A Narrative Approach to Multicultural Career Counseling

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Purpose of Presentation

- Give career and counselors a social systems approach for exploring in depth issues in career choices that include cultural expectations, environment, class, ethnicity and gender issues

- Create a means to organize information and ask personal and family related issues as an aid to the job seeking process
New Contexts

Digital Divide and the internet
Changing face of the interview
Loss of balance between work and family
Blending of home and workplace
Risk taking
Independence and entrepreneurs
Business reputation
New Contexts continued

* In and out economy - Actor model
* Organizational matrices and assignments
* Never ending job search - Walk on
* More due diligence / leader transparency
* Project driven work - Portfolio careers
* Creativity and imagination
Expediency of Narratives

*Storytelling leads to empowerment
*New actions are based upon stories
*Revising the story becomes the major building block
*Stages: revelation, deconstruction, reconstruction
Strategies

* Externalization-the person’s not the problem
* Deconstruction
* Unique outcomes
* Mapping the effects
Considering Multicultural Context

Past 35 years, dramatic shift multiracial, multiethnic and multiple language groups

Title VII and Civil Rights Act of 1964

Multiethnic and diversified groups remain worse off than white peers

Diminished employment opportunities are a significant source of stress
Cultural context in narrative counseling

How a narrative influences the career decision making process is often related to culturally specific factors that shape aspirations and a potential range of career choices.
Stressors for Immigrants and the Impoverished

- Biological stress
- Physical stress
- Psychological stress
- Family stress
- Social stress
- Cultural stress
Other Complexities

Younger family members access global information
Loss of filial piety
Desire for autonomy, self expression, and individually oriented achievement
Individualism versus collectivism
Career reconstruction
Non linear, cyclical career paths
Ten Considerations for Understanding Multicultural Influence

Level of acculturation, family values, cultural heritage as well as economic issues, histories of discrimination and unusual work opportunities can be incorporated into the career counseling process.
1. Cultural Identity

This can not be taken for granted in a multicolored world

What is the impact of assimilation?

Look at the questions posed to Barack Obama
2. Acculturation Modes

Different clients may be ashamed or proud of their culture; many will wish to remain separate from their own ethnic group while others will reject mainstream culture. And in more complex examples, some will wish to adopt the values of the new culture while maintaining a hold on other values from the indigenous culture.
3. Demographic Environment

It is valuable to understand the nature of the population in the area that the client resides and how representative it is of the client's culture. Information about typical career paths of people from different ethnic groups can also be useful.
4. Diversity within Cultural Groupings

It is also important that the counselor be sensitive to variations within a culture. For example, the broad categorization of "Latino/a" or "Hispanic" really needs to be broken down further into the cultural differences between South American, Central American, Iberian, Cuban, Caribbean, Mexican and other cultures. Middle Eastern ethnic groups share many similarities in culture and traditions. But they also have many differences including language (e.g. Arabic, Persian, Farsi, Iraqi, and Armenian) as well as differences in religion.
5. Legal Status

This is likely to be a sensitive topic for many immigrants. The legal status of a person and the family has important implications on career decision making. Legal services referrals may be appropriate in certain circumstances.
6. Language

Language is an important source of identity for people. A given dialect within a language may also be important; clients can express how a particular dialect further represents identity. Language that the client uses at home may contrast with that which is used at work or in school.

Recent demographic trends in the USA and the globalization of the economy have demanded multilanguage abilities in the workforce. While clients may have grown up in contexts that discouraged the use of their native language, current market forces are transforming multilingual abilities into added value.
Religious values play an important role in the career choices of many. In the USA, a Protestant work ethic drives the economy. This ethic is often seen as anti-women, anti-immigrant with limited multicultural applicability. People who follow a non mainstream religion may feel uncomfortable on the job. Jewish workers, for example, felt for years that they couldn’t ask for time off during the High Holy Days and Yom Kippur. Likewise, there continues to be a need for sensitivity to the religious values of many others like Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists for example.
The worldview of the family and culture regarding work must be addressed in the context of career decision making. Some families want the children to earn money and be independent. Others want them to achieve. Others want them to refrain from drawing attention to themselves. Attitudes about work can also be related to earnings. Families have attitudes about money, savings, and assets of friends, supportive loans from others, institutional loans, and the trustworthiness of financial institutions.
9. Rules in the Family System

Families may have different rules about the power and the influence of the extended family. Grandparents, aunts, cousins, and uncles may have a role regarding career selection and education that is different from that in other cultures. Confronting or disagreeing with parents can be seen as a sign of disrespect.
10. Gender Stereotypes

Most cultures have gender stereotypes regarding the roles that men and women play relative to work, educational experiences, and family responsibilities. Relationship status is also influenced by the culture and the family. The attitudes that partners have toward each other will often be influenced by the stereotypes that have been inculcated by the family and culture over a period of years.

Career counselors should be aware of the differential expectations regarding appropriateness of jobs for each gender. Counselors should also be knowledgeable of how partners or husbands and wives are able to accommodate to each others careers. A most interesting question is how a woman’s success affects the relationship. There are undoubtedly cultural differences in expectation about parenting roles. And the way pregnant women are viewed and treated will differ from culture to culture.
Rewriting life stories: Personal Statements and multicultural factors

Defining life stories, narrative career counseling (NCC) and personal statements

Life stories + NCC = Career stories

NCC=Uncover broader meanings in career experiences

Personal statements=Mission statement
Rewriting life stories: Key Questions

How can a personal statement be used in NCC?

How do factors of cultural diversity and family influence affect personal statements?

How can these factors be used to uncover broader meanings in personal statements and career goals?
Rewriting life stories: An example

Johnny

Knowing what you want and your constraints: Coming from poverty and pursuing medicine

Mapping out and growing into your story: Innovating solutions through medicine.
The Resume

A tool for narrative exploration in multicultural career counseling
Résumé Critique
Focus: Résumé; Product
Goals:
- Develop strong résumé for client job search
- Assist client in presenting strengths articulately
Counselor role: Critic, editor, consultant, educator, advisor
Outcome: A clear and powerful résumé

Résumé Therapy
Focus: Client; Process
Goals:
- Understand client’s background and barriers
- Increase client’s self-understanding and direction
- Facilitate client in addressing unresolved issues or current difficulties
- Prepare client for job search or transition
Counselor role: Therapist, facilitator, educator
A New Perspective: The Résumé as a Story

- Looking at language and organization as symptoms of career/personal problems
- Understanding the client’s story through chapters
- Facilitating the client to rewrite their story (or at least be aware of the story that is currently being told)
Résumé as a Diagnostic Tool:
Pt. 1: Symptoms in the Organization

- Change in locale of employers
- No job title change at same job
- Switch from for-profit to non-profit
- Blip in dominant career path
- Unaccounted time period
- “Kitchen Sink” resume
- Sudden demotion
Résumé as a Diagnostic Tool: Pt 2. Symptoms in the Writing

- Convoluted/indirect language
- Vague or missing objective/summary
- Vague or missing job titles
- Job descriptions vs. accomplishments
- Structure/focus of statements
- Past tense in current position
Sandra Simione’s Life & Work Résumé Symptoms

- Job Gap between 1999 and 2001
- Blip in Career Path / Change in Employer Type
- Change in Job Title
- Structure of Statements: Focus on helping clients instead of performing accounting duties
“After 10 years of doing accounting and payroll for a law firm and a multi-national retailer, I felt like I should be doing something more meaningful…Or at least do what I’ve been trained to do for a company that’s contributing something….a company that’s helping people who need help.”
“Well….this is probably more than you asked for but… in February of 1999 I got in a car accident and nearly lost my leg. It was a hit and run; I had to wait almost two hours in 20 degree weather for someone to come down the road and pull me out. Anyway, I was in rehab for six months and basically bed-ridden for six months after that. The law firm I was working at….let’s just say they gave me plenty of encouragement not to come back. And going to interviews with crutches and a noticeable limp didn’t bode too well. So I sort of felt like it was God telling me I had to do something different. Something important. So I listened to Him.”
“Altruism doesn’t pay the bills. I have two kids and a grandson so I went back to the corporate world. That’s just how life is, I guess. Some things you have to do. Some things you want to do.”
Desired Outcomes of the Process

- Greater self-understanding and self-confidence
- More consciousness of the relationship between personal and professional life
- Awareness of potential danger areas
- More prepared for interview
- Clearer career direction
- Assessment of skills and desired job activities
- Help received (or referral) for further counseling
Conclusion

Exploring cultural diversity and family influence in narratives allows for a deeper appreciation of the uniqueness of all clients and the cultures they came from and are now part of. Being aware of differential pressures on people and their responses to them add to the essential knowledge and awareness that all career counselors need to become increasingly culturally sensitive and effective.