

My career chapter as a tool for reflective practice

Peter McIlveen · Wendy Patton

Received: 18 July 2009 / Accepted: 13 July 2010 / Published online: 16 October 2010
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010

Abstract The career assessment and counselling procedure *My Career Chapter* is presented as a tool for reflexive self-awareness within career counsellors. To demonstrate application of the procedure as a method of self-supervision, this paper presents a study in which the participant studies himself. Results indicate a reflexive consciousness for the career counsellor that extends his self-awareness as a professional into his personal, non-professional life. Implications are presented with a focus upon the scope of self-report in qualitative research and collegial supervision.

Résumé. “My Career Chapter” comme outil pour une pratique réflexive. La technique d'évaluation et outil de conseil *My Career Chapter* est présenté comme un outil de conscience de soi réflexive chez les conseillers en orientation. Afin de démontrer l'application de cette procédure en tant que méthode d'auto-supervision, cet article présente une étude dans laquelle le participant s'étudie lui-même. Les résultats indiquent une conscience réflexive du conseiller en orientation qui étend sa conscience de lui-même en tant que professionnel à sa vie personnelle et non-professionnelle. Les implications sont présentées en se centrant sur la portée de ces récits personnels en recherche qualitative et dans le cadre d'une pratique de l'intervention.

Zusammenfassung. Mein Laufbahn Kapitel als eine Methode für reflexive Praxis. Das Laufbahn Mess- und Beratungsverfahren *Mein Laufbahn Kapitel* wird als eine Methode zur reflexiven Selbstklarheit für Laufbahnberater präsentiert. Um die Anwendung des Verfahrens zu demonstrieren, präsentiert diese Arbeit eine

P. McIlveen (✉)

Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD 4350, Australia
e-mail: mcilveen@usq.edu.au

W. Patton

Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, QLD 4059, Australia
e-mail: w.patton@qut.edu.au

Studie, in welcher der Teilnehmer sich selber untersucht. Die Resultate deuten auf ein reflexives Bewusstsein für den Laufbahnberater hin, welches seine Selbstwahrnehmung als eine Fachperson in das persönliche, private Leben ausdehnt. Implikationen werden präsentiert mit einem Fokus auf die Möglichkeit von Selbstberichten in qualitativer Forschung und kollegialer Supervision.

Resumen. Mi Capítulo Profesional como Herramienta para la Práctica Reflexiva. *Mi Capítulo Profesional* se presenta como un instrumento de diagnóstico y orientación para la carrera basado en el auto-conocimiento reflexivo por parte de los propios orientadores. Para demostrar la aplicación del procedimiento como método de auto-supervisión, este artículo presenta un estudio en el que el/la participante se estudia a sí mismo/a. Los resultados indican una conciencia reflexiva para el orientador que amplía su auto-conocimiento como profesional a otros aspectos personales y no profesionales de su vida. Por último, se presentan las implicaciones centradas en el alcance del auto-informe para la investigación cualitativa y la supervisión colegiada.

Keywords Self-supervision · Reflexivity · Autoethnography

Introduction

Supervision in clinical counselling practice has a long history with various schools of thought; however the supervision of career counselling practitioners has received only limited attention in the counselling literature (McMahon, 2003; McMahon & Patton, 2000). Beyond the classical supervision dyad—mentor and protégé, master and apprentice, or supervisor and employee—self-supervision, as a means of reflective practice in counselling, has for some decades been considered a viable means of self-directed professional learning and gaining perspective on practice (e.g., Dennin & Ellis, 2003; Lowe, 2002; Morrissette, 2001; Ward & House, 1998). Notwithstanding recent scholarship in the field of career counselling (e.g., Bronson, 2000; McMahon, 2004; McMahon & Patton, 2002, 2006), self-supervision by career counsellors has not featured significantly in the career development literature. In this paper, we contribute to the scholarship by demonstrating a method that generates objective and subjective self-awareness, by observing a career counsellor use a career assessment and counselling procedure, *My Career Chapter* (McIlveen, 2006), on himself and for himself, as an act of self-supervision.

We conceive of self-supervision as a form of reflective practice (see Schön, 1983) and as a set of complex processes requiring substantively more than just objectified reflection upon oneself as a practitioner and activities performed in that role. We are influenced by Aron's (2000) relational, psychodynamic differentiation of self-reflection and self-reflexivity:

Self-reflection ordinarily connotes a cognitive process in which one thinks about oneself with some distance, as if from the outside, that is, as if examining oneself as an object of thought. ...by way of contrast [self-

reflexivity], includes the dialectical process of experiencing oneself as a subject as well as of reflecting on oneself as an object. It is not, therefore, exclusively an intellectual observational function, but an experiential and affective function as well. (p. 668)

In his treatise, William James (James 1890/1952) outlined his view of the consciousness of self in terms of the empirical self, the *me*: the known, knowable, describable self. Aron's (2000) approach draws upon James's distinction between notions of *I* and *me*: extending inclusively from *I* as subject-as-knower and *me* as subject-as-known, to *I* as self-as-subject and *me* as self-as-object. This distinguishes subjective self-awareness (as awareness of here-and-now psychological experiencing) and objective self-awareness (as awareness of oneself observed at a psychological distance, as if as an "other").

Reflexive self-awareness is both an intellectual and emotional process; involves conscious and unconscious mentation; draws on symbolic, iconic, and enactive representations; involves the mediation of the self-as-subject with the self-as-object; the *I* and the *me*; the verbal and the bodily selves; the other-as-subject and the other-as-object. It is a conceptualization that necessarily draws together the intrapsychic and the intersubjective. It is not static, firmly acquired knowledge, but rather a process that occurs in internal conversation among multiple selves as well as in external dialogue with another, who must be viewed as both a subject and an object. (Aron, 2000, p. 684)

The challenge we address in this paper is how to construct a method of self-supervision which facilitates reflexivity in career counselling practice subjectively and objectively. To do so, conceptually, we present a model which operationalises the *I* and *me* dimensions of self-reflexivity.

In this paper we use the systems theory framework of career (STF, Patton & McMahon, 2006) to underpin facilitation of a career counsellor's awareness of self-as-knower (i.e., *I*) and subject-as-known (i.e., *me*). According to the STF, career is a construction of multiple proximal (intrapersonal and interpersonal) and distal (cultural and societal) *influences* which recursively interact with one another. The STF specifies that through the process of *story* a person may develop a narrative understanding of his/her career which is inclusive of the various influences upon his/her career. Thus, an individual may construct meanings pertaining to himself/herself from the perspectives taken from a distal influence or a proximal influence identified in the STF. From the perspective of a proximal influence, for example, he/she may know him/herself as a particular type of person (e.g., a Realistic person in terms of Holland's RIASEC typology). Alternatively, he or she may know of him/herself from the perspective of a distal influence, such as being one of the many unemployed as a result of the recent economic downturn.

Beyond the career concerns of the individual, as understood from the many perspectives possible within the STF, in this paper we extend its application to reflective practice and self-supervision, with regard to facilitating self-reflexivity. The STF has been presented as a broad conceptual aid for the supervision of career counsellors (McMahon & Patton, 2006). We purport that a career counsellor can

understand him/herself as a coherent compilation of empirical selves, or *me(s)*, through the multiple personal perspectives based upon the influences identified in the STF. By taking the perspective of a proximal personal position (e.g., a trait, a relationship) or by taking the perspective of a distal position (e.g., being part of community, cultural mores), a counsellor can more clearly observe his/her *me(s)* as the dimensions of a multifaceted counsellor-in-context. We assert that generating dialogue with oneself as an *other* among these multiple (proximal and distal) perspectives is a potential vehicle for enhancing self-reflexivity. Further, we suggest that this self-reflexivity can be borne out pragmatically in exercises which bring to awareness the multiplicity of self seen from the perspectives of influences in the STF. To demonstrate a model for practitioners, we now describe an example of an autobiographical narrative process which generates reflexivity by facilitating autobiographical writing based upon the various influences in the STF.

The current study

The current study drew upon the notion of self-reflection in context of experiential career development learning and training for career counsellors (Patton & McMahon, 2006) by using My Career Chapter (McIlveen, 2006). My Career Chapter is based upon the theoretical tenets of the Theory of Dialogical Self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993), which presents a contemporary advancement of James's *I* and *me* propositions, and the STF (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Based on career counsellors' reactions to training in the application of My Career Chapter procedure with clients (McIlveen, 2007a), it was postulated that the procedure could also be used as a tool for reflective-practice by career counsellors. Accordingly, we firstly aimed to demonstrate a career counsellor's self-application of My Career Chapter in order to generate reflexivity as part of self-supervision, and secondly, to further extend application of the STF to counsellor professional development.

Method

Research design

This study was informed by the research method *autoethnography* (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The study did not follow the conventions of autoethnographic research that is typically unstructured in its data collection process and inclusive of various types of data. This study made use of semi-structured tools for self-assessment and reflection. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method which facilitates the researcher studying himself or herself operating in a moment or experience of interest, and as a member of a particular ethnographic group. For example, McIlveen (2007b) studied himself as a scientist-practitioner psychologist exploring the personal and philosophical roots of his research. Similarly, du Preez (2008) used autoethnography to study the influence of his cultural and ethnic heritage upon his research into counselling. In the present study, the participant studied himself as a career counsellor examining himself in the process of

completing a self-reflective career assessment and counselling procedure—that is: studying himself engaging in a psychological procedure specific to his profession (i.e., career assessment). As the analytic autobiographer, the participant captured the experience of using My Career Chapter as a tool for facilitating his self-awareness. Of course, there are limitations to self-report as evidence in qualitative research as “people do not have a clear window into their inner life”; and reflection changes the experience (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139).

That caveat notwithstanding, a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005) was used to conduct the study and report the results. Accordingly, there was no assumption of truth in the traditional positivist sense. The truth, in this case, was meaningful and pragmatic to the primary participant in the study. Interpretations of his experience in terms of theory represent our secondary construction of his experience. As such, we openly sought the transformative capacity of reflection because it was assumed that it would lead to enhanced awareness in (a) the career counsellor’s personal understanding of his career life and (b) his ability to use the career assessment and counselling procedure in professional practice (and research).

Participants

The primary participant in the study was the first author (McIlveen) who investigated himself as a career counsellor. He is also a qualified psychologist registered in the state of Queensland, Australia. Psychologists in Australia must undertake continuing professional development. Supervision is also considered necessary for practice and this research explores one approach to self-supervision. His primary work role included the provision of career counselling and assessment services. With regard to demographic details that impacted his career life and his self-reflective interpretation of the data, he was aged in his mid-30s, married, and a father of two children. He was employed as a manager of a career service at a university and was completing research for a doctoral degree. This study was part of the doctoral research.

The principles of autoethnographic research require satisfaction of the criterion of *complete member researcher* (Anderson, 2006). This notion dictates that the participant should be replete with the conditions of the subject of enquiry so as to assure representativeness of that specific psychosocial group. Accordingly, in terms of the aforementioned criterion, the participant was a member of the following groups: scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and professional career counsellor; and one who needed to engage in supervision and self-supervision as a matter of reflective practice and continuing professional development. In addition to the primary participant, a career counsellor/State registered psychologist was engaged in the secondary phase of the application of My Career Chapter, which entailed a conjoint interpretive process.

Sources of data

My Career Chapter (McIlveen, 2006) was originally designed and evaluated as a qualitative career assessment and counselling procedure for use with counselling clients (McIlveen, Ford, & Dun, 2005; McIlveen, Patton, & Hoare, 2008). The user,

ordinarily a client, writes a career-related autobiographical “manuscript” comprised of paragraphs of text related to each influence identified in the STF. Using a sentence-completion technique, each paragraph contains a past, present, and future sentence stem for each career influence. The user also completes sentence stems describing the emotional valence and impact of an influence by circling appropriate descriptors. Thus, the main body of the My Career Chapter manuscript potentially consists 28 paragraphs comprising 5 sentences each—*potentially* because it is not compulsory to complete all sentence stems. In the case of the influence “Age” identified in the STF, for example, the user would complete the following sentences:

When I was younger

My age allows me to

By the time I reach retirement I want

I mostly feel very positive/positive/indifferent/negative/very negative in relation to my age because

My age has a very positive/positive/neutral/negative/very negative impact upon my careerlife because

In concluding the My Career Chapter manuscript, the author writes a further set of paragraphs (consisting of five sentence stems) pertaining to his/her strengths, obstacles, and the future.

In addition to completing sentence stems and paragraphs based upon the STF influences, the user participates in activities drawn from other principles of the theory of dialogical self (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). For example, the user engages in a process of dialogue with himself/herself across time. This is operationalised by the user reading a draft of his/her manuscript aloud to an imagined version of him/herself 5 years earlier. Having heard the manuscript, the imagined younger user then writes comments about the manuscript and the careerlife of the user. In this way, the user engages with himself/herself dialogically through the text and through hearing his/her own voice aloud. The final manuscript is then read aloud by a second party, usually a counsellor, so that the user can hear his/her story again, but in the voice of another person. Joint interpretation of the manuscript ensues as per any interpretive process in career counselling.

The process of the study entailed the participant completing My Career Chapter as an act of self-observation and reflection. For this study, the participant’s writing of My Career Chapter took approximately 2 h; which was consistent with the time taken by other career counsellors who undertook the same training (McIlveen, 2007a). Users may take more time if they so choose, as there is no strict timeline on its completion. Apart from the actual writing necessary for the completion of the procedure, the participant wrote reflective notes on the pages of the booklet. Over the days subsequent to completing the procedure, the author continued to note any thoughts on the booklet. Having worked through the booklet, the participant then sought the support of a career counsellor (the second participant) with whom to go through the process of reading his My Career Chapter aloud. As per the instructions, the second participant read the primary participant’s My Career Chapter aloud whilst the primary participant listened and affectively engaged in the experience of another person stating his autobiographical story. The reflective process began

shortly after completing My Career Chapter and continued for 2 weeks, and it was given structure through the following process.

Reflecting on My Career Influences (McMahon & Patton, 2006). The self-reflection exercise Reflecting on My Career Influences is a learning and debriefing process for career counselling training procedures, whereby participants of a training program reflect upon their own career development and the application of the systems theory framework to their own lives. Given that My Career Chapter was designed using similar theoretical tenets, the structured self-reflection process was adapted to organise the participant's self-reflective response to completing My Career Chapter. This exercise includes questions specific to the experiences pertaining to personal and professional dimensions, and the responses were the primary source of data for this study.

The questions comprising Reflecting on My Career Influences were clustered around constructivist notions of *connectedness*, *reflection*, *meaning-making*, *learning*, and *agency* with each being explored by various questions of a personal and professional nature. According to McMahon and Patton (2006), connectedness implies a counsellor's relationship to his or her own personal life story, relationship to his or her clients in context of his or her phenomenal world, and clarity on the systems of influences which inherently affect a counsellor and his/her practices. For example, the participant responded to the question: *What have you come to understand about your own career story by completing My Career Chapter?* The process of reflection relates to the creation of a psychological environment in which the client can feel hopeful and explore the meaning of the past, present and future. For example, the participant responded to the question: *What was it like for you to have a space where you could take time to reflect on your career story written in My Career Chapter?* Meaning-making relates to the co-construction of understanding between counsellor and client. For example, the participant responded to: *What new or different understandings do you have about yourself as a result of completing My Career Chapter?* The process of learning underpins a client's storying toward lifelong development, and the participant responded to the question: *By completing My Career Chapter, what have you learned about the role of the career counsellor and the role of the client?* Agency pertains to the engendering capacity for action within the client, and the participant responded to the question: *What steps may you take in your own life as result of completing My Career Chapter?*

Data analysis

Text written on the My Career Chapter booklet and recollections of it being read aloud were contemplated by the participant for meaningfulness by using the Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise as the basis for his reflections. The text on in the booklet and the notes written in response to the exercise were analysed in a manner consistent with the interpretative phenomenological analysis research method (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The notes were read and re-read in order to determine their meaningfulness for the participant. Initial points of interest were highlighted with a coloured pen and brought together as meaningful clusters under the higher-level themes of *connectedness*, *reflection*, *meaning-making*, *learning*, and *agency*.

Results

The participant's responses to the questions of the Reflecting on My Career Influences process are summarised according to their higher-level themes.

Connectedness

With regard to connectedness, as a theme explored through the Reflecting Upon My Career Influences, there is scope for the participant to consider the relationship between a his understanding of his personal life story and his clients' experiences of the systems of influence upon their careers. Firstly, the participant expressed surprise that his work ethic, values, and morals were evidently important to him, but that he had never given consideration to their role in his work as a psychologist. For him, the meaning of work ethic was entwined with gender because of his holding his own father in high esteem as a dedicated worker: "This was evident in my writing that being a male should be related to being a role model" for his children, particularly in regard to the importance of working hard and achieving career goals in life. This value position should be given careful consideration when working with clients, as it may inadvertently influence his understanding of clients' making sense of their own world-of-work and, therefore, influence the process of counselling assessment and intervention.

He also expressed some degree of concern for clients who would complete the procedure with regard to the amount of time required and the physical effort involved in writing such a large piece of work. He wrote:

I was surprised by the length of time taken to complete the procedure and wondered whether its duration would diminish clients' capacity or willingness to engage with it as a homework exercise. Secondly, completing the procedure required me to actually ponder over issues: Completing the sentence-stems was not a rapid succession of trite responses; they were, rather, considered projections of psychological import.

Similar concerns with the amount of time and effort required were raised in a study in which counsellors were trained in the use of My Career Chapter (McIlveen, 2007). In his second comment the participant was (again) expressing surprise at the depth of psychological consideration required for the procedure's completion. Having experienced his own life being storied through the process, he was forced to consider that his clients too would not necessarily write simple, trite responses, but would engage rather deeply with the process of self-exploration.

Reflection

The participant again reflected upon work ethic, but added how this was related to his roles models: "It was useful because I had not really put my work ethic into perspective, and seeing the connection to roles models and my father was instructive." Consistent with the finding in connectedness, the participant indicated how his reflection would impact his future practice: that, in recognizing the

psychological and physical effort required, he “would take more time to explain the procedure to clients...,” and “...place less pressure on clients to get it done and give them more scope to take additional time.”

Meaning-making

The participant expressed feelings of new perspectives with regard to theory. On this occasion, instead of thinking through theory for clients, he was thinking of himself through the theory and of the theory through himself: “I have always looked at the [STF] diagram from a professional perspective and considered it with respect to theory. For the first time I looked at it from my perspective. This was very different.” There was a profound contemplative dimension to this revelation that further deepened the sense of meaning he drew from the exercise. Instead of simply administering My Career Chapter in an objectified manner, as if it were just another assessment tool, completing it for himself and then contemplating the experience of that process, enabled him to experientially understand the notion of influences recursively effecting one another, as specified in the systems theory framework. Moreover, writing an autobiographical manuscript enable him to experience the notion of story as it is defined in the systems theory framework. In response to the reflective question “What were the strategies or process that facilitated the generation of new meaning?” he wrote “I think it is the reflective process and being induced to actually construct a story and the read it.”

Learning

The participant observed that the process was psychologically complex and suggested that My Career Chapter should be used within a “strong” counselling relationship, “Otherwise the procedure could be seen by clients as... an administrative act, rather than a learning process.” The participant also expressed the importance of him taking time out to consider his own career, rather than thinking of his clients’ careers. This was evidence of the participant taking alternative perspectives on himself and having dialogue with himself according to those different perspectives. This was experience was induced by the dialogue between his current (present-time) self and his imagined, younger self who provided initial comments on the story written in the booklet. This was also reinforced in the dialogue with the counsellor in the process of reading aloud the manuscript.

Agency

The participant’s psychological experience in this study revealed emotive themes pertaining to his work ethic and relationships with his family, which were—for him—inherently associated with his professional practice as a scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and career counsellor. He wrote:

I was moved by the clarity of my expression of work ethic and how this related to my father. I was also affected by the expression of my concern that my

work habits had potential to negatively affect my relationships with my wife and children—something probably not unfamiliar to a busy professional with a full-time job and associated voluntary work. The process of completing My Career Chapter required considerable psychological effort.

He deeply considered the implications of his work ethic and its impact upon his relationship with his wife and children. He reported that he was “working too hard” and was conflicted by the imbalance of time and not spending more time with his family. He suggested to himself that he should take more time to thank his wife for her support.

With regard to his clients’ experiences of the procedure, he again emphasised the importance of delivering My Career Chapter in a counselling relationship, because he was concerned that the psychological depth of the process would be lost if the procedure was administered in the absence of a counselling relationship, and that clients may need support to work through the process due to its potential to touch upon sensitive matters. This point was similarly raised in a study of counsellors’ experiences of the procedure in training (McIlveen, 2007a).

He also made some comments on the administrative process and how to improve its effectiveness based on his experience of completing this self-reflective process. For instance, he mentioned, “I also found myself circling the influences in the STF when I was instructed to consider the big picture. Perhaps the instructions could be modified to invite clients to do the same. The editorial instructions should be changed to invite the younger editor to use the word ‘you’ in writing back their comments. It felt easier this way.” His expression “circling the influences” meant drawing circles around the depictions of influences in the STF diagram. Drawing the circles was his indication of their salience.

Discussion

This study described a career counsellor’s experience of using My Career Chapter, with himself as the focus of attention. From a constructivist-interpretivist perspective, such internalised checking gives rise to confidence in the fairness and trustworthiness of the self-research as a self-supervision endeavour. From a critical-ideological perspective, the study demonstrated a genuine attempt to present the participant as a practitioner and self-researcher who is made transparent through a process of self-supervision.

The explicit revelation of such themes was made possible through the two procedures used in this study. In this way, the career counsellor observed himself as a multi-faceted me; thus experiencing objective self-awareness. Additionally, the participant also experienced himself as such in the process of observation; thus experiencing subjective self-awareness. We interpret this outcome as operation of dialogical self: a multiplicity of personalised perspectives; the participant writing and talking about his life from various perspectives and voices (i.e., professional and personal). We interpret this dialogue with oneself a process of reflexive self-awareness.

Implications and limitations for research

In addition to its place in counselling practice, reflective practice is considered vital to qualitative research (Haverkamp, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Parker, 2004). Whilst *slippage* between roles and identities, as a self-observer, can create problems in research (Medford, 2006), this study inherently required transgression across the boundaries of the career counsellor as a professional, and in regard to the non-work influences in his life. That is, this study required him to experience My Career Chapter as a scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and career counsellor; but he could only do this by completing the procedure in its inherently holistic form, which necessarily required voicing of all of his STF influences as dialogical personal perspectives, and thus the voicing of personal dimensions of himself.

Therein, we suggest, rests the core of a critique of the objectified career counselling professional (scientist-practitioner, psychologist, and career counsellor) and the attendant allusions to objectivity. In order to make sense of the process of reflexivity in research, as a scientist-practitioner, one cannot simply abnegate the critical and objective attitude that historically defined the scientist as an ethnographic grouping. Instead, whole-heartedly grappling with the subjectivity in the research process offers a genuine and authentic challenge for psychological science's ontology and epistemologies, and heeds the calls for alternative means of research of potential value for psychology (Polkinghorne, 1992). This study has exemplified one approach to that challenge.

Self-reported qualitative data is inherently limited (Polkinghorne, 2005) and conducting reflexive research in isolation runs the risk of solipsistic turning in on itself, with the researcher uncritically believing in all that he or she purports as the source of knowledge. This study mitigated that risk by using semi-structured methods of self-enquiry: My Career Chapter and Reflecting Upon My Career Influences; and the principles of the qualitative research method autoethnography. Scholars who advocate autoethnography that is typically devoid of data collection tools may question the application of Reflecting Upon My Career Influences reflection exercise on the basis that it constrains the reflexive interpretation. We would not necessarily disagree, but would respond with a call for methodological diversity at this early stage of autoethnography's entry into the repertoire of available methods for reflexive research in career counselling and vocational psychology.

Without doubt, the participant described "an insider's perspective" (Anderson, 2006, p. 386) by being a career counsellor using a career counselling procedure on himself. With respect to Anderson's criteria for using analytic autoethnography as a research method, the study complied with notions of complete member research, analytic reflexivity, and the researcher's activity and visibility within the text. The study could have been improved, however, through further dialogue with informants beyond himself as the self-researcher (see Morrow, 2005), such as family members or friends.

Implications and limitations for practice

This study highlighted some technical issues with My Career Chapter and its design. The administrative issue identified by the participant that My Career Chapter should

be embedded in a counselling relationship is consistent with previous research with clients (McIlveen et al., 2005, 2008) and with counsellors (McIlveen, 2007a). The psychological effort required to complete My Career Chapter may also be of interest to counsellors who must consider how much homework to give their clients. In light of Hansen's (2002) assertion that "if a counselling approach were to be introduced today that emphasized difficult emotional work over an extended period of time... it would probably not be accepted" (pp. 318–319), we suspect that not all individuals will happily engage with the procedure associated with My Career Chapter. Such personalised writing can be difficult or threatening because of its potential to highlight connections between the personal and professional spheres of a counsellor's life that are ordinarily quarantined from one another, in a psychological sense.

Patton and McMahon (2006) recommended a raft of learning systems for career development practitioners, including self-supervision. The process undertaken by the participant in this in this study can be relatively easily replicated by other professionals wanting to engage in a process of reflective practice, through self-supervision, simply by completing the two procedures and engaging in dialogue with a colleague. That the participant revealed to himself (and to his colleague) significant themes inter-relating his personal and professional life, with respect to the influences identified in the STF, is indicative of the potential value of the My Career Chapter and Reflecting on My Career Influences exercise. Generating reflexivity in practice is important if career counsellors are to be aware of their personal backgrounds and issues, and consider how they may influence their professional practices and personal life. Just a career counsellors trained in My Career Chapter recommended its use in a counselling relationship; we similarly suggest that it be used by counsellors in a collegial peer-supervision arrangement in which a trusted confidante participates in the reading aloud process and ensuing dialogue that adds to the formulation of new meaning and learning for the counsellor. This may be undertaken as part of graduate coursework studies, such as formative assessment tasks; included in professional practicum training, perhaps as an exercise to prepare counsellors for their engagement in a career counselling practicum; or as part of continuing professional development for professionals in the field who are seeking heightened reflexivity. Further to the recommendations for professional learning put forward by Patton and McMahon, this study, and the two procedures, put their STF into practice as the theoretical foundation for counsellor reflexivity.

Conclusion

In summary, this study demonstrated a means by which the theory and practice of career development may be integrated by a career counsellor, reflexively within him/herself using two technical procedures already present in the professional literature. It is not the intention of this study to present generalised assertions that the completion of the two procedures used in this study are necessarily of value for all career counsellors. Nevertheless, My Career Chapter is not normatively

referenced, and it allows an individual to ideographically construct meaningfulness for him or herself in relation to his or her context according to how he/she interprets influences depicted in the STF (e.g., ethnic, organisational influences). Far from seeking generalisation to all counsellors, the current study's validity rests in its transparent description of a process of reflexive research (Cho & Trent, 2006), rather than the outcome per se. It is incumbent upon the professional reader to determine whether he/she finds potential for the process to contribute to personalised reflective practices.

References

- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, 373–395.
- Aron, L. (2000). Self-reflexivity and the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 17, 667–689.
- Bronson, M. K. (2000). Supervision of career counseling. In L. J. Bradley & N. Ladany (Eds.), *Counselor supervision—principles, process, and practice* (pp. 222–244). Philadelphia, PA: Brunner-Routledge.
- Cho, J., & Trent, A. (2006). Validity in qualitative research revisited. *Qualitative Research*, 6, 319–340.
- Dennin, M. K., & Ellis, M. V. (2003). Effects of a method of self-supervision for counselor trainees. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50, 69–83.
- du Preez, J. (2008). Locating the researcher in the research: Personal narrative and reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 9, 509–519.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hansen, J. T. (2002). Postmodern implications for theoretical integration of counseling approaches. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 80, 315–321.
- Haverkamp, B. E. (2005). Ethical perspectives on qualitative research in applied psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 146–155.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Kempen, H. J. G. (1993). *The dialogical self: Meaning as movement*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- James, W. (1890/1952). *The principles of psychology*. Chicago, IL: William Benton.
- Lowe, R. (2002). Self-supervision: From developmental goal to systematic practice. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Supervision in the helping professions: A practical approach* (pp. 67–77). Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson Education Australia.
- McIlveen, P. (2006). *My career chapter: A dialogical autobiography*. Toowoomba, Australia: Unpublished manuscript. University of Southern Queensland.
- McIlveen, P. (2007a). Counsellors' personal experience and appraisal of My Career Chapter. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 16(2), 12–19.
- McIlveen, P. (2007b). The genuine scientist-practitioner in vocational psychology: An autoethnography. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 4, 295–311.
- McIlveen, P., Ford, T., & Dun, K. (2005). A narrative sentence-completion process for systems career assessment. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 14(3), 30–39.
- McIlveen, P., Patton, W., & Hoare, P. N. (2008). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of clients' reactions to My Career Chapter. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 17(3), 51–62.
- McMahon, M. (2003). Supervision and career counsellors: A little-explored practice with an uncertain future. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 31, 177–187.
- McMahon, M. (2004). Career counsellors as reflective practitioners and lifelong learners: What is the place of supervision? In H. Reid & J. Bimrose (Eds.), *Constructing the future—reflections on practice* (pp. 55–68). Stourbridge, UK: Institute of Career Guidance.
- McMahon, M., & Patton, W. (2000). Career counsellors, support and lifelong learning: A case for clinical supervision. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 22, 157–169.
- McMahon, M., & Patton, W. (2002). Supervision: Lifelong learning for career counsellors. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Supervision in the helping professions: A practical approach* (pp. 235–248). Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson Education Australia.

- McMahon, M., & Patton, W. (2006). The systems theory framework: A conceptual and practical map for career counselling. In M. McMahon & W. Patton (Eds.), *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches* (pp. 94–109). London, UK: Routledge.
- Medford, K. (2006). Caught with a fake ID: Ethical questions about *slippage* in autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12, 853–864.
- Morrisette, P. J. (2001). *Self-supervision: A primer for counselors and helping professionals*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 250–260.
- Parker, I. (2004). Criteria for qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1, 95–106.
- Patton, W., & McMahon, M. (2006). *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1992). Postmodern epistemology of practice. In S. Kvale (Ed.), *Psychology and postmodernism* (pp. 146–165). London, UK: Sage.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 137–145.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 126–136.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner. How professionals think in action*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51–80). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Ward, C. C., & House, R. M. (1998). Counseling supervision: A reflective model. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 38, 23–33.