Tech – Northern Virginia Center
Falls Church, VA 22043
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pbrott@vt.edu

Consider the following.....
U.S. Unemployment Rate: 2001-2011


CHART 1. Unemployment rates adjusted to U.S. concepts, 10 countries, seasonally adjusted
August 2009–January 2011
Clearly, what we know about finding a job and having a career is being impacted by the economic climate.

Embracing a more dynamic definition of “career”. . . .
20th Century theories of career development

- Traditionalists ~ individual differences
  - traits & factors (matching)

- Developmentalists ~ life roles across the lifespan
  - time and space (pre-vocation, vocation, post-vocation; life roles)

- Subject to bias in perception and ideology

21st Century paradigm shift

- World is exponentially changing
- From a narrow focus on occupations and work
- To a subjective career narrative
  - life designing
  - subjective well-being
  - strengths, positive potential, personal development
  - narrative, storied approach

How you fit work into life

Adaptability

- readiness to cope with predictable tasks and unpredictable adjustments
  - Ability to adapt = adaptability
  - Positive uncertainty (Gelatt, 1989)
  - Future is unpredictable
  - Changing circumstances
  - "good enough" = good options rather than maximum benefit

Sensitivity to diversity

- "What does it mean to you to be [single mother, male, Latino, unemployed]?

Person in context

Idiographic assessments

- Emphasis on the individual rather than broad generalizations
- Ipsative
- Subjective constructions
• Work is a means to an end for many urban youth and families; it is what you do (Chaves et al., 2004)

• Work is an emotional issue especially in turbulent times (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002)

• Working has the potential to fulfill one’s needs (Blustein, 2008)

• Career is negotiated within a social context where there is power and ideology through an evolving narrative (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004)

• Career counseling to co-construct meanings and understandings of the client’s life and work (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum 2004)

Essential Wellbeing
(Rath & Harter, 2010)

• Comprehensive study >150 countries

• Transcends country and culture

• Common elements
  • Social wellbeing
  • Financial wellbeing
  • Physical wellbeing
  • Community wellbeing
  • Career wellbeing ~ "arguably the most essential of the five elements" (p. 16)

• Recommendations for boosting career wellbeing
  USE YOUR STRENGTHS
  ENHANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS
  SHARE YOUR PASSIONS
Help clients develop their career wellbeing. . .

instead of predicting the future,
give a voice to the storied narrative of one’s unique life

from finding a job to living a life
(Savickas, 2002)

Career through Life Story

The personal story that is
Based on essential career wellbeing as clients
• use strengths
• enhance relationships
• share passions

Life story
• ever changing & evolving
• adaptable
• past, present, future chapters

The process of living a life through the ever-changing interactions among one’s life roles across the life span.
Life Story

- Storytelling traditional form of communication
  - Culture and cultural traditions
  - Informs us of our history
- Telling the story as the individual uncovers
  - Themes
  - People
  - High-lights and low-lights
  - Resources
  - Time perspective
  - Voice of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986)
- Past, present, future chapters in the life story
- Environment, perceptions, and motives
- Across life roles

Life Roles

- Relating relationships: family, school, peers, adults
- Learning formal and informal; experiential; knowledge & skills
- Pleasuring play, activities, hobbies, clubs & teams
- Working home & school; internships; employment
- Valuing center of personality; authentic self; finding meaning; making a difference; actualization
Life Story Apprenticeship

A period of time where you learn a trade (*education, life skills*) in a real world setting (*school, home*) from masters (*teachers, mentors, coaches, family*). It begins in the family of origin to learn ways of speaking, behaving, and getting to know the environment and continues during formal school years in learning a trade (*develop a life story*). Life story apprenticeship involves gaining knowledge, developing skills, and earning qualifications (*high school diploma*) through practical, classroom, and life experiences.
career through life story

The Storied Approach

co-construction ~ de-construction ~ construction
Co-Construction ~ discovering the story
- Client/Counselor collaboration
- Uncover the meaning-making themes

De-Construction ~ opening up space
- Looking for exceptions
- Inviting others’ perspectives
- Understanding motivations & needs
- Revising schemas as ways of knowing

Construction ~ authoring preferred ways of being
- Decisions to be made
- Actions to be taken
- Barriers to confront + resources to support

What If I Only Get One Session?
- Determine needs
  - How can I be useful to you?

- Select how to meet need/s

- Set action plan
  - What will you do next? When? Obstacles? Resources?

- Assess
  - What will you take with you from today’s session?
How Do Assessments Play a Part?

illuminating and organizing discrete pieces of information woven into the story

- **Quantitative**
  - Strong Interest Inventory
  - Self-Directed Search
  - Life Values Inventory
  - Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

- **Qualitative**
  - Card Sort
  - Holland Party Game
  - Résumé analysis
  - Ideal Day
  - Checklists

Holland’s Typology

RIASEC

REALISTIC

INVESTIGATIVE

CONVENTIONAL

ARTISTIC

ENTERPRISING

SOCIAL
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

- Where you get your energy from
  INTROVERSION ---------- EXTRAVERSION

- How you take in information
  SENSING----------INTUITION

- How you make decisions
  THINKING----------FEELING

- How you live in the outer world
  JUDGING----------PERCEIVING

Opening

- Determining needs
  "How can I be of use to you?"
  "When you leave today, what will you take with you?"

- Becoming collaborators
  Individual as the expert
  "I would like to understand what has/not been working for you."
  "We are creatures of habit...we repeat our patterns...let’s uncover and find meanings in those patterns."
Co-Construction: Discovering the Story

- Early recollections
  - Perceptions
  - Selected memories
  - Survivors
  - Based on present interpretations
  - Significant events
  - Interactions from the past

- Techniques
  - Audio taping, video taping, photographs
  - Video game, storyboard, music arranger, scrapbooking
  - News headline, life motto, slogan or saying (phrases you live by)
  - Career genogram, occupational daydreams, 5 lives
  - Life balance wheel
  - Card sorts
  - Lifeline, early recollections, life roles,

Life Line

(Title of My Story)

Mark off your lifeline as chapters (e.g., before starting formal schooling, elementary school, graduate from high school).

Jot notes about your early recollections from chapters in your life story.

Write the names of significant people in each chapter.

Choose 3-4 words that best capture the essence of this chapter.

Give a title to the chapter; give a title to your life story.
### Life Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>relating</th>
<th>learning</th>
<th>working</th>
<th>pleasing</th>
<th>valuing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

On this side, draw five circles representing your current life role situation. The size of the circle represents the importance/time that you currently place in this life role. Proximity of the circles represents relationships between/among the life roles.

Today’s Date: ____________________

On this side, select a time in the future when you see your life roles in balance. Draw the five life role circles in size to represent the importance/time that you want to be spending in each life role. Proximity of the circles represents relationships between/among the life roles in the future.

Future Date: ____________________

---

### Five Lives (Osborn & Zunker, 2006)

If you were able to live five completely different lives, what would they be?

Tell me more about each option

What is attractive about each option?

What do you know about each occupation?

What’s keeping you from following these aspirations?
De-Construction: Opening Up Space

- Looking for exceptions
- Inviting others’ perspectives
- Understanding motivations & needs
- Revising schemas as ways of knowing
  - Alternate viewpoints
  - Could it be?

Techniques
- Possible selves
- Happenstance
- Career style interview
- Résumé analysis

Possible Selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Martz, 2001)

- What I might become:
- What I would like to become:
- What I am afraid of becoming:
Planned Happenstance

HOW AN UNPLANNED EVENT AFFECTED MY CAREER

(Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999)

DIRECTIONS: In the space below, write a story giving details about an unplanned event that had a significant impact on your career.

(continue story on backside if necessary)

Then, answer the following three questions:

1. Before that unplanned event, how did one of your own actions contribute to creating it?

2. After the unplanned event, how did one of your own actions transform it into a career opportunity?

3. Now, tomorrow, how can you apply Planned Happenstance to what you do next?

Career Style Interview (Savickas, 2002)

◦ How can I be useful to you?

◦ Whom do you admire? self-concept

◦ Do you regularly read magazines? watch TV? favorite book? typology

◦ What were your three favorite subjects in high school – not based on teachers? What subjects did you hate? typology

◦ What do you like to do with your free time? in play, we prepare

◦ Tell me your favorite saying or motto. self advice
Construction: Authoring Ways of Being

- Preferences
- Decisions to be made
- Actions to be taken
- Barriers to confront
- Resources to support
- Future chapters
- Techniques
  - Goal map

Goal Map

My Goal Map

My goal is to

Obstacles in My Way
- 
- 
- 
- 

My Resources for Overcoming Obstacles
- 
- 
- 
- 

One Step at a Time
- 
- 
- 
- 

Today's Date: 2011

IAEVG ~ Cape Town, South Africa
Defining Career Through Life Story

P.E. Brott (2011)
Defining Career Through Life Story
Defining Career through Life Story

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Cape Town, South Africa
October 20, 2011

Defining career through life story inspires clients to author narratives of preferred ways of being. Life story narratives are illuminated in the storied approach (Brott, 2001, 2004, 2005) as a dynamic process of co-construction, de-construction, and construction. Counseling techniques and interactive activities engage clients and counselors as collaborators to explore and set action steps with client as life story editors in living a life as the interaction of life roles across the life span.

Following are the activities that can be used as part of the storied approach (Brott, 2011). Individual activity sheets are included that can be duplicated and used with your clients. Citations are given for the various activities so that you can locate the source from the references list.

Lifeline

Life Roles

Five Lives

Possible Selves

How an Unplanned Event Affected My Career

Career Style Interview

My Goal Map
Mark off your lifeline as chapters (e.g., before starting formal schooling, elementary school, graduate from high school).

Jot notes about your early recollections from chapters in your life story.

Write the names of significant people in each chapter.

Choose 3-4 words that best capture the essence of this chapter.

Give a title to the chapter; give a title to your life story.
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Today’s Date: _______________________

On this side, select a time in the future when you see your life roles in balance. Draw the five life role circles in size to represent the importance/time that you want to be spending in each life role. Proximity of the circles represents relationships between/among the life roles in the future.

Future Date: _______________________

P.E. Brott (2011) Defining Career through Life Story
FIVE LIVES  
(Osborn & Zunker, 2006)

If you were able to live five completely different lives, what would they be?

Tell me more about each option

What is attractive about each option?

What do you know about each occupation?

What’s keeping you from following these aspirations?
POSSIBLE SELVES
(Markus & Nurius, 1986; Martz, 2001)

What I might become:

What I would like to become:

What I am afraid of becoming:
HOW AN UNPLANNED EVENT AFFECTED MY CAREER
(Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999)

DIRECTIONS: In the space below, write a story giving details about one unplanned event that had a significant impact on your career.

(continue story on backside if necessary)

Then, answer the following three questions:

1. Before that unplanned event, how did one of your own actions contribute to creating it?

2. After the unplanned event, how did one of your own actions transform it into a career opportunity?

3. Now, tomorrow, how can you apply Planned Happenstance to what you do next?
CAREER STYLE INTERVIEW  
(Savickas, 2002)

– How can I be useful to you?

– Whom do you admire? (self-concept)


– What were your three favorite subjects in high school – not based on teachers? What subjects did you hate? (typology)

– What do you like to do with your free time? (in play, we prepare)

– Tell me your favorite saying or motto. (self advice)
My GOAL MAP
(Brott, 2004)

My goal is to

My Resources for Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacles in My Way

One Step at a Time

Today’s Date:

P.E. Brott (2011)  Defining Career through Life Story  Page 8
Defining Career through Life Story:
A Constructivist Approach to Career Development and Counseling

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Paper presented at the International Career Development Conference
PACE Career Centre & International Association for Educational & Vocational Guidance
19-21 October, 2011, Cape Town, South Africa
Defining Career through Life Story:

A Constructivist Approach to Career Development and Counseling

Defining career through life story inspires clients to author narratives of preferred ways of being. Life story narratives are illuminated in the storied approach (Brott, 2001) as a dynamic process of co-construction, de-construction, and construction. Counseling techniques and interactive activities engage clients and counselors as collaborators to explore and set action steps with clients as life story editors in living a life as the interaction of life roles across the life span.

Keywords: career development and counseling, constructivist, the storied approach

Current economic uncertainties around the world present new challenges for career practitioners. Clearly, what we know about finding a job and having a career is being impacted by the economic climate. Theories and models of counseling from the 20th century with a focus on information, satisfaction, development, and decision-making so that clients can “find a match” in the world of work are lacking in application to these challenging times. However, these challenges can provide counselors with a unique opportunity to reframe their counseling strategies from processing information to collaborating with clients in editing life stories.

Recent literature reflects this paradigm shift to a focus on life designing (e.g., Savickas, 2009; Savickas et al., 2009); subjective well-being (e.g., Hartung & Taber, 2008; Lent & Brown, 2008; Tay & Diener, 2011); strengths, positive potentials, and personal development (e.g., Linley et al., 2010); and a narrative, storied approach (e.g., Brott, 2001). The framework of counseling shifts to narratives and the subjective construction of the client’s life story. The meaning making or mattering is how the individual weaves a tapestry of both discrete pieces of information (i.e., traits, interests, preferences) and the values and beliefs that guide one’s behavior across a variety of life roles. And most important, career counseling is redefined beyond the exclusive scope of working.

A Dynamic Definition of Career Development

Frequently, practitioners use the terms career, occupation, and vocation interchangeably without regard to defining the distinctive aspects that each contributes to the profession. However, there needs to be clarity when we use the term “career” and in particular as it is used in reference to career counseling. Traditionalists see career counseling through the lens of individual differences (e.g., trait and factor). Developmentalists have broaden the scope of career counseling across time to include pre-vocation, vocation, and post-vocation through the lens of
DEFINING CAREER THROUGH LIFE STORY

life roles and contexts. However, these models are subject to a middle-class bias in perception and ideology that defines career through work (Richardson, 1993 as cited in Patton & McMahon, 2006) and may lack application to issues of gender, social class, family background, and cultural characteristics (Blustein, 2001). Add to these issues the fact we live in a world that is exponentially changing beyond what many of us can even dream. So, rather than attempting to know what will be with a narrow focus on occupations and work, career counseling can embrace a not-knowing what the future will be with a focus on the career narrative.

As so aptly stated by Wolfe and Kolb (1980), “career development involves one’s whole life, not just occupation…the whole person…in the ever-changing contexts of his or her life…self and circumstances—evolving, changing, unfolding in mutual interaction—constitute the focus and the drama of career development” (pp. 1-2). Patton and McMahon (2006) favor “[a] dynamic definition, which encompasses the individual, the environment, interaction and change” (p. 7). Constructivist approaches to career counseling embrace this dynamic definition by emphasizing active agency; individuals are acting purposively in life construction based on a personal meaning-making system.

The postmodern or constructivist point of view attends to the individual’s perception of problems, situations, and one’s lived experience. The focus is attending to the perception of reality rather than defining reality itself. Kelly (1955) referred to this meaning-making system as personal constructs. Personal constructs are how individuals construe or make sense of the world; these constructs are ways to interpret experiences. A personal construct system is a range of constructs used most often that is contextualized, highly differentiated, and allows us to anticipate events. One is creating life rather than life happening to him/her. There are no absolutes (except dying), and change is inevitable.

Social constructivism is a view to see each individual as unique with the ability to develop subjective ways of knowing (Gergen, 1999; McNamee & Gergen, 1992). It is an active, ongoing process; formulating and reformulating to accommodate the subjective construction as a way of knowing. Reality is not based on absolute truths; it does not pre-exist. Rather, reality is constructed as meanings based on the individual’s experiences and interactions with others. So, rather than fitting people into jobs, we can assist our clients in fitting work into life (Savickas, 2002) as one’s personal constructs are related to the active agency of one’s life story.
Consider the importance of adaptability and cultural sensitivity in career counseling given the current state of employment, under-employment, and unemployment. Adaptability (i.e., ability to adapt) can be framed as positive uncertainty (Gelatt, 1989), good options rather than maximum benefit (i.e., “good enough”), or one’s adaptability by being ready to cope with predictable tasks and unpredictable adjustments (Savickas, 1997). A narrative approach invites the client to share “what it means to me to be…. (e.g., single mother, female, Latino, unemployed)” from the personal, subjective perspective. The counseling focus shifts from the counselor as an “all knowing holder of the answer to the career question” to the counselor as being inquisitive to understand the person in context. Rather than offering a career test to find the answer, idiographic assessments are used with the emphasis on subjective constructions related to the current career question.

“Motives are the internal states that arouse and direct behavior toward specific objects or goals” (Larsen & Buss, 2005, p. 338). Motives help us to understand why people do what they do and are often based on needs. Needs are a state of tension within the individual and are often caused by a deficit. Motives drive us to think, feel, and act in specific ways to satisfy the need; as a need is satisfied, tension is reduced. People differ in the type and intensity of their motives, and these differences are associated with important life outcomes. Based on Murray’s (1938) theory of motivation, several dozen motives were proposed and the concept that each person has a unique hierarchy of needs (e.g., ambition, social power, social affection, defend status) was introduced; these various needs exist at different levels of strength for each person. Most of the research has focused on three fundamental human motives: achievement (e.g., McClelland, 1985), power (e.g., Winter, 1973), and intimacy (e.g., McAdams, 1990).

Maslow (1943) defined needs primarily by their goals and organized the needs in a hierarchy of five levels (physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, self-actualization) with more basic, pressing (survival) needs at the base and self actualization (develop one’s potential) at the top. Basic needs have to be met before higher needs can be attained; however, people do attempt to satisfy multiple needs at the same time. Research findings (a) support the hierarchical arrangement of motives, (b) highlight differences in how people react to attainment or frustration at various need levels, and (c) demonstrate that the attainment of higher needs is more satisfying than the attainment of lower needs (Wicker et al., 1993). However, overall happiness is not correlated to level of need one is working on; people who are working on self-actualization are
not any more likely to be happier than people working on other needs (Diener, Horowitz, & Emmons, 1985). Most people are not self-actualizers; however, self-actualizers have identified characteristics, such as efficient perception of reality, genuine desire to help the human race, philosophical sense of humor, and resistance to enculturation (Maslow, 1987).

Literature within the past 10 years has challenged us to view a more dynamic definition of career by weaving the worker role into the career story. Work is more than a job. For many urban youth and families, work is a means to an end; it is what you do so you can earn money (Chaves et al., 2004). Work is an emotional issue especially in turbulent times with responses being manifested as anxiety, worry, and despair (Law, Meijers, & Wijers, 2002). Work has the potential to fulfill one’s needs for survival, relatedness, and self-determination (Blustein, 2008). Work is a significant channel for a sense of belonging, and career counseling can assist the individual in understanding how work fits into life (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004). By emphasizing the social context, counseling can be used to understand how individuals negotiate career when power and ideology are instrumental players (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004).

So, instead of predicting the future and helping clients find a job, counselors help clients develop a career by giving voice to the unique storied narrative; in other words, counselors help clients in living a life (Savickas, 2002).

Recent research on the interdependent elements of wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010) has introduced career practitioners to what defines career wellbeing. Wellbeing is the combination of loving what you do every day, quality of relationships, financial security, vibrancy of physical health, and pride in contributing to our communities. Through a comprehensive study that included more than 150 countries, common elements of wellbeing were shown to transcend countries and cultures. The five distinct statistical factors that emerged were career wellbeing, social wellbeing, financial wellbeing, physical wellbeing, and community wellbeing; “Career Wellbeing is arguably the most essential of the five elements” (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 16).

Whatever the life role, what you do each day shapes your identity. In one longitudinal study where researchers looked at how major life events (e.g., unemployment, marriage, divorce, death of a spouse) affected life satisfaction, sustained unemployment was the only major life event from which people do not fully recover (Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2008). With unemployment comes the loss of income, the lack of regular social contact, and daily boredom, which are detrimental to one’s wellbeing. Therefore, being engaged in something that is enjoyed
and having the opportunity to be engaged every day is essential to wellbeing. Rath and Harter provide three recommendations for “boosting” career wellbeing, namely (a) use your strengths every day, (b) spend more time with those people who share your mission and encourage your growth, and (c) opt into more social time with the people and teams you enjoy being around. Career counselors can use career wellbeing with those who are unemployed, under-employed, or employed by including in the focus of attention how to help clients find something meaningful to do every day, use strengths and interests to find purpose in life, and share their passions with others.

**Career through Life Story**

Career development is a lifelong process that reflects the uniqueness of the individual’s life story by embracing a variety of life roles, one of which is the working role, and experiences that are ever changing and evolving. The life story illuminates our *possible selves* as what we might become, what we want to become, and what we are afraid of becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In telling the story, the individual uncovers themes, people, highs and lows, resources, and a time perspective of the past and current story. The life story incorporates elements of human development and the interaction of environment, perception, and motives. From the storied approach (Brott, 2001), career development is comprised of the past, present, and future chapters in one’s life story.

Story telling is a traditional form of communication that probably is as old as language. Culture and cultural traditions are passed down through story telling. Stories inform us of our history and culture, answer questions from a very young age, direct us to important roles, and communicate one’s orientation to life (Howard, 1991). Stories or narratives give voice to what is experienced and to the meanings of what is experienced. Ethnic and cultural narratives for adolescents, stories of heroes for older children, and folk tales for younger children have been used to help with behavioral problems and anxiety (Malgady & Costantino, 2003). Gendered stories are used to illuminate social factors that affect the plot, setting, and characters in the story. Clearly, narratives provide an avenue to uncover the influence of sexism, racism, oppression, entitlement, and dominance for both males and females of all ages.

The voice in one’s story is unique, and the counselor as a story facilitator encourages the client to explore this voice through various life roles (Brott, 2005). These life roles can be conceptualized as *relating* to self and others, *learning* knowledge and skills, *working* as paid and
unpaid jobs and work experiences, *pleasuring* through self-selected enjoyment and interests, and *valuing* what is the essence of one’s life story. The means by which the current story is co-constructed can be instrumental in developing a collaborative approach and in transforming career counseling from a narrow focus on occupations to a broad review of one’s life story. This broad review transforms the process from occupation to narration.

**Child and Adolescent Career Development: Life Story Apprenticeship**

Apprenticeship is how one prepares for a career. It is a combination of classroom instruction and practical experience where workers are inducted into a highly skilled occupation. This seems an appropriate metaphor for child and adolescent career development: Home and school provide the experiences and instruction with “graduates” obtaining a diploma representing a certificate of completion. So it is proposed that *life story apprenticeship* is

A period of time where you learn a trade (education and life skills) in a real world environment (school and home) from masters (teachers, mentors, coaches, family). It begins with the family of origin to learn ways of speaking, behaving, and getting to know the environment and continues during formal school years in learning a trade (develop a life story). Life story apprenticeship involves gaining knowledge, developing skills, and earning qualifications through practical, classroom, and life experiences.

Life roles for children and adolescents play a significant part in one’s apprenticeship. *Relating* is about the relationships to family, peers, teachers, coaches, and mentors. *Learning* occurs at school through classroom instruction, behavior and discipline, and observation of others. *Pleasuring* plays a central part in one’s developing life story as a variety of activities, hobbies, clubs, and teams are explored. *Working* as employment includes chores at home and school as well as part- and full-time jobs. *Valuing* is the authentic self reflected in what is important, how needs are met, and the motivations that sustain action.

Therefore, it is important to focus on positive youth development (Bowen, 2009) and resiliency (Bryan, 2005) as part of life story apprenticeship (i.e., child and adolescent career development). Positive youth development as a success model involves the intersection of being physically and psychologically engaged. Students need to be physically engaged by enrolling and attending school and psychologically engaged through holding positive attitudes, avoiding trouble, participating in extracurricular activities, completing homework, attaining satisfactory grades, and experiencing a sense of achievement (Bowen, 2009). When students are physically and psychologically engaged, they have the best chance to graduate and successfully transition to the next chapter in the life story (e.g., employment, further education, military). When students
are not physically and psychologically engaged, they will see dropping out of school as a logical course of action.

Resiliency is the protective environmental factors that support positive youth development. These protective environmental factors include (a) caring and supportive adult relationships, (b) opportunities for meaningful participation, and (c) high adult expectations (Bryan, 2005). Protective environmental factors are reflected in the school culture that supports students developing their life story. Students need to be connected to school through caring and supportive adult relationships with opportunities for meaningful participation. Schools need to focus on academic success rather than just achievement through test scores and grades. There needs to be the expectation that each and every student will graduate from secondary education with the necessary self understanding, academic skills, and aspirations to set goals and make plans. One’s life story apprenticeship provides instruction and experience to deal with transitions, make decisions, and understand choices and responsibility.

**The Storied Approach**

Defining career through the life story inspires clients to author stories of preferred ways of being. Life story narratives are illuminated in the storied approach (Brott, 2001, 2004) as a dynamic process of *co-construction* (discovering the story), *de-construction* (opening space), and *construction* (authoring preferred ways of being). The counselor and client collaborate as co-editors to understand the meaning-making framework of the life story and to support the client in authoring future chapters for living a life (Brott, 2001). It is a dynamic and interactive process involving activities that engage both the client and the counselor to explore the past and present with future action steps framed for developing one’s life story thorough various life roles.

Life story editor is a useful pragmatic metaphor for both the client and the counselor. A well written story consists of the setting, characters, plot, problem, and resolution. The life story consists of life roles (setting), people (characters), themes (plot), motivations (problem), and meaningfulness (resolution). As a collaborative process, life story editing empowers the client to explore reoccurring themes from life experiences, to open up space in understanding one’s motivations and needs, and to embrace a dynamic life story that can fulfill subsistence and yet be ever evolving.

During *co-construction*, the client and counselor are collaborators in discovering the meaning making themes (life story) found in the past and present chapters of lived experience.
DEFINING CAREER THROUGH LIFE STORY

with a particular interest in the language of the client’s narrative. *De-construction* is a way of opening space in the client story by looking for exceptions, inviting others’ perspectives, and revising schemas as ways of knowing. *Construction* of future chapters to the story is based on preferred ways of being, decisions to be made, actions to be taken, barriers to confront, and resources to support these future chapters. As the process unfolds, exploring the client’s life roles (*working, learning, relating, pleasuring, valuing*) can give voice to the dynamism in one’s life story (Brott, 2005).

There is a part that career assessments can play in the counseling process. Career assessments can add to the language of the script as a means to illuminate and organize discrete pieces of information that can be woven into the life story. Both quantitative (i.e., standardized) and qualitative assessments can be valuable tools in career counseling. Qualitative techniques can be used to introduce concepts, typology, and language to the client. Card sorts, résumé analysis, Holland’s party game or desert island, and checklists can satisfy the client who wants to take “the test” to find out “what should I do?” as well as help the client understand how information is organized before taking a standardized career assessment. Once clients understand how occupational and personal information is organized, the mystery of more traditional assessments (e.g., *Strong Interest Inventory, Life Values Inventory, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*) can be revealed as a means to organize one’s understanding (or lack of understanding) based on self-report.

**Co-construction**

Various techniques have been suggested for the narrative co-construction process, such as life line, life chapters, success experiences, family constellation, role models, and early recollections (Brott, 2001; Cochran, 1997). We creatively construct reality, and our perceptions of early life experiences reflect basic convictions in life, core beliefs, and the meaning-making framework that is reflected in the life story. Adler (1937) gave importance to the individual’s childhood experiences in forming one’s character and attitude toward life.

When exploring the life story, the counselor’s intent is not to establish historical facts but rather to uncover the client’s selected memories or recollections based on present interpretations of significant events and interactions from the past (Bruhn, 1990; Spirrison & McCarley, 2001). From the constructivist perspective, “humans not only play an active role in interpreting the reality around them but also in the creative construction of that reality” (Scott, Kelly, & Tolbert,
1995, p. 5). Estrade (2006/2008) writes that “our memories, both good and bad, are inextricably linked to our deepest selves…that our memories are consistent with our present style of life” (p. xii). Memory function conforms to adaptive principles in that memory is purposeful, and early memories are especially important because they are survivors (Bruhn, 1990). These early memories are “The Story of My Life” repeated to warn and comfort, to keep one’s concentration, and to prepare for what will happen in the future (Adler, 1931/1958). What is recalled is consistent with the individual’s most strongly held attitudes, perceptions, and expectations (Mayman, 1968). How these earliest life events are recalled serve a utility by reinforcing what is believed today. Since there are no chance memories, early recollections contain an individual’s basic view of the world that sustain and support one’s life story. One chooses to remember only what has a bearing on one’s situation and reflects the perceptual framework within which the individual perceives self in relation to life tasks (Mosak, 1958). Therefore, early recollections can be used as an approach for uncovering the client’s meaning-making framework; what one remembers is purposeful and supports the individual’s life goal and life story. Early recollections are important cursors of the life story; in fact, “Adler regarded early recollections as the most important indicators of an individual’s lifestyle because they conveyed ‘the story of my life’ from the person’s subjective point of view” (as cited in Kopp & Eckstein, 2004, p. 165). Early childhood recollections are particularly expressive of an individual’s basic attitude toward life and provide a more holistic view of the individual (Olson, 1979).

The application of early recollections in career counseling is not a new concept. Research relating manifest content of early recollections and career choice (i.e., vocational, occupational) was reported over 40 years ago (see Holmes & Watson, 1965; Manaster & Perryman, 1979). Watkins (1984a) proposed an Adlerian vocational theory consisting of hypotheses and corollaries divided into life story, work as life task, family atmosphere and relationships, and early recollections. His specific hypotheses about life story were that (a) individuals implement life story through vocational choice and (b) individuals’ life story consists of attitudes toward self, others, and the world with implications for vocational choice. In another article, Watkins (1984b) wrote about using early recollections in career counseling. He contended that early recollections are purposively retained, illustrate a person’s life story themes, are consistent with one’s current approach to life, and “can provide a wealth of career-related information about clients’ dispositions” (p. 271). Bettner (2005) used early recollections to understand and help a
failing adolescent student by identifying his safeguarding techniques (use of symptoms to hide or get what he wants) and his talents (skills, interests).

Inviting the client to recall an early life event can be a starting point for co-construction of the life story (Brott, 2001). The event is described in detail as experienced and not as reported to the client by someone else. The detail includes time, place, people, and sensory and emotive experiences. Early recollections provide the counselor with a conceptualization of the client, a means for organizing client information from various perspectives (e.g., self, others, events), and a working hypothesis for the counseling process that evolves as new information comes to light (Clark, 2002).

There are other variations on collecting early recollections, such as news headlines for significant childhood events (Mosak, 1958), the life motto (Olson, 1979) that guides the life story, emplotment to cast the client as the main character in a career narrative (Cochran, 1997), and role models (heroes/heroines) based on the premise that these role models portray solutions to problems because of the desirable qualities that strengthen or modify one’s self-concept (Savickas, 2002). Modern technology has given us additional tools that can be used to illuminate the early recollections. For instance, you can ask a client to be the director of the early recollection as a video (e.g., U-Tube video), be the creator of a cartoon storyboard for the early recollection, or be a music arranger and select the songs to be put on an iPod that represent the early recollection, or be a crafter for scrapbooking the early memory. For older individuals, audio recordings of early recollections may be a useful approach.

**De-construction**

De-construction is the process of opening space in the client’s story. As co-collaborators, the counselor and client look for exceptions, invite others’ perspectives, identify motivations and needs, and revise schemas to accommodate ways of knowing. A number of activities can assist this collaborative process, namely planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and the career style interview (Savickas, 2002, 2006).

Planned happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) is a useful technique to help clients gain perspective over a variety of life events. So, rather than seeing life as “fate” or “what will be, will be” or “luck,” clients process how one of their own actions contributed to the event, how the event was transformed into a career opportunity, and how this knowledge of planned happenstance can be applied to their future chapters (future events).
The concept of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) provides a conceptual link between self-concept and motivation. It represents “individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Possible selves are the personalized cognitive stories of aspirations, motivations, distortions, fears, and change from the past and into the future; these possible selves mediate one’s current personal functioning. An individual can create a variety of possible selves and explore the influences of the individual’s particular socio-cultural and historical context, social experiences, and innate abilities. Selection and construction of possible selves has implications to relationships, decisions, goals, and to the way an individual views reality.

The career style interview (Savickas, 2002, 2006) also provides a narrative framework to engage the client in the de-construction process. The career style opens up space by finding out about whom the client admires (reflecting self-concept as “this is the way I would like to be”), preferences for reading magazines or books and watching TV (reflecting Holland’s RIASEC environments), choices in leisure activities (reflecting that in play we prepare), favorite motto or saying (reflecting self advice), school subjects not/liked (reflecting preferences), and three early recollections (reflecting pre-occupation). These reflections are “findings” that can identify motivations and needs to be met, articulate support for current challenges, and provide ideas for new endeavors.

**Construction**

This phase of the counseling process engages the client in authoring preferred ways of being. This perspective on the life story embraces one’s motivations and needs that are to be held onto, those that need to be adapted, and possibly developing new approaches to the life story. The counselor as a life story co-editor uses a variety of techniques that assist the client in recognizing preferences, decisions to be made, actions to be taken, barriers to confront, and resources to support in writing future chapters to the story. Action steps are put into place to empower the client in being an active participant in developing the preferred life story.

Techniques that can be used include (a) revising the lifeline with chapters written from today and into the future and (b) revisiting one’s life roles from a future perspective. Using a goal map (Brott, 2004) or a similar technique helps both the client and counselor to visualize (a) the goal, (b) obstacles to overcome, (c) resources to overcome obstacles, and (d) action steps that are measurable and do-able to set yourself up for success.
Career through Life Story: Life Story Editors

Gone are the days where “career” was defined as a linear progression of jobs (e.g., career ladder) with increasing levels of responsibility and remuneration that was rewarded with the gold watch upon retirement at the age of 60. Recent economic changes, not only in the United States but across the world, bring to the forefront the tenuous and changing nature of the job market. Career counseling practitioners do not have the crystal ball in which to gaze and find answers to the client’s questions. So, rather than fitting individuals into preconceived models of “career” and placing counselors in the role of expert with the answers, there needs to be a “dynamic definition, which encompasses the individual, the environment, interaction and change” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 7).

Constructivist approaches to career counseling embrace this dynamic definition by emphasizing active agency where individuals are acting purposively in life construction. One creates life rather than life happening to him/her. So, rather than matching people and jobs, clients are empowered through the narrative. The counseling process is collaborative with clients becoming life story editors in discovering the story (themes, motivations, needs), opening up space to see various perspectives and possibilities, and writing future chapters in the life story based on preferred ways of being.

Life story through life roles for relating, learning, working, pleasuring, and valuing is sensitive to multicultural concerns. Psychological, sociological, and biological variables can be taken into consideration when career counseling is approached from the perspective of the life story. Career is the life story of how clients narrate a subjective, personal meaning-making approach to living a life. Individuals creatively construct reality, and their perceptions of life experiences reflect basic convictions in life, core beliefs, and the meaning-making framework that is reflected in the life story.

Without a crystal ball that can predict the future, it will be challenging to focus counseling services on how to prepare clients for current jobs that will become redundant and future jobs that do not yet exist. However, professional counselors have the training and expertise to focus on the client’s subjective phenomenological view. Counselors can provide clients with opportunities to better understand themselves; encouragement to support aspirations; information and resources for making decisions; and counseling to give voice to the storied narrative that is being experienced as the client’s unique life story.
Life story narratives are the stories that illuminate our lives. They are the stories that are authored based on experiences, preferences, and themes that guide one’s approach to life across all the life roles. These are the stories about living a life.
References


