

**Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds**

Author

Abkhezr, Peyman, McMahon, Mary

Published

2017

Journal Title

International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling

Version

Accepted Manuscript (AM)

DOI

[10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z)

Rights statement

© 2017 Springer. This version of the article has been accepted for publication, after peer review (when applicable) and is subject to Springer Nature's AM terms of use, but is not the Version of Record and does not reflect post-acceptance improvements, or any corrections. The Version of Record is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z>

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/409841>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

# **Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds**

## **Abstract**

For people with refugee backgrounds, pursuing a meaningful career in their country of resettlement is important for their successful integration. However, for many, achieving this is a challenging process. Career counsellors may have a role to play in facilitating the transition and integration of people with refugee backgrounds, and narrative career counselling has much to offer. This article discusses the impact of prolonged transition under difficult circumstances on people with refugee backgrounds, and the potential contribution of narrative career counselling in assisting them. In particular, it identifies cultural considerations for narrative career counsellors who work with people with refugee backgrounds.

Keywords: career counselling; narrative career counselling; refugees; resettlement

Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

## Introduction

The forced displacement of people has now become a huge global issue, raising concerns within many fields. Every minute more than 24 people worldwide are being displaced and for the first time in recorded history, there are over 65.3 million people around the world who have been forcibly displaced (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR]; 2016). In 2016, the UNHCR suggested that in 2017 alone, more than 1,190,000, mainly children and young people, would find themselves in need of resettlement in other countries (UNHCR, 2016). This is a dramatic increase in the number of people in urgent need for resettlement, compared to the 691,000 people in 2014, and unfortunately it is predicted that this trend will continue (UNHCR, 2016).

After resettlement in a new country, when the difficulties and circumstances that have caused people to seek asylum or leave their home country behind become less pressing, a new phase of life with challenges of a different kind begins. These challenges are often such that integration is not always easily achieved.

As a result of prolonged transition under difficult circumstances, language differences, disrupted education backgrounds, and racism and classism in the host country (Flores, 2009), difficulties in relation to education and employment plans may appear. Career counsellors may have a role to play in facilitating successful transition for people with refugee backgrounds to meaningful work in their country of resettlement. In search of a relevant career counselling approach for people with refugee backgrounds, culture, contextual and psychosocial factors, personal experiences and subjectivity need attention, and these elements are most appropriately considered within constructivist, narrative, reflexive and critical approaches to career counselling (Reid & West, 2016). Narrative approaches to career counselling are considered suitable for populations with diverse cultural and contextual

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

backgrounds, or for those at risk and disadvantaged (Clark, Severy, & Sawyer, 2004; Young, Marshall, & Valach, 2007), including people with refugee backgrounds who have migrated from developing countries to developed countries, in need of assistance to find decent and dignified work or to make decisions regarding their career development (Abkhezr, McMahon, & Rossouw, 2015).

In this article, narrative career counselling is recognised as an approach that goes beyond the mere provision of information and advice to clients (Reid & West, 2016). The approach shifts the focus from objectivity towards subjectivity, through which it attends to constructs such as meaning-making, connectedness and agency in working with each individual (McMahon & Watson, 2011). Narrative career counselling and its core constructs will be elaborated in a later section of the article.

The majority of contemporary migrants in developed countries are people from developing countries who usually have experienced disadvantage, oppression, and/or marginalisation. Since the foundations of the career counselling field are rooted in the social justice legacy of its pioneers such as Frank Parsons (1909), career counsellors of the present era should not lose sensitivity to the plight of others or feel content with providing only information and advice to clients. Narrative career counselling enhances sensitivity among career counsellors to issues of social justice and advocacy (Arthur, 2013) and reminds us that creativity and innovation are necessary to stay connected with the cultural, contextual and psychosocial domains of each client's life (Reid & West, 2016). Creativity in career counselling is not only about focusing on techniques; rather, it is more about being mindful of opportunities that can enhance the quality of the dialogue and the collaborative nature of the relationship between client and counsellor (McMahon, 2017). Creativity in narrative career

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

counselling is mostly concerned with the detailed exploration of career stories and how they are continuously being shaped.

An important component of narrative approaches to career counselling is storytelling. Storytelling can reflect the “temporal nature of career experiences” (LaPointe, 2010, p. 7) and explain how each single life event or experience is built upon previous experiences over time. As “our world is a storied world”, storytelling is considered as a natural tendency of all human beings; it provides us with the tools to make sense of the world around us and our social interactions (Murray, 1997, p. 10). Storytelling is a “central characteristic of African” (Pierce & Gibbons, 2012, p. 120) and Middle-Eastern cultures (Parks, 1997), which are the current dominant cultures of many people with refugee backgrounds. Such cultures are filled with rich historical and literary stories shared by a collective audience. The practice of storytelling by older adults, parents and even people who tell stories in the marketplace, streets or other public locations is common in these cultures (Pellowski, 1990). Engaging clients with refugee backgrounds in conversations that depict their own life events as cohesive and meaningful stories is a meaningful process that each person can directly relate to.

This article considers narrative career counselling as a particular form of assistance for people with refugee backgrounds who are considering and exploring their career options in their Western countries of resettlement. First, the article briefly considers the context of the migration process for people with refugee backgrounds and its potential impact on their account of narratives and stories that they hold as truths about themselves. Subsequently, narrative career counselling is discussed, extending to a discussion of how the approach might be highly suited for people with refugee backgrounds. Consideration is given to how sensitivity to cultural issues can enhance the collaborative nature of the counselling process.

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

## **People with refugee backgrounds and their stories**

People with refugee backgrounds who are settled in developed societies usually have been through a four stage migration process consisting of: (a) pre-migration, (b) migration, (c) resettlement, and (d) living in the host country (Pierce & Gibbons, 2012). During these stages people with refugee backgrounds may have been repeatedly persecuted and their many stories and experiences challenged and questioned. Before being approved by UNHCR for resettlement in a new country (i.e., during the migration and pre-migration stages) or, in the case of those seeking asylum, being granted refugee status, typically, extensive interviews occur during which people with refugee backgrounds must provide detailed accounts (stories) of the experiences that have led to their displacement. They must extensively review and repeat stories of fear, hopelessness, helplessness and trauma that have contributed to their refugee status and provide proof about their current situation (Amnesty International, 2013).

Throughout this process, telling stories of their skills and strengths may not be perceived as useful, and might even be seen as hindering the processing of their case, and so people with refugee backgrounds may avoid talking about aspects of their lives other than the troubling issues that have caused them to seek asylum. Repeatedly telling ‘refugee’ stories may, therefore, lead to a diminishing of other stories (such as those related to their previous educational achievements, career successes or family and community experiences), and generate the construction of a ‘refugee identity’ that overshadows their previous accounts of identity. Eventually a “culture of disbelief” and “defeat” (Harris, 2002, p. 4) may escalate as being the dominant internal frame of reference. People with refugee backgrounds may begin living with stories about themselves that are restrictive, painful, confusing, desperate, unsatisfactory or unfulfilling in nature (Combs & Freedman, 1994). The dominance of these

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

stories may intensify even more after experiencing challenges and barriers to integration in their final resettlement country (Abkhezr et al., 2015).

In addition to the effects of the interview and processing phases of migration, which might promote a culture of disbelief, the “dominant Western deficit models that define refugee people” (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 55) as victims or as traumatised may also be influential in constructing a dominant story about their lives and identities. It is possible that the dominant Western deficit models and the escalation of a culture of disbelief operate in a reciprocal cycle, and it may take many years for people with refugee backgrounds to re-connect with, re-tell and regain their preferred stories of competence, achievement and strength held prior to migration.

It is evident that the context of the migration journey of people with refugee backgrounds is often filled with many contradictory and opposing stories. For instance, young people might have experienced themselves in the past as being ‘a top student with excellent marks’, but throughout the migration journey as someone ‘with no access to school for a couple of years’ and/or subsequently in their final country of resettlement, as someone ‘ineligible for university entry’. It is possible then that during migration, people’s narratives and subsequent truths come to lean more towards their more recent stories. Holding onto such self-narratives could be detrimental to their personal development and “amendments to correct mistaken ideas, adjustments to soothe old conflicts, and alterations to enhance self-efficacy” might be necessary (Savickas, 2012, p. 658).

Amendments to personal narratives may happen at any time and in different developmental life stages. However, the degree to which such detrimental self-narratives could influence an individual, is largely dependent on the cultural or social expectations that people prioritise, as well as the different circumstances and conditions of their new lives

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

(McIlveen, 2012). Moving people with refugee backgrounds towards preferred career plans is only possible when revised self-narratives are established that promote a sense of purpose for becoming engaged in culturally meaningful future oriented projects (Flum, 2015). Narrative career counselling, given its nature, may facilitate the exploration of such new self-narratives and stories, so that the construction of new and preferred stories about life and future career plans becomes possible. The following material will first explore narrative career counselling and then propose cultural considerations corresponding to the practice of narrative career counselling with people with refugee backgrounds.

### **Narrative career counselling**

Narrative career counselling aims to combine “a range of diverse, yet very similar, theoretical models and perspectives into a broader, more integrated” theoretical framework of the narrative approach in vocational and career psychology (Chen, 2007, p. 23). Suggesting a definition for narrative career counselling would be counter-intuitive to its own philosophical underpinnings in constructivism and post-structuralism which consider narrative practice as a continuously and “rapidly evolving collection of ideas and methods” (McIlveen & Patton, 2007, p. 228) and not just a set of pre-determined or limited number of techniques or strategies. Exemplifying the constructivist approach, McIlveen and Patton (2007) proposed:

*Narrative career counselling emphasises subjectivity and meaning. It aims to facilitate self-reflection and elaboration of self-concepts toward an enhanced self-understanding that is subjectively and contextually truthful. It entails a collaborative process in which the client is supported in creating an open ended personal story that holistically accounts for his or her life and career, and enables the person to make meaningfully informed career decisions and actions.*

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*



Evident in this conceptualisation of narrative career counselling are some of its core constructs such as story, subjectivity, meaning making, reflection, connectedness, and agency. The process of narrative career counselling is enhanced by utilising these core constructs. On the surface narrative career counselling may seem to offer less structure but four steps have been identified by different scholars (Brott, 2005; Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Savickas, 2013) that shape the counselling process.

The narrative career counselling process begins by uncovering previously untold stories (step 1: co-construction). In this initial phase the counsellor and client collaborate in exploring the past and present life-career stories of the client. This collaborative exploratory environment opens up space for uncovering alternative perspectives and exploring life roles, life themes, values, interests and motivations (step 2: de-construction). This second step prepares and enables clients to assess the life themes and values, allowing them to weave together a new and preferred unified narrative identity (step 3: re-construction). Finally, going through the previous three steps and learning about how different experiences, life events and socialisations have influenced their progress in life, clients can now look for new ways of action to move in certain directions and make new decisions (step 4: construction). This exploratory and reflective process provides more clarity, confidence and wisdom for people with refugee backgrounds, contributing to their career development. For instance, the somewhat confusing and disorienting employment markets of developed countries might be considered as being a challenge for the career development of many people with refugee backgrounds. In this regard, narrative career counselling can provide a “transitional space for self-negotiation” (Reid & West, 2011, p. 4), re-authoring of a life/career narrative that enhances agency and preparing people to “keep on keeping on” in disorienting situations (Reid & West, 2016, p. 4). The core constructs that are utilised throughout the process of

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

narrative career counselling, in addition to the collaborative nature of the counselling relationship, are overviewed here.

*Stories* are used to clarify, understand, explain or make meaning of different aspects of life and existence. Actions, plans, decisions and experiences are primarily made meaningful through life stories (Polkinghorne, 1988). Stories do not happen in the real world but in the minds of people, constructing descriptions of life events. The vast array of stories that individuals hold about themselves have been conceptualised as narratives (Antaki, 1988). Individuals' capacities to narrate life stories are not fixed or limited, as they are constantly receiving information about themselves from the outside world and from others around them. However, they "selectively highlight particular experiences to produce a narrative truth by which they live" (Savickas, 2005, p. 43) and form life themes.

*Life themes* have been conceptualised as sets of concerns that are prioritised in life above everything else and can lead the person in a certain direction to search for solutions and answers (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979). These concerns or preoccupations are what narrative career counselling highlights and is interested to explore. Life themes, either pleasant or unpleasant (Savickas, 2013), "provide a framework for understanding the past events of one's life and for planning future actions" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11). Some themes and life stories become 'dominant stories' because they rely on a stereotypical description of the person's experiences (Freedman & Combs, 1996), and some stories are considered as 'alternative stories' (White & Epston, 1990). Alternative stories may be untold, marginalised, forgotten, discounted and unrealised (McMahon, 2007) under the powerful effect of dominant stories.

After resettlement, people with refugee backgrounds normally try to begin a new life in their new home country. Seeking employment is a high priority in this process, which has

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

to be achieved in very unfamiliar surroundings and, thus, may require considerable assistance (Abkhezr et al., 2015). In this process of looking for new career opportunities, refugees telling stories that may not have been accessed or told about themselves for a long time since departing their countries of origin will become important again; stories that might have become forgotten, hidden, or diminished (McMahon, 2007). By offering an invitation to clients from refugee backgrounds to narrate their pre- and post-resettlement stories, career counsellors can create an environment whereby clients become more aware of their capacity to tell alternative and preferred stories over those dominant stories they repeatedly had to tell during their pre-migration and migration stages. In this way, they may get to tell stories of hope, possibility, confidence and optimism (Amundson, 2009).

However, for this process of re-storying and re-authoring to be useful for people, other constructs that constitute and complement the process need to be explored. An important construct for shaping life themes and dominant or alternative stories is meaning making. Subsequently a process of meaning making will become influential as people constantly ascribe subjective meaning to each life event (Bruner, 2004).

**Meaning making** is considered as a “process construct” of narrative career counselling that is linked to subjectivity (McMahon, Watson, Chetty, & Hoelson, 2012, p. 127). People subjectively make meaning of events, life experiences and their numerous stories about self and others. Unique culturally available linguistic resources are used for making sense of and organising events, people and life experiences (Hartung, 2013; Kelly, 1955) within the stories. Narrative career counselling enables clients to make meaning of their lives by exploring their past and present narratives. Emphasising subjectivity and prioritising the clients’ process of meaning making, narrative career counselling aims to enhance contextual self-understanding through facilitating self-reflection.

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

**Reflection** is about the promotion of reflective thinking. Through the space provided within the process of narrative career counselling, clients think reflectively so that unclear or complex past stories are transformed into more clear and coherent meaningful stories (Dewey, 1933; McMahon et al., 2012). Establishing coherence among different stories or different aspects of each story, requires a sense of wholeness rather than disparity which promotes connectedness.

**Connectedness** provides the opportunity for clients to see their lives as a series of interrelated, connected and coherent events and experiences that occur in diverse contexts rather than a series of disparate or unrelated events. By reflecting through and making meaning of certain stories within the process of narrative career counselling, clients get to see their lives in relation to other people, interdependent with a wide range of factors and therefore systemic and recursive reflective thinking are enhanced (McMahon, 2007).

The overall operation of these process constructs within narrative career counselling supports client's construction of "an open ended personal story that holistically accounts for her/his life and career, and enables the person to make meaningfully informed career decisions and actions" (McIlveen & Patton, 2007, p. 228). This process emphasises expanding the individual's capacity to "construct and tell stories that shape their identities" (McMahon, 2007, p. 71) in ways that are more preferred. It is perhaps the ultimate purpose of narrative career counselling to assist clients to become the creative authors of their new, often restored, identities (Botella, Herrero, Pacheco, & Corbella, 2004; McMahon, 2007) by expanding accessibility to their skills, knowledge, capabilities and special qualities that have been largely undermined and disqualified over time (White, 2007). Such new or restored identities might emerge as a "fluid and evolving work in progress" (Singer, 2004, p. 445)

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

through a narrative process within career counselling that leads to enhancements in a perceived sense of agency.

**Agency** refers to a person's sensed capacity for acting and speaking on behalf of themselves (McMahon et al., 2012; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997). Narrative career counselling that aims to deconstruct and alter dominant stories that operate in disruptive, disadvantageous or generally not useful ways for the career development of people with refugee backgrounds will provide a space not only for the emergence of preferred and alternative stories, but also paves the way for such stories to enhance agency and action. These narratives meaningfully move towards situating people with refugee backgrounds into their new context and provide unity among their past, present and anticipated stories. Narrative career counselling offers them an opportunity to re-evaluate their position in their new country and identify what actions and decisions might bring them closer to or further away from their goals. Overall this detailed exploration of life-themes, dominant and alternative stories, emphasising subjectivity and meaning making within the process, enhances the clients' reflective thinking to arrive at a sense of coherence among their stories, which will then consequently assist them in becoming "self-regulating agents" of their own lives (Savickas, 2013, p. 155).

**A trusting counselling relationship** is essential when working with people's life stories, especially when client and counsellor cultural backgrounds are very much different. Narrative career counselling is a collaborative process in which the counsellor is regarded as an "attentive listener" (McMahon, Watson, Chetty, & Hoelson, 2012, p. 138), "co-traveller" (Spangar, 2006, p. 146), "audience, editor of the story and co-writer" (McLeod, 1996, p. 182), "curious and tentative inquirer" (McMahon & Patton, 2002, p. 59), and as a facilitator of storytelling with a "de-centred but influential" posture (White, 2005, p. 9). De-centring the

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

role of counsellor means that personal stories, knowledge and skills of clients and their role as the primary author of their stories are prioritised (White, 2005). The narrative career counsellor assists clients by asking questions and providing reflective responses to build a scaffold so that more rich and alternative stories may be revealed, and some of the forgotten or neglected stories of the client's life can re-emerge. To prioritise these personal stories, knowledge and skills of clients, narrative career counsellors engage in a cultural journey with each client in order to enrich this trusting counselling relationship and to be able to prioritise client subjectivity in practice.

If the actualisation of persisting or fading dreams is to occur, the preferred and alternative self-narratives of the client need space and opportunity to be accessed and woven together into future stories of hope and possibility that are congruent with the cultural and contextual backgrounds of the client. In this regard, culture is the basis of a wide range of stories from which people may choose in the re-authoring of their narratives (McAdams & Olson, 2010). As people “adopt and adapt culturally”, an ongoing modification happens to the stories and narratives that they hold about themselves (McIlveen, 2012, p. 67). Such story modifications or re-authoring experiences are contingent upon the person's cultural background as well as what is present in their discursive contexts.

### **Cultural considerations for narrative career counsellors**

Accounts of flexible and open-ended narratives of people with refugee backgrounds are inevitably bound to their socio-cultural backgrounds from their countries of origin as well as to the socio-cultural contexts of their migration journey and those of their new country of resettlement. Considerations of culture are central to narrative career counselling since the approach values the subjective and contextual aspects of each person's life (McMahon, 2014). To build trusting and collaborative relationships between narrative career counsellors

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

and clients with refugee backgrounds, a number of cultural considerations should be taken into account, including: 1) clarifying the nature of the career counselling process; 2) previous interview experiences vs. the experience of narrative career counselling; 3) exposure to clients' unique cultural backgrounds due to the cultural differences between career counsellors and clients from refugee backgrounds; and 4) previous cultural experiences of work and collectivist orientations.

These considerations and the role of narrative career counsellors in their work with clients with refugee backgrounds will be briefly discussed. Of course, as people with refugee backgrounds are a heterogeneous population and belong to very diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, these considerations will vary among clients.

***Clarifying the nature of the career counselling process.*** The term 'career counselling' is a Western concept, as well as being a Western practice that cannot be simply translated into other languages (Reid, 2015) or be known to people of all cultures. Some people from refugee backgrounds make career- and education-related decisions relying on opinions of and directions provided by family members, their community and also fate (Stebbleton, 2007). Consideration of clients' expectations about their understanding of and perceptions about career counselling are important, as many people with refugee backgrounds would have never experienced career counselling as such (Sultana & Watts, 2008). Some clients with refugee backgrounds may consider career counsellors as having 'magic powers' (Amundson, 2009) that will help them find an ideal job or career pathway. So that clients are not disappointed as a result of such expectations, career counsellors are encouraged to first explore their client's expectations about career counselling and then inform them about the narrative career counselling process, and finally, work together to establish realistic expectations. To ensure that such messages are supportive, empathic and aligned with clients'

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

cultural backgrounds, the counselling relationship becomes of utmost importance. Narrative career counselling emphasises the therapeutic relationship (Cochran & Cochran, 2006) and the core elements of the person-centred approach (Rogers, 1957), involving empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard, along with what Amundson refers to as “flexibility” (2009, p. 40).

***Previous interview experiences vs. the experience of narrative career counselling.***

As mentioned earlier, people with refugee backgrounds often encounter many professionals during and after their migration journey (e.g., UNHCR employees and immigration officers, physicians, psychologists) within interviews that might result in assumptions about the process of career counselling. Past experiences of interviews dealing with authorities and professionals during and after the migration journey (Harris, 2002) may also result in pre-conceptions and assumptions about career counselling. Career counselling might initially resonate as being another expert-driven process for people with refugee backgrounds, which will create a contradictory dynamic for narrative career counsellors because their focus will be on a collaborative process that creates a co-authoring and co-travelling relationship between counsellor and client. Thus, it becomes important for narrative career counsellors to clarify their own role and their partnership with clients from different cultural backgrounds in an early stage of their encounter.

To clarify and communicate the process with a client and to express a genuine sense of interest without sounding like an expert but more like a “curious inquirer” (McMahon & Patton, 2002, p. 59) and an “attentive listener” (McMahon et al., 2012, p. 138), narrative career counsellors may need to explain the process and their role as early as possible. This explanation may cover issues such as the nature of stories the career counsellor is curious to have expressed, and the reasons behind this curiosity and what it can do for their partnership

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*



and eventually for the client as a person. Such explanations are intended to a) invite clients to feel at ease with the career counselling process, b) give the impression that the counsellor needs their assistance in telling as much as possible about themselves, c) establish an open space for staying curious, and d) facilitate a detailed and ongoing sense of reflection, connectedness and meaning-making. Initiating the counselling relationship on this foundation will ensure that clients come to have an active role in constructing their careers, as well as ensuring that career counselling generates outcomes beyond the initial transition needs of people with refugee backgrounds (Pierce & Gibbons, 2012).

***Exposure to clients' unique cultural backgrounds.*** To clarify the role of narrative career counsellor for clients from refugee backgrounds, counsellors should make an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the unique cultural background of each client. To do so, clients may be encouraged to take a role as a “cultural informant” (Leong & Pearce, 2014, p. 77) through which they share elements of their culture with the career counsellor. Being constantly curious about clients' cultural backgrounds and cultural priorities will assist career counsellors to generate ideas about issues that may inform and improve their practice contributions. In their process of integration, people from refugee backgrounds may also have come to value certain cultural practices of the host society and identify with them. Culture is considered as being a fluid concept (Stead, 2004) that calls for constant monitoring and learning by narrative career counsellors.

Instruments and strategies available in the different approaches to narrative career counselling may not be suitable for all clients from refugee backgrounds. Learning about some of the customs and traditions of the particular culture of each client could be helpful in choosing assessment instruments and strategies that might be more culturally responsive.

Collaboration and communication with other professionals such as psychologists, social

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

workers or teachers, and other “cultural informants” (Leong & Pearce, 2014, p. 77) from the client’s culture are highly recommended. Exposure to the personal culture of clients as well as the cultural backgrounds of their ethnic, linguistic, socio-political or religious group could be helpful in understanding their experiences, expectations, and worldviews in regard to work and what career counselling may have to offer.

When clients observe and experience that their career counsellor is curious and interested in key aspects of their cultural practices and involvements, and is interested to know more about certain customs and traditions, the counselling relationship will be deeply enriched, developing heightened levels of trust and enthusiasm that will be useful for hearing more detailed and rich stories and descriptions. As a result of such movements within the counselling process, possibilities for constructing new meaningful narratives based on those cultural practices will emerge. Clients will then have a better chance of embedding such cultural stories into their future and preferred career stories.

*Cultural experiences of work and collectivism.* What is considered as work is culturally constructed (Ferrari et al., 2009). In developed countries that are currently countries of resettlement for most people with refugee backgrounds, paid work which has also been referred to as “market work” has been valued over unpaid work (Richardson, 2012, p. 87). However, in developing countries and collectivist cultures, voluntary, unpaid and care work are valued and may begin early in childhood. Understanding people’s previous experiences and cultural understandings of work is important as their migration journey now faces them with an environment in which previously familiar work roles are not valued as much. Some people with refugee backgrounds have been engaged in work, responsibilities and actions that young people of their culture are expected to participate in from an early age (due to the absence of their parents or other familial, social and cultural norms). For instance,  
*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

for many African clients their previous work role experiences would be “under the influence of cultural expectations” related to “fulfilling family or community obligations” and “working in service to others” (Stebbleton, 2012, pp. 61-62). Narrative approaches in career counselling need to be flexible in terms of working with populations from diverse cultural backgrounds, allowing people to evaluate their work life through their own cultural framework (Arthur, 2006) and, in the case of most people with refugee backgrounds, through a collectivist framework.

To engage people with refugee backgrounds in conversations about work and future career plans, narrative career counsellors need to be prepared for and informed about the key characteristics and cultural practices of clients that influence their orientations to work and career (Arulmani, 2011). Career counsellors are encouraged to ensure that their services resonate with local and traditional knowledge and ways of life that are specific to the subjective meaning-making processes of clients (Arulmani, 2011). In the case of people with refugee backgrounds who grew up mostly in collectivist environments but now function in Western countries with more individualistic frameworks, certain traditions and cultural knowledge may be overshadowed by what is dominant in the new context. Providing space for collectivist frameworks to surface during career conversations, enables clients to value contextual and relational factors that still are apparent in their life, such as those concerning family, friends, community and the influence of social, historical and political systems. Such conversations value “interdependence, group work, group rewards” (Watson, 2017, p. 48) and “duty to the in-group and maintaining harmony” (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p. 44) over certain Western values, and need consideration in terms of their impact in career construction and future decision-making.

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

The inclusion of culturally congruent work related experiences in the process of narrative career counselling will contribute to the development of culturally informed perceptions about work and the world of work, preparing clients to construct new and preferred personal and career stories consistent with what is personally and subjectively meaningful for them. It is conversations involving such qualities that make career counselling of people with refugee backgrounds a culturally resonant practice.

## **Conclusion**

Narrative career counselling with people with refugee backgrounds provides a space for exploration of their preferred accounts of life and career stories that may have become challenged before, during and after the migration journey. In this way, narrative career counselling transcends the provision of information, advice and point in time career counselling. By emphasising subjectivity, narrative career counselling aims to facilitate self-reflection and to enhance cultural and contextual self-understanding among people with refugee backgrounds. To facilitate the emergence of alternative life and career stories, an important pre-requisite for narrative career counsellors is to be sensitive to cultural issues in their practice. Through a culturally sensitive counselling relationship, a detailed and holistic exploration of contextual, social, historical, relational and psychological domains of people with refugee background lives becomes possible. The new autobiographical narratives that emerge as the result of narrative career counselling will be useful in assisting people with refugee backgrounds to experience a greater sense of continuity in life and hence assist them to meaningfully position themselves in their new environment in terms of career connection and development.

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*

## References

- Abkhezr, P., McMahon, M., & Rossouw, P. (2015). Youth with refugee backgrounds in Australia: Contextual and practical considerations for career counsellors. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 24*(2), 71-80. doi: 10.1177/1038416215584406.
- Amnesty International. (2013). This is breaking people: Human rights violations at Australia's asylum seeker processing centre on Manus island, Papua New Guinea. NSW, Australia.
- Amundson, N. E. (2009). *Active engagement: The being and doing of career counselling* (3rd ed.). Richmond, Canada: Ergon Communications.
- Antaki, C. (1988). *Analysing everyday explanation: A casebook of methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Arthur, N. (2006). Infusing culture in constructivist approaches to career counselling. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Career counselling: constructivist approaches* (pp. 57-68). New York: Routledge.
- Arthur, N. (2013). Social justice and career guidance in the age of talent. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 14*(1), 47-60. doi: 10.1007/s10775-013-9255-x.
- Arulmani, G. (2011). Striking the right note: The cultural preparedness approach to developing resonant career guidance programmes. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 11*, 79-93.
- Botella, L., Herrero, O., Pacheco, M., & Corbella, S. (2004). Working with narrative in psychotherapy. In L. E. Angus & J. McLeod (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative and psychotherapy: Practice, theory, and research* (pp. 119-136). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

- Brott, P. (2001). The storied approach: A postmodern perspective for career counseling. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 49(4), 304-313.
- Brott, P. (2005). A constructivist look at life roles. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 54, 138-149.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 71(3), 691-710.
- Campbell, C., & Ungar, M. (2004). Constructing a life that works: Part 2, an approach to practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 53(1), 28-40.
- Chen, C. P. (2007). Narrative counselling: An emerging theory for facilitating life career success. In J. G. Maree (Ed.), *Shaping the story: a guide to facilitating narrative career counselling* (pp. 20-38). Hatfield, Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Clark, M. A., Severy, L., & Sawyer, S. A. (2004). Creating connections using a narrative approach in career group counselling with college students from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Journal of College Counseling*, 7(1), 24-31.
- Cochran, J. L., & Cochran, N. H. (2006). *The heart of counseling: A guide to developing therapeutic relationships*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education.
- Combs, G., & Freedman, J. (1994). Narrative intentions. In M. F. Hoyt (Ed.), *Constructive therapies* (Vol. 1) (pp. 67-92). London: The Guildford Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Beattie, O. V. (1979). Life themes: A theoretical and empirical exploration of their origins and effects. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 19, 45-63.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston, MA: Heath.
- Ferrari, L., Nota, L., Soresi, S., Blustein, D. L., Murphy, K. A., & Kenna, A. C. (2009). Constructions of work among adolescents in transition. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 17(1), 99-115. doi: 10.1177/1069072708325829.
- Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

- Flores, L. Y. (2009). Empowering life choices: Career counseling in the contexts of race and class. In N. C. Gysbers, M. J. Heppner & J. A. Johnston (Eds.), *Career counseling: Contexts, processes, and techniques* (3rd ed., pp. 49-74). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Flum, H. (2015). Career and identity construction in action: A relational view. In R. A. Young, J. F. Domene & L. Valach (Eds.), *Counseling and Action* (pp. 115-133). London, UK: Springer Verlag.
- Freedman, J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.
- Harris, K. (2002). The importance of developing a ‘culture of belief’ amongst counselling psychologists working with asylum seekers. *Counselling Psychology Review*, 17, 4-12.
- Hartung, P. J. (2013). Career as story: Making the narrative turn. In W. B. Walsh, M. L. Savickas & P. J. Hartung (Eds.), *Handbook of vocational psychology: Theory, research, and practice* (4th ed., pp. 33-52). New York: Routledge.
- Hutchinson, M., & Dorsett, P. (2012). What does the literature say about resilience in refugee people? Implications for practice. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 3(2), 55-78.
- Kelly, G. A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs*. New York: Norton.
- LaPointe, K. (2010). Narrating career, positioning identity: Career identity as a narrative practice. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77(1), 1-9. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2010.04.003.
- Leong, F. T., & Pearce, M. (2014). Indigenous models of career development and vocational psychology. In G. Arulmani, A. J. Bakshi, F. T. L. Leong & A. G. Watts (Eds.), *Handbook of career development: international perspectives* (pp. 67-79). New York: Springer.
- Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

- McAdams, D. P., & Olson, B. D. (2010). Personality development: Continuity and change over the life course. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *61*, 517-542. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100507.
- McIlveen, P. (2012). Extending the metaphor of narrative to dialogical narrator. In P. McIlveen & D. E. Schultheiss (Eds.), *Social constructionism in vocational psychology and career development* (pp. 59-76). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- McIlveen, P., & Patton, W. (2007). Narrative career counselling: Theory and exemplars of practice. *Australian Psychologist*, *42*(3), 226-235. doi: 10.1080/00050060701405592.
- McLeod, J. (1996). The emerging narrative approach to counselling and psychotherapy. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, *24*(2), 173-184. doi: 10.1080/03069889600760161.
- McMahon, M. (2007). Life story counselling: Producing new identities in career counselling. In J. G. Maree (Ed.), *Shaping the story: A guide to facilitating narrative career counselling* (pp. 62-71). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik Publishers.
- McMahon, M. (2014). New trends in theory development in career psychology. In G. Arulmani, A. J. Bakshi, F. T. L. Leong & A. G. Watts (Eds.), *Handbook of career development: International perspectives* (pp. 13-27). New York: Springer.
- McMahon, M. (2017). Creativity and constructivist career counselling. In M. McMahon (Ed.), *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches* (2nd ed., pp.222-232). Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge.
- McMahon, M., & Patton, W. (2002). Using qualitative assessment in career counselling. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *2*(1), 51-66. doi: 10.1023/A:1014283407496.

Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.



- McMahon, M., & Watson, M. (2011). *Career counselling and constructivism: Elaboration of constructs*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- McMahon, M., Watson, M., Chetty, C., & Hoelson, C. (2012). Examining process constructs of narrative career counselling: An exploratory case study. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 40(2), 127-141. doi: 10.1080/03069885.2011.646949.
- Monk, G., Winslade, J., Crocket, K., & Epston, D. (1997). *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Murray, M. (1997). A narrative approach to health psychology: Background and potential. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2(1), 9-20. doi: 10.1177/135910539700200102.
- Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 3–72.
- Parks, P. D. (1997). *Story telling as a method of instruction in theological training in a Middle East context* (Doctoral Dissertation). Oral Roberts University, OK, USA. Retrieved from ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing.
- Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation*. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Pellowski, A. (1990). *The world of storytelling*. New York: Wilson.
- Pierce, L. M., & Gibbons, M. M. (2012). An ever-changing meaning: A career constructivist application to working with african refugees. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, 51(1), 114.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press.
- Reid, H. (2015). *Introduction to career counselling and coaching*. UK: Sage.

Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

- Reid, H., & West, L. (2011). "Telling tales": Using narrative in career guidance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(2), 174-183. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2010.10.001.
- Reid, H., & West, L. (2016). Negotiating professional and personal biographies in a liquid world: Creating space for reflexive innovation in career counselling. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 44(5), 562-575. doi: 10.1080/03069885.2016.1145014.
- Richardson, M. S. (2012). A critique of career discourse practices. In P. McIlveen & D. E. Schultheiss (Eds.), *Social Constructionism in Vocational Psychology and Career Development* (pp. 87-104). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 21(2), 95-103. doi: 10.1037/h0045357.
- Savickas, M. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42-70). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Savickas, M. (2012). The 2012 Leona Tyler award address: Constructing careers-actors, agents, and authors. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 41(4), 648-662. doi: 10.1177/0011000012468339.
- Savickas, M. (2013). Career construction theory and practice. In R. W. Lent & S. D. Brown (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (2nd ed., pp. 147-183). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Singer, J. A. (2004). Narrative identity and meaning making across the adult lifespan: An introduction. *Journal of Personality*, 72(3), 437-460. doi: 10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00268.x.

Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

- Spangar, T. (2006). SocioDynamic career counselling: Constructivist practice of wisdom. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches* (pp. 137-149). New York, London: Routledge.
- Stead, G. (2004). Culture and career psychology: A social constructionist perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 64(3), 389-406. doi: 10.1016/j.jvb.2003.12.006.
- Stebleton, M. (2007). Career counseling with African immigrant college students: Theoretical approaches and implications for practice. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 55(4), 290-312.
- Stebleton, M. (2012). The meaning of work for black African immigrant adult college students. *Journal of Career Development*, 39(1), 50-75. doi: 10.1177/0894845309358888.
- Sultana, R. G., & Watts, A. G. (2008). Career guidance in the Middle East and North Africa. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 8(1), 19-34. doi: 10.1007/s10775-007-9133-5.
- UNHCR. (2015). *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2016*. Geneva, Switzerland: Division of International Protection United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- UNHCR. (2016). *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2017*. Geneva, Switzerland: Division of International Protection United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Watson, M. (2017). Career counselling theory, culture and constructivism. In M. McMahon (Ed.), *Career Counselling: Constructivist Approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 43-53). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- White, M. (2005). *Workshop notes by Michael White*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.

White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Young, R. A., Marshall, S. K., & Valach, L. (2007). Making career theories more culturally sensitive: Implications for counseling. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 56(1), 4-18.

*Please cite as: Abkhezr, P., & McMahon, M. (in press). Narrative career counselling for people with refugee backgrounds. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. doi: 10.1007/s10447-017-9285-z.*