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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Re-authoring career narratives: exploring identity in contemporary careers practice

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ABSTRACT

Narrative Career Therapy (NCT) is recognised in this paper as having relevance for career practitioners who are working to create meaning for their clients in complex work life situations. Re-authoring Career Narratives is described as a practice that involves principles of NCT and these principles contribute to the exploration of agentive development. Re-authoring Career Narratives is demonstrated to support clients to navigate the reality that career learning is lifelong and evolving. We propose that a NCT requires practitioners to place emphasis on the contexts in which discourse is developed which can facilitate greater awareness of a client's career identity and capacity to navigate uncertainty. We use a narrative research approach to explore how re-authoring practices assist clients to make career decisions. We recommend that re-authoring practices assist clients to reconstruct their stories and to gain insight into career identity as an evolving contextual phenomenon responsive to changing career and work landscapes.

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Introduction

Increasingly, careers practitioners are working with clients who are in the process of developing new and evolving career identities in broad general life contexts. With the onset of COVID-19, it is evident that many people are rethinking their career opportunities, some describing this as an opportunity to think differently about the meaning of work in their lives (McKinsey and Company, 2021). For young people who are at the start of their working lives, it becomes imperative to develop a career narrative alongside employability skills and capabilities that enable them to enter the workforce with the resilience necessary to “fit with” the evolving work cultures while recognising recognise the clusters of skills that underlie strengths (see the Foundation for Young Australians, 2017). No matter where clients are in their career journey, increasingly, careers practitioners need to find ways to work with their clients that are responsive to changing needs while staying informed of the socio-economic-political factors that impact a client's sense of meaning and choice in relation to work-life decision-making. It has been recognised in the career guidance field for some time that career issues cannot be reduced to a purely vocational domain; it is necessary to consider the broader context of work and life as these evolve (for example, see Chen, 2001). Career identity is most usefully conceived as time-bound, constructed and reconstructed across the lifespan (Savickas, 2015). Career construction theory may have varied meanings. For example, Savickas (2005) emphasises how

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construction theory provides a basis to explore how human development is driven by adaptation to a social environment through goal-driven behaviour. The emergence of career construction and postmodern theories for comprehending models of self-making, career constructing and life designing are well established in the career guidance field (McMahon & Watson, 2011; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Shefer, 2018) and like all postmodern perspectives incorporate a spectrum of interpretation. A distinguishing feature of varied terminology is the way a counsellor is positioned as a practitioner and how this informs their interaction with their clients. Savickas and Porfeli (2012) describe the role of a practitioner as uncovering the client's goal orientation. Shefer (2018) positions the role of a Narrative Career Therapist as working in partnership with a client to explore what is problematic for the client and then assisting the client to develop a less "problem saturated" story.

While Narrative Career Approaches broadly share a social constructivist foundation and/or adopt the notion of career narrative, they do not explicitly adopt the therapeutic practice orientation that is integral to Narrative Therapy, as distinguished by Shefer (2018). For these reasons we have called our approach a "Narrative Therapy informed approach" (NTIA). For example, Shefer (2018) who discussed the application of White's (2011) narrative therapy principles called their approach "Narrative Career Therapy" to indicate that the relationship is therapeutic and applicable in Career-related contexts. In this paper, we describe the relevance of re-authoring career narratives when working with trainee career counsellors as one that is informed by therapeutic principles. We do not provide an in-depth account of the therapeutic value of narrative therapy in this paper; rather, we discuss the relevance of a dominant technique that had application in a particular context. We describe what we call in this paper an NTIA to Careers Practice as an approach that applies re-authoring practices to the exploration of self-making and agentive development and to support clients to navigate the reality that career learning is lifelong and evolving. We propose that an NTIA, with an emphasis on meaning and the discursive contexts in which meaning is shaped, can facilitate the development of a client's identity as a capable and resourceful career decision-maker and, as a result, provide them with a greater sense of agency in relation to an evolving career identity over the lifespan.

As described below, in this paper, we draw on a narrative research approach with a constructivist theoretical framework to illustrate the value of the process of the Narrative Therapy concept. We draw on re-authoring practices (originally conceptualised by White, 2007) to facilitate the development of a flexible and responsive career identity.

This paper draws upon narrative analysis to illustrate the value of re-authoring practices in career guidance practice. We present co-constructed case examples that are based on the reflective practice of trainee career counsellors and subject leaders teaching postgraduate narrative careers counselling subject. These were generated through a study that formed part of a broader research project that investigated how trainee Career counsellors and faculty collaborate and experience an online counselling training process. Trainee career practitioners, such as the trainee careers counsellor in this study, increasingly require a range of flexible models that connect theory, practice and ongoing developments in the field of careers and techniques to effectively assist clients to navigate these changing realities (Lauder & Neary, 2020). In the present study, we explore how trainee careers counsellors who are alumni of the postgraduate narrative careers counselling subject regard the value of an NTIA. The case examples presented in this paper demonstrate how an NTIA considers the context in which the career story is told and, in doing so, gives the individual agency over their story. We also show how drawing on re-authoring principles enables the client to reconstruct their story in personally meaningful ways.

Narrative career counselling and narrative therapy

Narrative career counselling has been recognised as offering a richness to careers practitioners' work because of the opportunity it provides to assist clients to further develop their understanding of their work-life context (Brott, 2001; McMahon, 2018; Reid, 2005; Sharf, 2010). Narrative Careers approaches emphasise the centrality of the person and their "story" in career development processes, as

opposed to the role of the “expert” careers practitioner. Drawing on a constructivist approach, the orientation is to the career decision-maker as an interpretative and active subject. This approach has proven amenable to integration within contemporary careers counselling practice (McIlveen & Patton, 2007; McMahon & Watson, 2012; Patton & McMahon, 2006; Savickas, 1991, 2005). Some narrative careers counsellors have recommended certain approaches to demonstrate the application of the constructivist approach (McIlveen & Patton, 2007).

Narrative Therapy (NT), as a therapeutic approach was originally conceptualised by White (1999, 2002), is a post-structuralist approach that emphasises the social, cultural and political contexts in which meaning is constructed (Denborough, 2019). “NT practitioners pursue the aim of individuals and sometimes groups to re-author conversation to enable them to see new avenues for action” (Hutto & Gallagher, 2017). Due to the influence of the contexts in which a story is told, a person may overlook personal values, strengths, competencies or dreams about themselves. Winslade (2005) reminds us that socially constructed discourses have a positioning effect on individuals and groups; the language used in a narrative may create processes of social constraint, as well as social production. Winslade (2005, 2007, 2013) argues that at times we need to “disidentify with stories” that are proving problematic in our lives and reposition stories about our lives and careers. Vahidii et al. (2022) found that discourse in career development practice can have an impact on the experience of marginalised social groups, because dominant discourses about careers may overly represent certain groups of people and give less agency to others. Careers practitioners need to be aware of the presence of discourses that constrain a person in their life by listening for language and assumed meanings to engage in a process of deconstruction-reconstruction of the person’s stories as they unfold as a discursive construct. This process is called re-authoring in NTIA. An NTIA draws on these understandings and offers specialised processes, such as re-authoring, that enable the client to differentiate a preferred narrative from past storied constructions that are problem-oriented rather than aspirational.

NTIA approach to careers practice

An NTIA has a focus on the role of questioning as a technique to bring to light both dilemmas (or potential obstacles) and opportunities (as strengths) in a person’s story as they navigate career decision-making choices. Such an approach draws upon a range of techniques to promote a personal understanding of how we all live and make meaning through a story, recognising that narratives happen within broader social contexts in which meaning is made and value is assigned. These discursive contexts, from familial through to the socio-political, can have material effects on a person’s identity since they can shape dominant or problematic narratives that limit a person’s sense of their future options and constrain their sense of themselves as a career decision-maker. For example, a person’s understanding of “work-life” as a broad category is impacted by discourses related to gender, age, class, ability, race, culture, socio-economic status and broader socio-political events and circumstances. A person’s story provides “discursive clues” about how that person understands their career-work opportunities, the nature of work-career and themselves as a career decision-maker informed by those broader discursive contexts. Listening to these discursive clues in relation to career-work choices under consideration enables the careers practitioner to hear the personal meaning in the story shared. On this basis, a person can be encouraged to explore the impact of the assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs these meanings express, to identify dominant and/or problematic stories and to differentiate alternative or preferred narratives (re-constructed stories) in their career decision-making process.

In these ways, the person engages in a process of re-authoring: re-constructively exploring constructed stories and formulating re-constructed stories, mapping the influence of discursive contexts on their sense of agency and personal identities. Re-authoring involves exploring meaning-making through uncovering “counterplots” or forming new storylines or identifying overlooked themes that form the basis of alternative stories. Alternative stories are powerful in contradicting the negative

identity conclusions that may have emerged in a particular context that are no longer relevant or helpful to a person (Carey & Russell, 2004; Denborough, 2019; White, 2011). As part of the re-authoring process, when alternative narratives are identified, the person is then positioned within their own life to choose, with agency, their preferred narratives and potentially a narrative that is aspirational rather than problem-focused.

Re-authoring principles of landscape of action and landscape of identity

The premise of re-authoring as developed by White (2007) is that the counsellor partners in a conversation with a person to identify their past, present and future aspirations (White, 2007). The story is discovered by the person. The term “re-authoring” describes this process of uncovering a less problem-focused story. This story is not offered by the therapist but is rather discovered by the person. The person’s re-authoring of their life story involves choosing the lens through which they would prefer to view a problem associated with career or work life.

NT makes a distinction between Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity questioning that, together, make sense of past and present experiences in relation to potential future choices and complement the re-authoring process. Both modes of questioning emphasise the person’s agentic orientation in relation to enacting a preferred narrative (Landscape of Action) and expressing preferred personal values and meaning (Landscape of Identity) through those actions (Carey & Russell, 2004). Landscape of Action questioning emphasises readiness and preparation for action while, as a complement, Landscape of Identity questioning explores values and meaning as expressions of action choices (Carey & Russell, 2004). Both forms of questioning invite the client to think about alternative storylines, with a beginning, middle and end, that express the identified alternative or preferred narrative. Alternative plots are important in re-authoring conversations because they invite people to co-create unique outcomes for themselves based on reclaimed or recovered meaning and values. For example, a practitioner may ask a Landscape of Action question about how certain actions may prepare an individual to take the next steps towards a decision in their “career construction” (Denborough, 2019). Landscape of Identity questions invite the person to reflect on the character of various personal and relationship qualities which contribute to and are experienced through identified actions (White, 1991). For example, the practitioner may ask, “What does this action say about the kind of person you are?”

White (1999) emphasises that the goal of narrative therapy is to focus on person-specified areas of “self-actualisation” and “personal agency” as the foundations from which to take “responsible action” in one’s life. In this way, Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity lines of enquiry work together in the re-construction process as foundational to “re-authoring”.

Through the combination of Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity questioning, the person can experience themselves positioned within their identified alternative narrative which enhances their sense of agency as the (re)-author of their career and work-life choices. Landscape of Action questioning supports a person’s sense of their capacity to act, while Landscape of Identity questioning increases their sense of resourcefulness as a career-decision maker navigating meaningful work and life choices.

About this study

This study is part of a broader research project, led by SM, that investigated learning design, student–faculty collaboration and learning experiences of trainee career counsellors and faculty in an online postgraduate career counselling subject. The subject was accredited through the Career Industry Council of Australia, which forms a benchmark for the curriculum. This study explores the nexus between the theory and practice of an NTIA using alumni reflections, as well as the teaching experiences of SM and KG. Drawing on alumni reflections and reflections by the teaching team, two case examples were developed by SM and KG to demonstrate Landscape of

Action and Landscape of Identity questioning. As suggested previously, these two lines of enquiry are central to the process of re-authoring, a key component of the NTIA. Our research question was "How can a narrative therapy informed approach enhance career counselling practitioners' capacity to facilitate meaningful career-based conversations that enable persons' sense of career-decision agency and identity?"

Author positionality

SM was the coordinator of a new postgraduate subject, located within a School of Education, that was part of an institutional curriculum renewal strategy at a large metropolitan university. SM also led a related research project investigating learning design and participants' perceptions and experiences in this career counselling subject. KG was working as an industry expert in the field and a senior lecturer in the subject. Both SM and KG facilitated an NTIA in the subject and conducted the present study, including the reflections which contribute to the findings presented below. At the time of conducting these reflections, SM was engaged in applying the techniques of Narrative Therapy as part of a Masters programme. SM shared reflection on aspects of the approach adopted to practise with faculty within the Masters programme, who commented on techniques. KG was experienced in applying a breadth of NTIA and had previously completed training in Narrative Therapy. JR was a co-investigator on the broader research project and played the role of an external observer in the present study, co-conceptualising the overall research approach, interviewing the alumni, analysing the alumni interview data used in the present study and contributing to the writing of this paper.

Data generation

Following ethics approval (23310), SM engaged in journalling during and after her facilitation of narrative counselling workshops that used an NTIA in the postgraduate online narrative counselling subject. She recorded themes representing her own experiences and recorded her notes of student feedback about their experiences of participating in the subject. KG reviewed this journalling and highlighted significant aspects of the journal reflections that had application to the way trainee career counsellors described their experiences of using an NTIA in their practice. These reflections also drew on SM's and KG's experiences of facilitating NTIA workshops over several years. This form of reflection on practice is aligned with post-structuralist ideas and narrative-informed principles of practice (Lainson et al., 2019).

Data were also collected from four alumni from the narrative counselling subject through an opt-in interview. The alumni included one male and three females, all in their mid-to late-30s and working as Career Practitioners in professional settings such as schools, universities or community-based contexts. Participants were invited by email to participate in semi-structured video interviews with JR about their perceptions and experiences of participating in an online narrative counselling process on that subject. JR managed the recruitment of participants as she was not part of the teaching team, and this provided an opportunity for trainee career counsellors to provide feedback more freely if they chose to without concern about how this would be received by members of the teaching team. Using a narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008, 2015) which aimed to elicit expansive responses in a conversational mode, interviews sought reflections related to learning experiences in the subject.

Data analysis

A narrative analytic approach was used in this study. Narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008, 2015) involves principles of collecting stories and exploration of themes across the stories. In this study the collection of stories involved co-creation of stories as two Case examples from two participants

– SM and KG – based on their experiences and engagement with the research data (McMahon, 2018). Co-creation is a form of creating insight through and by people who experienced a particular event (Patton & McMahon, 2006). The authors reflect on their own experiences to help maintain a sense of the essence of participants' sentiments. In this study, we went through a process of reconstruction to illuminate key outcomes or narratives that were based on journal reflections and analysis of the alumni data obtained from opt-in interviews.

Analysis of SM journal

SM and KG engaged in sharing thoughts related to the analysis of the journaling through the practice of a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019, 2–21). In this phase, SM and KG used deductive analysis to identify re-authoring principles as these were constructed through the journaling.

Alumni narratives

SM and KG analysed the themes across de-identified transcripts of interviews with alumni to look for themes in trainee career counsellors' experiences as they related to the NTIA. Having been involved in the facilitation of the workshops, they used a co-research process, engaging in a reflective process to identify examples of dominant themes associated with experiences of learning. They identified re-authoring processes as a key theme in these interviews.

Co-creation of case examples using journal and trainee counsellor's narratives

The case examples were co-created by SM and KG. They build on the analysis of SM's journal and alumni interviews and are also drawn from the experiences of SM and KG as facilitators of the NTIA workshops with trainee career counsellors. There were a range of themes in the dataset beyond re-authoring; however, this theme emerged as something the trainee career counsellors described as having relevance and they also gained an understanding discussed how the concepts of landscape of identity and action had relevance to their experiences. The workshops were not part of the research but were part of the discursive context through which the data were drawn. There were a range of themes in the dataset beyond re-authoring; however, re-authoring was the dominant theme. Case examples are representative of this dominant theme. They emphasise re-authoring principles and Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity questioning that can elicit re-authoring. SM and KG used the themes in the journal along with the data collected from trainee counsellors to co-create the case examples.

Findings and discussion

The case examples

The two case examples presented below reflect vignettes of two client/counsellor pairs to illustrate how an NTIA applies in practice. Case examples 1 and 2 involve a counsellor named "Dena" and a client named "Charlie" (fictional names). In Case example, 1 the counsellor takes a Landscape of Landscape questioning approach while Case e 2 highlights Landscape of Identity questioning.

Case example 1: landscape of action is a structuralist questioning style that aims to identify actions in terms of "next steps" and "outcomes" as the basis for career decision-making

Dena: Hi, Charlie. How can I help you today?

Charlie: Well, I'm not sure how to move from my current role into a new career's practitioner role within my school. I'm just juggling a lot of things right now at home with a new baby and it seems like there are many problems associated with going back to work for me.

Dena: What would you need to do, Charlie, to be able to return to work?

- Charlie: My partner really needs me to be earning money and I have one child at home who has several learning challenges. I can't really think about how to start the conversation with my principal about returning to work next month. I... I'm just really feeling overwhelmed.
- Dena: Can you tell me a bit more about what you did before you took parental leave?
- Charlie: Well, I was a lead teacher in English and then I also started working with the final-year trainee career counsellors to plan their applications for university entry, and I really liked that work.

Critical reflections: thinly described presenting the story

In the case scenario, the counsellor starts by asking an action question, then moves to focus on the presenting issue of returning to work, without "thickening" the story in terms of deepening understanding of the multiple roles that Charlie plays in their life and how this is impacting their decision-making process, including how they are feeling. This may lead the counsellor to focus on looking for a *practical* solution to ready Charlie to return to work. The counsellor here asks the person about their previous role and what their experience was like when they were in the workplace prior to maternity leave. It is evident that the questioning at this point is focused on one storyline when Charlie may have a story: for example, about conflicting values, being a new parent on the one hand and, on the other hand, working. There may in fact be multiple storylines they are navigating in relation to the current situation/dilemma they are navigating. When the counsellor remains curious about this the person can identify for themselves what the key issue or story is for them at this time. When orientated to Landscape of Action questions, the counsellor can be in danger of foreclosing further exploration that may hinder the efficacy of their interventions.

The example below provides more room for a Landscape of Identity form of questioning.

Case example 2: landscape of identity questions that relate to who are you becoming?

- Dena: Thanks for coming back, Charlie. What would you like to explore during our session?
- Charlie: Well, I've been giving some thought to a dilemma I'm facing about work and what options I have regarding returning to work after taking maternity leave. I think I just need some more time at home. I really feel I need time away to start to have something of my own outside of work and to earn some money, which will give me more independence.
- Dena: Tell me more about what you think is at the heart of this dilemma for you.
- Charlie: I have a son who I've been home-schooling, and I have a 12-month-old daughter. I've been able to get some support from one day a week childcare and I've now started to have my son also attend a school for two days a week and he seems to be doing well. I just have spent some time away from work and now I don't know if I feel I can go back to doing what I did before. I've started studying a postgraduate careers education course over the past six months and it's been enjoyable to interact with some of the other trainee career counsellors.
- Dena: Okay, so let me check with you if I have understood the dilemma. How would you know that you had found the right mix between study, work and home? What would be ok with you and what would not be ok for you in that mix?
- Charlie: In terms of my children, I'd feel okay about my children being supported by others and confident they were in a safe place. I know I've spent time away from work and now I think that's where my dilemma is about what work looks like for me. I don't think I can do what I did before. I've managed to do some study, so that has given me confidence to do something else.
- Dena: Wow, in the middle of all you have going on, you've managed to do some study! Who or what motivated you to take up careers counselling as a practice? I guess I would like to understand what is important to you in keeping up the study.
- Charlie: I know the careers person at my old school, and they mentored me a bit before I took maternity leave. They were in the role of careers counsellor at our school where I worked.
- Dena: What ideas do you think that mentor had about you and this work that may have influenced their encouragement about this work potentially for you?

- Charlie: I feel confident I could talk to my mentor because she really gave me the idea about this role, and I know from my study that I have a lot to offer in this field. I could think of a way to talk with her and explore this further. One thing that she helped me understand was that in careers practice it's important to ensure you work closely with the classroom teacher to embed career learning into the curriculum and this helps the trainee career counsellors come to the counsellor for further information.
- Dena: Ok, it sounds like there is some more information you could explore here with your mentor that might help clarify the kind of work you might pursue. In terms of your dilemma about what work-life balance means to you; I know many women struggle with this question. How are you finding other people in your life to address or resolve this dilemma? What do you find helpful and not helpful in how you hear this being discussed? Let's get some more detail about what that might look like for you.
- Charlie: I work part time and would like to do just careers work. I want to let go of the teaching because there's so much preparation and after-school time, and that wouldn't give me the balance I need to take care of personal things right now.
- Dena: Tell me how this scenario reflects what is most important to you in your career and for family life at this stage as you embark on this next phase of your working life?

Critical reflections: thickening the storyline through re-authoring

In this second case example, we see how the questions focus on re-authoring a narrative of career and life that is not simply resolved by a decision but one that reflects values and meanings in an evolving context, including life stage. Establishing a deeper sense of how a person has come to a particular decision about the study, in this case by enquiring about outside influences (*What or who motivated you to take up career counselling as a practice?*) can reveal ongoing resources and avenues for support. Our counsellor pays close attention to the discourse by asking questions that enable the person to identify what is at the heart of the story and to explore the nuances of the dilemma that may emerge consequently. Our counsellor explores Landscape of Identity by being curious about what is meaningful for Charlie and where Charlie's agency is positioned in their discourse. In these ways, the counsellor works to enable the person to see themselves as resourced as a career and life decision-maker, as distinct from just enacting a specific career decision.

The thematic data and how this contributed to the above cases

By analysing the alumni transcripts, we found that the key theme presented by trainee careers counsellors after participation in workshops practising the NTIA was that the careers counsellor's intention moves from a focus on solutions about an imminent career decision to helping people find their own, possibly multiple, solutions informed by values and meaning. In this way, the trainee careers counsellors reflected re-authoring principles in their responses in themes that related to the counsellor working with the person to find their own meaning associated with a career life choice. Trainee career counsellors (who were the participants in this study) discussed the importance of adopting a curious "not knowing" stance and paying close attention to the language of the person in NTIA rather than following a structured form of questioning where the counsellor is focused on a particular decision-making outcome. The representative trainee career counsellor quote below is typical of shifts in trainee career counsellors' understandings and of re-authoring principles:

Narrative technique may liberate professional identity by shifting the onus from career counsellor to have all the knowledge and embodied expertise; this may be an alternative to the "dominant story of what career counselling is" I learnt by watching other trainee career counsellors who did not give the person space to tell their story".
(Sample response for trainee career counsellor)

In the example above, we see the role of the identity of a trainee career counsellor also shifts from the "expert with knowledge" to a more facilitative one in creating a space for the person to tell their story. The career counsellor, therefore, sees their intention move from solution-focused to helping

people *know* their story so that solutions can emerge or become more apparent in a re-constructed narrative that reflects what is meaningful and valuable to them. In practice, this means the career counsellor doesn't necessarily follow a particular or predetermined line of questioning related to the construction of a career and life plan. Rather, the careers practitioner is attuned to the person's language, follows the person and ensures the person is given the space to explore how their context shapes their career-life decisions. In this way, the person is engaged in a naturally unfolding deconstructive-reconstructive process. The practitioner refrains from taking on the role of "cheerleader" for what may be a foreclosed decision or solution which can shut down the person's process of exploration.

Through the Case examples we sought to demonstrate this shift by highlighting both Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity questioning as ways that embody the stance of curiosity and not-knowing for both the counsellor and client. As shown above, the shift in focus to Landscape of Identity creates possibilities for the client to experience a greater sense of agency when appreciating their career dilemma in a greater context of meaning, values and possibilities. As a result, they may re-author their current career dilemma; for example, as one of "self-actualising" certain values or meanings. In Case Example 2, Charlie identifies "balance" as being important. The counsellor's next question provides Charlie the opportunity to expand on what is most important to them currently paving the way for a re-authoring of their current "returning to work" dilemma.

Conclusion

Our narrative analysis of student reflections on their learning, combined with reflections on running narrative counselling workshops, enabled us to recognise the unique application of re-authoring principles in career guidance practice. Fundamentally, having an opportunity to tell our story to others and to have it heard is an important part of an NTIA, as is having an awareness of how discourse is context-specific. Providing people who are exploring their career life decisions with an opportunity to tell different stories about themselves opens the possibility for re-authoring career narratives aligned with preferred and hoped-for identities. Employing both Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity questioning potentially supports the person's sense of agency as a capable and resourceful career decision-maker. Aligning oneself with one's preferred narrative serves the client in relation to their current career/study/work-life dilemma and into the future.

Of course, as career educators (facilitators of a career development programme – SM and KG) we cannot be sure how trainee careers counsellors will integrate these theories and approaches into future practice or if they will make connections to other theory and practice orientations that support the NTIA. However, the current research provides insight into the way an NTIA may help shift careers practitioner graduates' sense of their role and enhance their intentions to work in ways that foster personal agency in the career decision-making process and to give recognition to how discourse is contextual.

An NTIA has relevance in careers and employment contexts to help people explore contextual factors, including socio-political impacts, on career decisions and to bring to the fore individual meanings and values that, together, empower the client to develop a stronger sense of agency as a career decision-maker. As some forms of work and the idea of "career" become more complex, for example, in online spaces, people need helpful frameworks and the capacity to develop a way to articulate what is meaningful for them in their working lives. "As a therapy, retelling narratives enables people to create new meanings to get rid of disabling stories harmful to their happiness" (Ntinda, 2019). Careers counsellors and employment specialists with the capacity to work with people to enable them to curiously reconstruct their experiences and to help their clients gain insight into their values and capacity for career decision-making are well equipped for contemporary practice.

Recommendations and limitations

This paper has sought to describe and demonstrate the relevancy of an NTIA to career practice. Further research into each of the NTIA processes identified is warranted. For example, Denborough (2019), White (1991) and Winslade (2005, 2007, 2013) have described how one of many distinguishing features of Narrative therapy is that the concept of Landscape of Identity can be utilised to help people situate their story among “shared histories” (Denborough 2019; White, 1991; Winslade, 2005, 2007, 2013). The value of connecting with shared histories is that individuals or groups who have experienced marginalisation, “may find meaning and identity through shared histories” (Liu & László, 2007). This can promote an experience of inclusion in the community and opportunity for social learning. By joining a “chorus of voices” (Riessman, 2008), a person can re-author their story finding agency by situating themselves in a shared story that may not be a dominant discourse. This approach offers rich possibilities for addressing issues of diversity, inclusivity and social justice in careers practice. Further targeted research into the integration of the NTIA would be a valuable exploration, with a particular focus on how shared histories could be applied in career guidance.

Lauder and Neary (2020) discuss the importance of career professionals integrating a theoretical body of knowledge that is specific to the profession to strengthen practitioners’ capacity for reflexivity. We recommend a collation of data from a broader sample of learning contexts to explore how the application of NTIA applies within learning and teaching contexts to gain greater insight into the value of re-authoring practices as a teaching and learning resource for career practitioners. This may provide greater insight in understanding how the practice engages diverse learners in life stories and/or life histories together by fostering reflective practice that supports professional development.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, [SM]. The data are not publicly available due to [restrictions e.g. their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants].

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