

Narrative career counseling: My career story and pictorial narratives



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ABSTRACT

The present article addresses the questions of what changes during narrative-informed career interventions and what prompts client reflection. We interrogated two case studies that both used the interventions of *Pictorial Narratives* (Taylor & Santoro, 2016) and *My Career Story* (Savickas & Hartung, 2012). Being heard and validated were elements that prompted client change through increased reflexivity and agency. And, reflexivity and agency were fostered by encouraging clients to consider the contrast between problem and preferred pictorials and to connect the perspective from early recollections to possibilities in a reconstructed career narrative. This pair of contrasting symbols prompted deep sense-making and new realizations that primed purposeful actions in the real world to reconstruct career and life. In addition to addressing the questions posed by the organizers, this article describes how the *Pictorial Narrative* methods, when used in career counseling, can be integrated with the *My Career Story* workbook to enhance client reflection and agency. The two case examples illustrate this unique integration of constructionist career counseling interventions.

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1. Introduction

This article addresses, from the perspective of a counselor and a researcher, the questions posed by the organizers of this symposium about narrative-informed career interventions. To do so, we concentrated on two specific interventions - *Pictorial Narratives* (Taylor & Santoro, 2016) and *My Career Story Workbook* (Savickas & Hartung, 2012). Based on two case studies using these methods, we respond to the three questions posed by the organizers: "What changes during the intervention? What elements prompt these changes? How was reflexivity fostered and developed?" What changes is meaning. Being heard and validated are elements that prompt change through increased reflexivity and agency. And, reflexivity and agency are fostered by encouraging clients to consider the contrast between problem and preferred pictorials and connect the perspective from early recollections to possibilities in evolving career narratives.

When clients experience the sense of being heard and validated (Myers, 2000), they can reflect more deeply on their preferred ways of living and working. This reflexivity is essential for the client to make meaning during a counseling session. Through listening, counselors convey to the client that she or he is the expert on her or his own life (Bohart & Tallman, 1999). Accordingly, constructionist and narrative-informed career counseling approaches emphasize meaning-making through reflection.

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In addition to reflection, constructionist career counselors embrace the notion of enhancing agency, which refers to a sense of being able to take action (Walter & Peller, 1992). Constructionist counselors co-create with clients what seems out of control to them as in their control. It's not that the problem is solved, but that the problem is now described in a way that does not stifle the client's movement to take action (Walter & Peller, 1992).

Two constructionist interventions that have been found to be useful in fostering reflection and agency are *Pictorial Narratives* (Taylor & Santoro, 2016) and the *My Career Story Workbook* (Savickas & Hartung, 2012). In addition to addressing the questions posed by the organizers, this article describes how the Pictorial Narrative intervention, when used in career counseling, can be integrated with the MCS Workbook to produce enhanced client reflection and agency. Two case examples will be used to illustrate this unique integration of constructionist career counseling interventions.

1.1. Pictorial narratives

The Pictorial Narrative (Taylor & Santoro, 2016) intervention represents an innovative, versatile, and optimistic approach through which counselors can make contact with a client's inner frame of reference. The Pictorial Narrative process integrates experiential and narrative components as a way to maximize positive and meaningful career counseling experiences for both client and counselor. The experiential component consists of inviting the client to draw a picture of the Problem story, as it is being experienced in the here-and-now, as well as a drawing of the client's Preferred Outcome, which depicts how the client would be thinking, feeling, and behaving differently if the problem were to suddenly and miraculously disappear. A third picture may be drawn, the Baby Steps picture, which depicts one small step the client can take to move from the problem story toward the preferred outcome.

Pictorial Narratives are rooted in the postmodern constructionist assumption that emphasizes the quality of the dialogical engagement between the counselor and the client (Gergen, 2009), and the humanist/experiential assumption that drawings provide an uncensored view of a client's inner subjective experience (Naumberg, 1958, as cited in Ulman, 2001). Thus, both drawings and dialogue are integral to the meaning-making processes that occur when the counselor and client are engaged in the Pictorial Narrative process. Pictorial Narratives provide a way to maximize opportunities for client reflection by helping clients feel heard, understood and validated through a richly descriptive, collaborative therapeutic dialogue about what is meaningful to the client. The Pictorial Narrative intervention allows clients to tell their stories in a way to help them make sense of their life experiences, to integrate personal meanings, and to create movement toward their preferred view of self.

Pictorial Narratives can be viewed as a constructionist, narrative-informed approach to counseling in any modality, including career counseling. The intervention emphasizes the need to reflect on meaning by creating a therapeutic space in which clients can re-construct, or re-author, new life stories that resonate with their values, interests, and life themes (McAuliffe & Emmett, 2016). These stories encompass the client's past, present, and future life experiences. Pictorial Narratives, when used in career counseling, assume the constructionist assumption that career information is enhanced significantly when personal meanings become the central task of the counseling session (Peavy, 2010). By listening to the client's interpretations of the meanings attached to the client's drawn images, a richly descriptive, meaning-generating, collaborative dialogue emerges.

It is within this dialogue that *clients* will steer the direction of the counseling process. The sessions are client-centered, where the individuals lead and navigate their story to unfold and develop through the process of reflection. The clients make meaning of life experiences by reflecting on deeply-rooted, emotionally salient memories while attaching new meanings to old events. In addition, clients envision the self in ways that are congruent with their values, in ways they want to see themselves, and in ways in which they want others to see them. Clients experience the sense of being heard, listened to, and validated while feeling a sense of hope that new possibilities for change can occur.

It is within this dialogue that *counselors* can assume a therapeutic stance that is real, authentic and genuine by relinquishing the need to be expert. Also, the counselor will exhibit an abundance of curiosity (Anderson, 2007) about what it feels like to be in the client's shoes and appreciate that what emerges during the counseling conversation does not need to be verifiably true; rather, it needs to be meaningful and helpful to the client. The counselor establishes an emotionally safe, collaborative therapeutic environment in which moments of enduring change can occur. Throughout the narrative career counseling process, the counselor encourages client reflection through listening and dialogue: "Listening in dialogue is listening more to meanings than to words.. In true listening, we reach behind the words, see through them, to find the person who is being revealed. Listening is a search to find the treasure of the true person as revealed verbally and nonverbally" (Powell, 1986, p. 49). The reflexivity in the Pictorial Narrative intervention demands a "conscious and deliberate consideration of self, relationship building, reflective processes, [insight], imaginative delivery and establishing a safe environment" (Fox, 2011, p. 6). The Pictorial Narrative intervention is an experiential intervention. According to Fox, "reflection is a vehicle for manifesting experiential knowledge" (Fox, 2011, p. 40).

In sum, the Pictorial Narrative intervention serves as a springboard to open up the therapeutic conversation that allows counselors and clients to think in fresh ways about their lives and careers. The process creates a therapeutic "spaciousness" (Neimeyer, 2009) in which new meanings for old problems can be co-constructed between the client and counselor and in which new possibilities for a preferred future can emerge.

1.2. My career story

A second constructionist career counseling intervention is the *My Career Story* (MCS) Workbook (Savickas & Hartung, 2012), which utilizes life design theory (Savickas, 2011) to evoke reflection through narrative expression beginning with the client's occupational daydream through the client's life mottos. The MCS Workbook allows clients to formulate and articulate new life

narratives and possible selves, which are central tasks in Savickas' life design approach. By reflecting on a series of questions, the MCS helps the client to enact her or his own career story in terms of their vision of self, where in the world of work they would like to be, and how they will connect themselves to occupations that are appealing. The questions in the MCS ask the client to (1) identify heroes or heroines, or people they admired while they were growing up, and provide adjectives to describe these people; (2) indicate three favorite magazines or television shows and what they like about them; (3) describe their current favorite story, (4) state their favorite saying or motto they live by, and (5) report early recollections.

The following case examples illustrate how the integration of Pictorial Narratives and My Career Story can produce meaningful, relevant and pragmatic outcomes in narrative-informed career counseling approaches.

2. Case 1: Charles

2.1. Initial session

Charles was a 62-year-old male who presented for career counseling after a recent job loss in the print marketing industry. He requested job search help, hoping to find "meaningful" employment. During the initial session, rapport was established by talking with Charles about what he meant by "meaningful" employment, to which he responded he wanted a job in which he would find personal fulfillment. Charles described volunteering on a weekly basis at a local church in which he coordinated a food bank for homeless individuals. Charles stated that if he could do this job five days a week and get paid for it, he would be the "happiest man in the world." His volunteer work at the church gave him a great sense of satisfaction because, not only was he helping others, but he was also using his numerous organizational and managerial skills while working collaboratively with others to ensure that adequate amounts of food, beverages, and all other supplies were available.

2.2. Family background

A family history was obtained during the initial session. Charles had been married for 12 years to a woman who worked in the healthcare field, earning about \$50,000 per year. This was Charles' first marriage. Charles described himself as having a traditional gender-role belief system, explicitly stating that he felt he should be the primary financial provider for his family, and that his inability to do so contributed to his experience of feeling like a "failure." Charles and his wife had no children of their own, yet his wife had three adult children from her previous marriage, along with five grandchildren.

2.3. My career story

Charles completed the My Career Story Workbook with the counselor (JT) during the second session. Charles was quick to identify three people whom he admired, providing rich adjectives to describe them, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Charles' favorite movie was "The Escape," and described the plot as, "Stallone and Schwarzenegger team up together in a prison to plan an escape. They need to figure out where the holes are to escape. They are challenged by the warden and guards, but their cooperation with other prisoners keeps you hoping they find a way out."

Charles' favorite mottos were as follows: (a) "Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever quit!" as spoken by Winston Churchill, and (b) The most important thing God expects of us is to try," as spoken by a priest and friend of Charles.

The counselor (JT) inquired as to Charles' earliest recollection, to which he responded as follows: "*I remember going fishing with my brothers and my dad—we were on a boat on a lake. My father scolded me—it was very harsh—for standing up in the boat. He screamed at me, 'Quit rocking the boat! Never, ever stand up in the boat!'*"

As Charles recalled this memory, his affect changed—his voice became softer, his body slouched down further into the chair, and his eyes teared up. Charles' reply to the question of what he was feeling at that moment was "shame."

2.4. Pictorial narratives

Charles was invited by the counselor to participate in the Pictorial Narrative intervention, and was informed that this would not only help the counselor to feel what it would be like if she was in his shoes, but that it would likely help him reflect on his current problem as well as his preferred outcome. Charles agreed to participate and was provided with a set of colored pencils. The counselor's directions to Charles were, "*Draw a picture of your problem as it is being experienced currently, or a picture of the*

Table 1
Charles' role model descriptions.

George	Drew	Phil
Professional; classy; shook hands like a man; would look you in the eye; I like the way he treated people—equally and with respect. He was magnanimous, knew and lived his priorities and his job wasn't his life.	Magnanimous on all levels; friendly; articulate; professional; thorough; sincere; compassionate; credible; has integrity; classy; understanding; patient, and respectful.	Like a father—gave me the confidence that I was on a good path. A mentor. Professional; respectful; had a deep personal understanding; fun; reliable; good communicator and knew the business world.

problem that brought you to counseling. No art skills are needed—stick figures are perfectly acceptable. When you are finished with the drawing, give it a catchy title, as if it represented a best-selling novel or a blockbuster movie. Use whatever colors you would like. While you are drawing, I will sit here and catch up on a little reading." The minimization of the counselors presence while the client is drawing is important so that clients can experience a sense of freedom in drawing whatever they want without feeling judged or closely monitored. However, it is important that the counselor occasionally glance at the client and observe the client's level of engagement in the drawing task.

The Pictorial Narrative intervention involves inviting the client to draw a picture of the problem story, as well as a picture of the preferred outcome story. Of utmost importance in the Pictorial Narrative process is that it is the *client*, not the counselor, who interprets the meanings ascribed to the drawn images. This is congruent with postmodern constructionist therapeutic approaches that emphasize that the dialogical engagement between the client and the counselor should be focused on what is meaningful to the client. The therapeutic dialogue about the meanings of the drawings involves a tacking back and forth between narrative storytelling and emotional processing within a co-constructive dialogue that stimulates reflective meaning-making processes (Greenberg, 2012).

2.4.1. The problem picture

Fig. 1 represents Charles' Problem picture, which he titled, "The Big Hunt: Building a Rainbow." In this drawing, Charles portrayed himself trying to balance a very large and extremely heavy boulder over his head. The boulder represented "meaningful job preparation" along with various other responsibilities in his life that he was trying to balance (i.e., wife, bills, the house, etc.). Charles had no facial features in the Problem picture. Above him was an image of a mountain with steps going up the side of the mountain. The steps represented Charles' perceived obstacles to finding meaningful employment, such as age, experience, location, education, talent and salary. There were multi-colored raindrops falling down from the sky. When asked about what these meant, Charles' reply was, "No matter how beautiful a day may be, it always feels like it is raining." Although the top of the mountain was labeled, "Gets Job," the counselor noted that there was a rather large gap between the last step of the mountain and the top. When asked what this meant, Charles' response was, "Wow! That must have come from my subconscious!" Charles described never having reached the top of the mountain, although he has tried several times, only to find that he gets "knocked down" by some obstacle. There was a very small rainbow in the upper right corner of the drawing that Charles described as where he would be if he reached the top of the mountain.

The therapeutic dialogue about Charles' problem picture transitioned into discussion about his current family and his family-of-origin. Charles mentioned that he hated going to family functions, and described feeling "invisible." He stated, "I just sit there, on the couch, talking to no one and no one talking to me ... I don't even think my wife's kids know my name."

The dialogue about Charles' family-of-origin revealed Charles' description of his father as a "raging, abusive alcoholic," who ruled the family with an "iron fist." Punishment was frequent, harsh and often physical. Charles' father, who was a former marine, was also an athlete in his younger years and demanded that his sons not only participate, but also excel in athletics (i.e., football and wrestling). Charles described his mother as being "in the shadows" throughout most of his life, although he did indicate that she was the person to whom he would go to when he had emotional problems during his childhood. He described his relationships with his siblings as "distant."

The therapeutic dialogue during discussion of the problem picture became even more richly descriptive when Charles told stories of his childhood. He described feeling afraid of his father, who criticized him throughout most of his childhood and adolescence. Charles perceived that he was a "failure" in his father's eyes and that he could "never be good enough" because he did not have athletic abilities like his two older brothers, whom he referred to as the "apples of his father's eyes." Charles perceived that he was treated unfairly compared to his brothers.



Fig. 1. Charles' problem pictorial narrative.

After a few moments of silence, the counselor asked Charles the following questions, intentionally, so as to stimulate reflection and provide a rich description of how clients experience their problems cognitively, emotionally, and somatically. Asking how old the client feels in the problem picture may also provide clues as to the time in his or her life when the client became stuck in the problem. Note how the client's responses to these questions enhance the depth of the affective nature of the client's problem story:

JT: As you look at this picture, what is the dominant thought that comes to mind?

Charles: Five thumbs. Screw up. Disappointment. Not important.

JT: As you look at this picture, what is the dominant emotion that you feel?

Charles: Angry. Frustrated. Tired.

JT: Where in your body do you feel the problem?

Charles: [Pointing to his gut]: There's a constant churning in my lower abdomen. It's also in my head. Every night when I go to bed I have this spinning sensation in my head. I try to eliminate the spinning by turning everything over to God, which provides only temporary relief from the spinning.

JT: How old do you feel in this picture?

Charles: I feel 50 (this was the age he was shortly after getting married).

2.4.2. The preferred outcome picture

Charles was then asked to draw picture #2, the Preferred Outcome. Borrowing from deShazer's (1985) Miracle Question, the counselor's directions to the client were as follows: *"Tonight, while you are asleep, suppose a miracle has occurred—so that when you awake in the morning, your problem has suddenly disappeared! Draw a picture of what this would look like for you. Before you begin to draw this picture, there are a couple of important caveats: In this picture, the change cannot occur in any of the external circumstances that are associated with the problem. Rather, the change needs to occur within yourself."*

The Preferred Outcome picture represents a visual representation of the client's goals for counseling. The change depicted in the Preferred Outcome picture frequently depicts an exception to when the problem story was not so dominant in the client's life (White & Epston, 1990). Thus, Picture 2 depicts the client when she or he has actually experienced some or all aspects of the Preferred Outcome picture during an earlier time of life.

Charles' Preferred Outcome picture (see Fig. 2) was entitled, "No Hands! Riding the Waves!" Charles described himself in this image as riding a surfboard over large waves of water. He had a smiling face and his arms were extended upward—an empowering position which is frequently found in clients' Preferred Outcome pictures. Charles' raised arms signaled that he was riding the waves with no hands. Under the waves were the same stressors that were depicted in the Problem picture (i.e., house, wife, bills, health, etc.) and the same perceived barriers, including age, people, opinions, and "Dad." He described that in the Preferred Outcome picture, he had the ability to surf over the waves, despite the numerous stressors and obstacles, and that he was effortlessly surfing, hands free, not allowing himself to fall off, or sit down, on the surfboard. The predominant thought in Charles' Preferred Outcome picture was, "I'm free, empowered, and successful." The predominant emotion was "contentment." The location of the feeling within his body was "all over and warm", and his perceived age was 62, his current chronological age.

2.4.3. Juxtaposition

The juxtaposition of the Problem and Preferred Outcome pictures (see Fig. 3) is perhaps one of the most important process issues in the Pictorial Narrative intervention. A fundamental assumption upon which the Pictorial Narrative intervention is based is that in order to revise an underlying meaning system, the client must experience a different knowledge that is sharply inconsistent with the key features of the problem story (Ecker et al., 2012). Further, it is extremely important that the images in



Fig. 2. Charles' preferred outcome pictorial narrative.

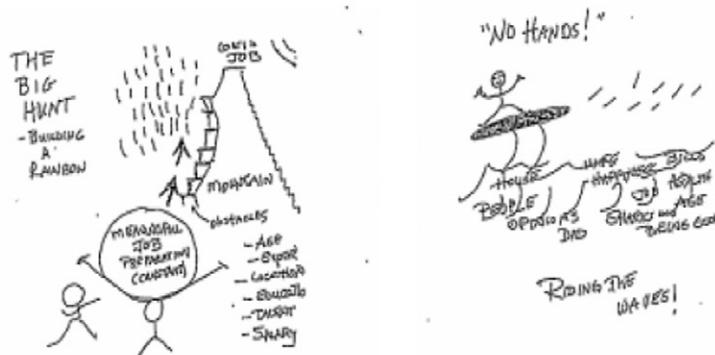


Fig. 3. Juxtaposition of Charles' problem and preferred outcome pictorial narratives.

both the Problem and the Preferred Outcome pictures feel vividly real to the client (Ecker et al., 2012), representing two competing realities that both cannot be simultaneously true. Reflecting on two completely contradictory yet equally valid realities, side by side, can be a powerful experience. Moreover, recent research from neuroscience suggests that it may be *the* experience required in order for new learnings to be integrated into old meaning systems to diminish the emotional reactivity associated with old learnings (Ecker et al., 2012; Nadel & Moskowitz, 1997).

The therapeutic dialogue during the juxtaposition experience was richly descriptive, as the client was asked to identify how the two images were qualitatively different from each other. Charles described himself in the Preferred Outcome as being someone who "knows and lives his priorities—where his job is not his life." He contrasted this with his depiction of self in the Problem picture, in which he was having difficulty standing and balancing the enormous boulder. Charles described his fear of rocking the boat, which was a powerful metaphor describing the implicit rules in his family-of-origin, consisting of 'don't rock the boat,' and 'don't get Dad mad.' The therapeutic dialogue during the juxtaposition experience enhanced client reflexivity by facilitating the emergence of themes, which consisted, in part, of Charles' feelings of invisibility, unimportance, and failure. The dialogue also fostered his understanding that his commitment to help others who are struggling helped him to feel important.

2.5. Integration

During the third session, the counselor indicated that she wanted to read Charles' success formula derived from information he provided from the Pictorial Narratives intervention as well as from My Career Story. Charles made a point of explicitly telling the counselor that he did not believe that he possessed any of the adjectives he used to describe his heroes, but that "perhaps, some day in the future, like in my Preferred Outcome picture, I'll have those characteristics." The counselor placed the pictures of the Problem and the Preferred Outcome stories in front of him, side by side, and read to him, out loud, carefully punctuating emotionally salient words, and observed his reactions:

I am/I am becoming a person who is professional, classy, and magnanimous on all levels, sincere, compassionate, and a man of integrity. I know what my priorities are and live according to my values. Not only do I respect myself, but I am respected by others. I have a deep personal understanding of who I am. I treat others with respect, and I am confident that I am traveling along a good path. (Pause ... observed Charles nod his head in agreement with what was just read to him).

I like being in places where I can team up with others who are reliable and can work with them cooperatively, have fun, and serve as a mentor to help others find holes through which to find a way out of their pain. (Pause ... observed Charles nod his head affirmatively, smiling).

I will be most happy and successful when I am able to stand up, not be afraid to rock the boat during times of challenge, and serve as a respected mentor in places where people work collaboratively so that I can offer others hope that they, too, can reach the top of their own mountains. (Pause ... observed that Charles began to tear up).

The most important advice I can give myself is to remember that God will give me the strength to try to achieve my goals, but will not achieve them for me, and that I will never, ever, ever quit trying. (Pause ... observed Charles wiping his tears, and stating, "Yes—that's me. That's definitely me").

2.5.1. Success formula

By the end of the third session, Charles was confident that finding employment in a non-profit service organization truly represented what he valued. He was provided with various resources (i.e., names of people with whom to network, lists of organizations, books, internet sites, etc.). He committed to preparing his resume and beginning the networking and job-search process.

The counselor asked Charles if he would be willing to do experiential homework by being aware of and juxtaposing his bodily sensations whenever he perceived that he was riding the waves no-handed, as well as when he perceived he was at the bottom of the mountain. He was also asked to read his Success Formula while looking at his two pictures every night before he turned off the light to go to sleep. He agreed to do this homework.

Four months later, Charles informed the counselor that he had secured a position as an assistant director at a local non-profit organization.

3. Case 2: John

John was a 26-year-old male who graduated from college with a Bachelor's degree in Business Economics/International Business and a minor in Spanish. He was living with his parents and worked at a large department store. John presented for career counseling with "uncertainty" over which direction to take his career. John's articulation of his career-related problem was vague and ambiguous, making it difficult for the counselor (JT) to gain a fuller understanding of his inner subjective experience of the problem as well as the meaning behind his articulation of the problem. However, he was explicit in describing his ideal job, which consisted of setting up a non-profit organization in a Spanish-speaking country in which needed services would be provided for the people who lived there.

3.1. My career story

John used the My Career Story Workbook with the counselor (JT) during the second career counseling session. He successfully named and described three role models (heroes/heroines). In addition, he stated that he "imitated [his role models] ... observing them with excitement." John explained the values of each of the three role models using adjectives to most appropriately depict them, which can be found in [Table 2](#).

John stated that his favorite movie was "Forest Gump." He reported that he appreciated Forest Gump because "he is a person that seems genuine, not motivated by wealth, power [and] social standing. He wants to make people happy." The client described the plot with Forest joining the army to make his mother proud. Forest's army friend, Bubba, was severely injured during battle and Forest could not save Bubba's life, yet he kept his promise about running Bubba's shrimp business and sharing the profits with Bubba's family. According to John, running the shrimp business and sharing the profits were congruent with his desire to run his own company so he could "give back" to the people who had supported him, such as his parents and his grandfather, as well as helping others in need.

John reported that his favorite motto was "men and women for others." The client further explained that this quote is a common Jesuit saying which resonated within him. John elaborated that the teaching of St. Ignatius was an integral component of his life. Similar to the actions of his grandfather, the ideals of Forest Gump, and the leadership of St. Ignatius, John desired to use his "talents and skills for the good of others, not just for [my] own good."

After discussing John's favorite motto, the counselor elicited John's earliest recollection. He recalled that as a child, he went on vacation with his parents, grandparents, and other family members to a small island which was John's favorite sanctuary. John described several fond memories—"cousins, aunts, uncles, family ... being on a deserted island having fun on the beach, bonding with everyone." To John, this was his "special place" where he dreamed of buying a future house. When the counselor asked the client to title his recollection, John titled it, "My Sanctuary, My Special Place with Family." Again, John discussed the significant theme of the value of spending time with family and the desire to support and provide for his family and others in need or close to him.

John desired a working environment where he could serve as an exemplary role model, always interacting with and giving to others to ensure their well-being. He described himself as sticking to the tasks at hand to live for "men and women for others." John would like to work where he can feel "super human" and as though he is a "good person."

3.2. Pictorial narratives

John agreed to participate in the Pictorial Narrative intervention. As John was drawing his Problem picture, the counselor subtly observed for cues of his engagement in the process, noting that he took time to stop and think before drawing, and that he chose his colors very carefully. John appeared quite engaged in the drawing process. When he was finished with his drawing entitled, "Where Do I Find the Motivation?", he interpreted the meanings of the images he had drawn. [Fig. 4](#) represents John's problem picture.

John's portrayal of the problem included an image of himself standing outside of a "structure ... or a barn." Inside the barn was a very large pile of hay, and buried deep within the hay was a blue diamond. John wanted to get his blue diamond, but lacked the motivation to do so. There was no ground in the picture, which compromised the structure of the barn. The counselor pointed out that John used the word 'structure' often and asked him what that meant to him. He described liking and needing structure—that lack of structure in his life keeps him "in limbo" or "unable to move forward."

Table 2

John's role model descriptions.

Professional baseball players: Jim Thome, Omar Visquel	Grandpa	Steve Prefontaine
Superhuman; good people; professional; exemplary—how to act when competing	Always giving; makes sure family is well; takes care of them; buys things; interacts with; makes family laugh; good and giving; been through a lot and came from nothing	Different by being exceptional; stuck to it; do anything to become better to win; motivation—to prove people wrong



Fig. 4. John's problem pictorial narrative.

The predominant emotion that John experienced in the Problem picture was "fear." Upon hearing this response, the counselor spontaneously engaged John into a richly descriptive dialogue that brought the "fear" to life and allowed John to look at the fear from a different angle. Note how the dialogue quickly transitioned into externalization of the problem, a common technique used in narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990):

JT: What is the predominant emotion you feel when looking at your Problem picture?

John: Fear.

JT: Imagine that Fear is sitting in the chair over there. Fear is sitting right there, right in that chair, just looking at you. Can you describe what it looks like?

John: It's sharp and jagged. And it is very large, larger than normal fear. So what I need to do is smooth out the jagged edges because I get caught on these jagged edges and just hang there, in limbo.

JT: So, it's the jagged edges of fear that hook you—that keep you in limbo—that prevent you from moving forward?

John: Yes.

JT: What does fear whisper in your ear? What lies does Fear tell you about yourself?

John: It whispers, 'Everything will be alright. Even if you don't do any work toward your goal, everything will be alright.'

JT: Is there something you would like to say to Fear?

John: Yes, I do need to have some conversations with Fear and say things like, 'Fear, it's time for me to make you smaller. You are too big in my life right now and I'm tired of you controlling me.'

JT: Hmm... so you want to make Fear smaller... by smoothing out the jagged edges?

John: Yes!

JT: Is there a special tool that you could use to make Fear smaller?

John: I need an ink pen to smooth out the jagged edges... a pen to use so I can start to plan my journey toward my goal.

JT: What useful purpose does staying outside the barn serve for you?

John: If I stay outside the barn and don't seek my blue diamond, then I won't arrive at my goal. So, in this way, I will not fail.

JT: So, by staying outside of the barn, you don't have to worry about failing, and you can stay in limbo. What else in your life keeps you in limbo?

John: I work at the store and live at home with my mom and dad...

JT: How would things be different for you if you weren't living at home?

John: I would be more independent, and I would need to be motivated to work toward my goal. Working toward my goal includes moving out of my parents' home—It's part of becoming an adult.



Fig. 5. John's preferred outcome pictorial narrative.

This dialogue significantly helped the counselor more fully understand John's internal subjective experience of his problem. Not only did the counselor come to realize that part of his problem was lack of motivation, but also that the core emotion of fear was driving his behavior and keeping him immobilized. The implicit construct that was attached to the fear was, 'Moving on with my life ... moving out of my parents' home and pursuing my own journey ... means that I must become an adult, and that is scary for me.'

3.1.1. The preferred outcome

John's Preferred Outcome picture (see Fig. 5) entitled, "Working for the Betterment of Others," depicted "John's Organization," a building that sits atop a grassy hill. Approaching John's organization are two people—John and another person whom John is helping in some way. They are working together, collaboratively carrying their values over the hill toward the building.

JT: What do these images mean on the suitcase?

John: It's like a vehicle to help others. It will create a greater sense of family in the world. It reflects Christianity and my religious values, and me and the person I'm helping are working together. And, it's a bright, sunny day.

We noted that the Preferred Outcome picture was grounded—John and John's organization were firmly rooted in a solid ground.

3.1.2. Juxtaposition

The juxtaposition of the Problem and the Preferred Outcome pictures (see Fig. 6) occurred, in which both pictures were placed side by side. Typically, the dialogue during the juxtaposition experience is richly descriptive, with both counselor and client contrasting the qualitative differences between the two pictures. However, John's juxtaposition experience was quite different.

As the counselor and John looked at the juxtaposed pictures, what emerged was not a descriptive dialogue but rather an extended period of silence, characterized by a sense of calmness and peacefulness. This particular juxtaposition experience was particularly powerful for both the counselor and the client, as there simply were no words to describe what was occurring in the counseling room at that particular moment in time. Suddenly, after several minutes of silence, John exclaimed, "Oh my! Look at this!

[pointing to John's Organization' in the Preferred Outcome picture] ... This is it! It's my favorite sanctuary ... where I can bond with special people in my life ... it's my blue diamond!

John's juxtaposition experience and the peaceful silence that accompanied it, along with the realization that John found his blue diamond, captured the essence and spirit of the Pictorial Narrative process by creating an inter-subjective space between client and counselor in which both are empathically attuned to each other's internal subjective experiences. The level of relational depth that occurred was so powerful, yet simple and elegant—such that words to describe it would diminish the experience.

3.1.3. Baby steps picture

The Baby Steps picture represents an image of a very small behavior the client can and would be willing to take to move toward the Preferred Outcome. The counselor can ask the client to draw the Baby Steps picture in the following way:

"For the third picture, draw one very, very small baby step that you would be willing to take—perhaps within the next week—to move away from your problem story toward your preferred story". The Baby Steps picture is a way for the client to articulate, through visual means, an action or a new behavior that she or he can do that is congruent with the client's goal for counseling. It serves an important purpose in reinforcing integration of new meanings into old meanings.

Baby Steps pictures include simple behaviors, like having a cup of tea, going for a walk, or taking a bubble bath. These are examples of very small, yet important behaviors in which the client can engage to help solidify her or his preferred view of self. It is important that the counselor ascertain whether or not the Baby Step picture may be so broad that the client would not know how to go about engaging in this novel behavior. An effective way to make this determination is to simply ask the client, "How will



Fig. 6. Juxtaposition of John's problem and preferred outcome pictorial narratives.

Strengthening my Relationship with God



Fig. 7. John's baby-step pictorial narrative.

you go about doing this?" If the client's answer is, "I don't know," then the baby step picture will need to be broken down into smaller steps. Fig. 7 represents John's Baby Step picture.

The image in John's Baby Step picture is of himself kneeling over his bed and praying to God. On one side of the bed is the Bible and on the other side of the bed is a cross. John's baby step was a commitment to strengthen his relationship with God. He stated he will pray for the strength to be "motivated, just for this one day."

From that point, the focus of the career counseling was on ways that John could create structure in his life. Suggestions included making detailed lists with target dates; writing a future autobiography; forming a "team"—a group of people with whom he can work to form his Organization. At the time, John's team consisted of himself and God.

The career counselor and John spent over two hours talking, drawing the pictures, listening to stories. John said that he felt he received much guidance and direction from the two times he met with the counselor. The counselor's sense was that he walked away with something that he didn't have when he first came to career counseling: hope.

4. Conclusion

Using narrative career interventions provide a safe dialogue for the client to first deconstruct and then reconstruct the personal story (Savickas, 2012). The client will gain a stronger sense of self and vocational identity through the process of re-storying the career narrative. Using both the Pictorial Narratives and the My Career Story as two forms of narrative career interventions, the client constructs deeper meaning and new intentions through reflecting on the contrast between the problem and preferred pictorial and the connection between early recollections and current situation. These contrasting symbols prompt deep sense-making and new realizations that are a long step to purposeful actions in the real world to reconstruct career and life.

The narrative career interventions discussed can be used with diverse clients and counseling settings. Career counselors may use the Pictorial Narratives and the My Career Story Workbook in individual counseling, group counseling, and couples counseling, as well as in career and clinical supervision. In the future, research is needed to establish the clinical utility in other counseling modalities.

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