Enlightenment on Career Education from Bruner's Narrative View of Cultural Psychology

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Abstract

At present, China's career education displays a lack of cultural awareness. From the perspective of Constructivism, narrative career counseling focuses on the process of individual construction, while Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology highlights the perspective of social culture. Learners can acquire the ability needed for career development from culture to cope with the complexity and changeability of society. Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology emphasizes the meanings, metaphors and mutations in culture. The enlightenment on career education will be discussed from two aspects in this paper: one is that career education should be developed from a cultural perspective because culture is a resource and tool of career education; the other is that the narrative method should be adopted in career education.

Keywords: Jerome S. Bruner, narrative theory, cultural psychology, career education

1. Introduction

T The era of globalization, information technology and cultural diversity characterized by industrial transformation and unprecedented changes to occupational types and ways of working have posed daunting challenges to human capital, especially when the number of satisfying job vacancies shows a dramatic decline. Globally, the frontier theme of career education in recent years is the contextual career competence, in which the focus is more especially reflected in the rise of "narrative career theory" (Abkhezr & McMahon, 2017). Narrative career education still needs to be explored further. A number of problems are waiting to be solved since such education focuses more on personal experiences but seldom notices the tools provided by culture, and the study is insufficient on the process and methods (Reid, 2005). Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology can enlighten the operation of narrative career education and the ways to integrate cultural factors, inspiring individuals to deal with the harsh realities of society and culture proactively. The implementers of career education need to pay attention to culture. In practice, study on career education explains its result by taking culture as an independent variable, but never shows students how to acquire tools from culture in order to enhance their career development. Under the new circumstances, such aspects are undoubtedly worth studying further.

2. Bruner's Narrative View of Cultural Psychology

Narrative theory, a basic concept among Bruner's later theories, is the crucial cornerstone of the narrative view of cultural psychology. Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology is integrated from multiple fields. Based on psychology, it introduces the methodology of culture and jurisprudence into psychology, constructs culture from the perspective of anthropology, and integrates psychology into the bigger picture of culture. In psychology, the narrative view is discussed from the perspective of social and cultural psychology. Bruner's "narrative theory" consists of a series of independent events, consciousness, and everything about humanity. A series of connected stories mean continuous cultural development. The narrators present stories by planning or storytelling. They prepare to organize experience in a certain narrative form, organizational structure or other systems, and use inspiring words, expressions and grammatical forms in storytelling to expound according to occasionality or necessity. Narration features concreteness, integrity, infectiousness and coherence. Concreteness and integrity are presented by the story itself, but infectiousness and coherence are conveyed not only by the story itself but also the significance beyond the story. Narration is characterized by the normative nature of the overall culture. Human behaviors exist in the cultural context explaining details about the person himself/herself, implying how much content of the discussion is in conformity with his/her behavioral background, and hinting at the

protagonist's consciousness (beliefs or expectations) or some normative factors in cultures (Bruner, 2012). Bruner has elaborated on three important aspects of narration.

Firstly, Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology focuses on the formation of "meaning". He delved into the significance of "meaning" at the very beginning. In *Acts of Meaning* (1990), Bruner discussed two views on how to nurture souls, including the computational view and the cultural view. The former focuses on "information processing", while the latter concentrates more on the "formation of meaning". The psychologist suggested that rules in information systems don't include a messy and vague meaning formation system decided by cultural background when comparing the two views. The cultural view can better interpret the "fuzziness" and "metaphors" of human meaning. This area is difficult to replace with computation (Bruner, 1996). Human meaning, as the concept of "possibility of acts", is crucial to the concept of psychology (Bruner, 1990). Bruner explored three basic features of meaning. Firstly, meaning refers to relationship which connects us with the world psychologically. Secondly, meaning is social and historical. It exists in culture and its symbolic system, and meaning-making is the essence of human culture. Therefore, what faces an individual on the social level is not the natural world, but a cultural structure of meaning. Thirdly, meaning is not a deterministic trigger for acts, like physical, chemical or biological stimuli or constraints, but an instruction or a series of choices that indicate the possibility of acts (Brockmeier, 2009). The dominant cultures can be seen with the naked eye, but the cultures deep in human souls are hard to discover. Meaning is a focus, while narration is a crucial way to discover meaning (Bruner, 1990). The role of "meaning" has been discussed again and again. In their lives, humans always highlight specific experiences selectively to produce the narrative truth which pervades their lives, thus forming the theme of life (Savickas, 2005). Stories that might be marginalized, forgotten, neglected, or undiscovered often have in-depth "meaning" which opens up space for unveiling different perspectives and exploring life roles, life themes, values, interests and motivations. Narrative career theory emphasizes that humans subjectively give meaning to events, life experiences, and countless stories about themselves and others that they tell. The process of narration attaches great importance to the formation of meaning, and enhances the understanding of particular situations by promoting self-reflection. Space will be provided in self-reflection, and unclear or complex stories from the past will become more coherent and meaningful (McMahon, et al., 2012). The value of narration also lies in people's ability to make meaningful career decisions and take action while explaining their careers (McIlveen & Patton, 2007). The narrator will make use of the narrative, storytelling or plot construction. A person will give meaningful career narration by using metaphors in the process of narration, career guidance and meaning making (Reid, 2005).

Secondly, Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology focuses on "metaphors". Plentiful works on narration have mentioned specific research methods of narration. Among them, it is metaphors that can make meaning making address practical difficulties beyond conventions in a creative way. In psychology, the typical metaphors explained in Freud's theory and stories implied in id, ego and super-ego are the mainstream of the Psychoanalytical School. Stories are used to clarify "ego" which needs to be continuously constructed and reconstructed to deal with the current situation (Bruner, 2003). Freud's theory influences not only psychology, but also other fields including literature. Naturally, litterateurs are proficient in using metaphors which can help the strictly defined and exemplified world coexist peacefully with the hazy and challenging narrative world (Bruner, 2003). Bruner elaborated on "metaphorical space", "What kind of model is a story? How do stories represent the world beyond the specific things that they directly refer to? Undoubtedly, they do so by using metaphors… The power of metaphors gives stories the space to transcend specific things, and this is their metaphorical space. A story not only simulates the individual actions of humans through metaphors… Stories operate in the fields of action and consciousness of the world, and are released in protagonists' thoughts, emotions and secrets." (Bruner, 2003, p.19) Analogies by metaphors can stimulate students' imaginations and turn mutational obstacles into ability boosters.

Thirdly, Bruner's narrative view of cultural psychology focuses on "troubles" and "mutations". In the process of narration, it is a "mutation" that can drive conscious activity. A mutation is a sudden change in the environment. Hence, for transforming something normal into a story, the "mutation" can be leveraged to discover its "meaning", which will in turn enlighten human thinking (Bruner, 2003). Humans learn the grammar of languages and narrative elements (actors, actions, objects, directions, aspects, and other things) from preschool age. However, unexpected events happening over time need to be captured in order to narrate stories by using grammar, which constitutes the narrative grammar that is more defined by referring to what happens in the story world. The theory of five elements of drama proposes that what drives the story is a certain unsuitability among the five elements: trouble. The imbalance is also a human dilemma. Once we start communicating with each other about them, we'll trigger them off (Bruner, 2003). The most typical dilemma has even become the root metaphor of the human situation, thus becoming the source of the code (Bruner, 2003). Classic narrative dilemmas become classic templates. For example, classic dilemmas in American stories of heroism are worries and fears towards the unknown world and existential crises. Another example of classic dilemma is the cognitive dissonance of marriage in Ibsen's classic play, *A Doll's House*, which is one of the first batch of dramas introduced to China and has

been popular since 1914. The play tells a story about women's status in their family against the background of western cultures. It has also advanced the development of women's liberation in China. Why can a story elicit a common response from people in different cultures? The reason is that common dilemmas of mankind are evocative.

Chinese culture boasts rich connotations. China's outstanding literary works, especially novels, have their own narrative templates. Among the four famous Chinese literary masterpieces, *Journey to the West* is a typical narrative template for solving problems and overcoming suffering; *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is a typical grand narrative template set against the backdrop of war; *The Water Margin* is a narrative template for individual and joint resistance, while *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a typical narrative template for family emotions. These narrative templates are unique and regional, but they are all metaphors on a large scale. In a metaphorical sense, they give life to the story, allowing people to see themselves in the story, to feel the emotions in the story, to evoke empathy and for the reader to relate. Metaphor is also a matter of opinion, as the same narrative template will evoke different emotions for different readers, demonstrating the multiple meanings of the word metaphor. As a Chinese saying goes, "Every year the flowers are similar, every year the people are different." As age and circumstances change, and as individuals and society continue to interact, the same story can be interpreted in different ways. Metaphors therefore have a trans-temporal, trans-regional, trans-cultural and trans-psychological effect. Career is a process of personal exploration of self and self-knowledge, which also needs to be explored in a certain cultural context, and the use of metaphorical narratives allows people to access culturally derived tools to realise the meaning of their career.

In all, Bruner is not the first scholar to pay attention to cultures and narration, but he has set cultures into a bigger picture. Culture is not only the astatic background, but also a dynamic resource. As society and cultures develop, individuals obtain tools from cultures to develop their careers. Indeed, narration is the bridge connecting people and cultures and influences the field of education.

3. Career Education Highlights Cultures and Narration

3.1 Reason for Choosing "Career Education"

When studying career interventions, scholars have noticed "vocational guidance", "career guidance", "career education" and "career counseling". As the era develops and society and cultures change, different scholars will employ different career interventions whose connotations are roughly divided into 4 categories. One is the connotations of vocational guidance. Scholars represented by Parsons (1909) matched personal traits with professional characteristics and they were the first to put forward the concept of "vocational guidance". Career education in Japan focuses on helping students master vocational knowledge related to employment. Holland's Theory of Career Choice (Holland, 1997) is widely adopted and it focuses on the enhancement of self-understanding, increases in occupational information and matches between ego and career. The second one is the connotations of career guidance. Based on the theory of developmental psychology and humanistic psychology, Super (1953) has changed "vocational guidance" to the more sophisticated theory of "career guidance". Career Development Theories (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996), Career Anchor Theory (Schein, 1985), Career Development and Planning (Reardon et al., 2000) have complemented the traditional "vocational guidance" and it thereby evolves into the modern "career guidance" (Reardon et al., 2000). The third one is the connotations of career education. In 1971, American scholars officially proposed the concept of "career education", which refers to career recognition, career exploration, career orientation, career preparation, career proficiency and other steps. It pays attention to the educational function and focuses on all career-related matters affecting a person (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010). In the United Kingdom, the specific goals of career education are self-development, career exploration and career management. The representative figures are Savickas (2005) and Super (1990), who regard people as the dominant players based on the subjective perspective of individual development. Career educators will apply Super's Career Development Theory to help people understand the stages of their career and the developmental tasks at hand, and to develop their attitudes, beliefs and abilities needed to accomplish the tasks. Savickas put forward the theory of life course and proposed that career education uses pedagogy to help individuals or groups determine the urgent tasks of vocational development and find corresponding solutions. The service can be provided with the help of work manuals and computer-assisted programs. The fourth one is the connotation of career counseling which is represented by Savickas. He proposed that career counseling leverages psychological methods to encourage individuals to explore themselves, and makes itself a prelude of career choice and adjustment, because career counseling requires visitors to establish relations with their counselors. Therefore, such counseling is often targeted at individuals (Savickas, 2011). Current career interventions are mainly composed of career guidance, career education and career counseling. Career guidance determines career matching. Career education promotes career development, while career counseling designs work and life.

Every aspect has its value. Users can choose corresponding interventions according to specific situations. Compared with "career guidance", "career education" is not only reflected in curriculums, but also pays more attention to integration with national education policies. Compared with the newly developed "career counseling" that emphasizes reflectiveness,

"career education" pays more attention to people's preparation for participating in developmental tasks suitable for their own life stages, and helps develop new attitudes, new beliefs and new abilities, and advance their career (Savickas, 2011). Thus, they finally choose the connotations of career education.

3.2 Career Education Theory Highlights Cultures and Narration

The method of study integrating career and narration has developed to a certain degree. The career theme put forward by Savickas, the systematic theoretical framework and career construction theory proposed by Australian scholars have laid an important foundation for the development of narrative career counseling, and paved the way for narrative career development. The theories are widely used in the process of narrative career counseling. Based on constructivism, they emphasize the process of individual construction and the subjectivity of narrative career, so that people can make meaningful career decisions and act accordingly. Narration is regarded as a collection of ideas and methods that continue to evolve rapidly.

3.2.1 Static Trait Factors Match Dynamic Human Development: Focusing on Cultures

The practice of career education had not been supported by a corresponding career theory until the emergence of Parsons' theory, which pioneered career development theories. In that theory, Parsons proposed the first conceptual framework for career decision-making and the three main factors for choosing a career wisely. The first is to know about oneself; the second is to know the requirements of different industries, conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, salaries, opportunities and the prospects of work in different fields; the third is the true reasoning about the relationship between the two sets of facts mentioned above (Parsons, 1909). From Parsons's era to the present, the concept of career matching has been deeply rooted in the minds of most people. Career researchers who support career matching insist that finding a job does not depend on chance. People should independently choose their own occupation, and then they will be more satisfied with their work. That not only reduces the cost of organizations, but also improved employees' efficiency. Career matching has become the core of career development theories. However, as time goes by, the view of taking occupation as a static entity no longer meets the needs of the era, so people begin to pay attention to "career", and notice the educational environment before entering the professional environment, and start to transform the static perspective into a dynamic one. Based on Parsons' Trait-Factor Theory, Super's Theory of Career Choice develops a static theory into a dynamic theoretical model and allows people to consider career development from a dynamic perspective, which combines opinions from developmental psychology and sociology, and thus supports career education theoretically.

The comprehensive theory of career development explains the career development of every group and individual, and promotes the understanding of career development. Career choices and the reason for making such choices are crucial, especially when people pay attention to the antecedents that affect their career choices. According to Holland (1997), few people concentrate on why certain personality types develop. They rather focus on explaining why choices occur and the results of choices. Therefore, the career development theory focuses more on the question of "why" and pays attention to the process before people choose, which helps to understand the past, present and future events. Hence, the career development theory also supports the philosophical view of social constructivism, whose purpose is to enable people to construct their own reality by themselves. Social constructivism assumes that human behavior can only be understood in the specific context, while human subjective frame of reference is the only legal source of knowledge. In addition, the context and frame of reference is understood as cultures, and career development is inseparable from the cultural background.

Dynamic career theories need to focus on the development of society and cultures. The sociological view regards career as a "social form", which is reached by individuals based on negotiation of the structure and motility reflecting the characteristics of human society (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Career choices are not entirely in the hands of individuals, but in social and cultural organizations, which restrict certain types of career decisions and outcomes. Previous studies of sociology paid too much attention to the structure and practice of social systems, and neglected the process of personal meaning making. Cultures is, to a large extent, a manifestation of the structure that commands social reality. It affects both the way organizations operate and the way individuals behave. In the process of seeking general knowledge about how social structure influences the creation of meaning, humans have forgotten the inherent nature of cultures and the localized meaning of career. In terms of how to deal with ego and society, the external and objective "other" should be transformed to a complex mixture from a perspective of epistemology and analysis, from the structure formation to the cultures in daily life.

3.2.2 From Empirical Research to Qualitative Research: Focusing on Narration

Many scholars studying career development adopt empirical research to advance theories' practice and development. It is precisely because of the characteristics of empirical research that such research has great effects on externally observable and measurable content, but has fewer effects on the implicit part, so that some factors might be ignored (such as meaning). Therefore, Savickas, another famous scholar in career development theories, turned career study from

empirical research into qualitative research. The current theory of narrative career counseling integrates constructivism with career research. It can be said that the narrative career counseling from the perspective of constructivism pays attention to personal construction, and focuses on the story of individual life existence. The method used is also from the perspective of constructivism. Some scholars have developed a qualitative assessment program for career assessment and consultation, and integrated quasi-experimental research with rigorous qualitative verification research. Some progress has been made, but the theories adopted in narration and their relationship with identity and use have to be explored further. In addition, the construction described in the counseling experience is yet to be expanded. Narration describes personal experience against the big picture of cultural background, while the narration only focusing on personal experience and ignoring the cultural value behind it is obviously carried out without strong support. Narrative career counseling can also present itself more impressively in career education. Plenty of research commonly focus on culture, and studies on culture also promotes the shift of focus on research methods from the mainstream of empirical research to qualitative research. Narration has entered the research of career psychology, and has also been well applied in cross-cultural career research. The research method will regard career as something dynamic rather than a static entity, and introduce a cultural perspective into career research. Scholars who earlier proposed to use narration to study career adopt constructivist methods to emphasize the subjectivity and significance of narrative career counseling, enable people to make significant career decisions and take action accordingly, and regard narration as a collection of ideas and methods which continue to develop rapidly (McIlveen & Patton, 2007).

3.2.3 Limitations of the Previous Narrative Career Theory—Overly Highlighting Personal Construction and Ignoring the Value of Cultures

The narrative career theory offers a new method, which is also considered to be an approach combining constructivism, narration, reflection and criticism (Reid & West, 2016). Narration is suitable for groups in different cultures and backgrounds, even those at a disadvantage. Narrative career counseling is intended for storytelling, which reflects the "temporal nature of career experiences" (LaPointe, 2010, p.7), explains how each event or experience in life builds on past experiences, and emphasizes how individuals creatively construct their career and explore their career stories in detail. Reflection and criticism of narration are inseparable from "mutations". Discontinuous mutations have become the key to forming meaning in the narrative process. However, individual careers are inseparable from cultures which provide people with tool packages and resources to construct their careers. Narration that only focuses on personal construction is limited, and needs to be supplemented by cultural narration. Career counseling scholars have carried out systematic research on narration, but narration is yet to be widely applied in career education.

4. Meaning Required in Current Career Education

The awareness of teachers who are teaching career education in schools is very important. They consciously use narratives for human interaction and integrate this interaction into the interpersonal process. In both written and non-written communication, people-to-people exchanges are everywhere. In this sense, culture is considered to be a practice rather than a stereotypical contextual feature or structural form.

Firstly, from an individual perspective, career education focuses on personal emotional expression. Narration itself is emotional. For example, when a person compares work to "purgatory" in the narrative process, it reveals negative emotions, such as tension and anxiety, which can also be spread to family and social circles and then affect the core environment of life. When a person uses a metaphor in narration, it might be related to their emotional state at a certain time. Metaphors could affect emotions and sway a person. Thus, a person may be able to imagine new career metaphors, comparing work to "paradise". Motivation is considered to guide narrative thinking, both in terms of interpersonal communication and things to experience in the future. Narration is an effective way to understand experiences (Bruner, 1990). It is a metaphorical approach because metaphors can be used as a basis for thinking about specific careers and careers in general. Metaphors themselves have two sides to them: on one hand, the problem with metaphors is that they may limit career thinking to stereotypes; on the other, metaphors can visualise metaphors created by others, thus helping us to broaden our horizons, expanding perspectives by considering alternative metaphors and creating new metaphors. It does not only provide opportunities to express our thoughts, but also helps us to construct them. Metaphors describe the world in vivid and familiar ways, allowing us to see events from a particular perspective, so the process of developing and using metaphors can stimulate creativity.

Secondly, teachers can use culture as a resource for career education. Career itself is in the cultures, and it means that career can be regarded as cultural customs. Individuals connect with society mainly through their occupations which are inseparable from the cultural background. Besides, cultures imply the meaning of seeking a certain occupation. Cultural factors are central to narrative career theory since they emphasize the subjectivity and background of everyone's life (Bruner,1990). Cultures provide career education with not only the background but also resources. Attention shall be paid to forms of narration which include the integration of texts and dialogues, and the focus shall be laid on how people's

behaviors interact with narration through exchanges and communication in daily work, life and study, so as to obtain cultural resources. Career education needs to shape space and geographical locations for understanding career, and resources supporting and restricting career planning. Such education is not only designed for individual construction. Individuals can acquire resources related to career development from cultures, such as literature works and true stories. Combining with the corresponding eras, every story is a carrier of culture. In career education, stories are used to enlighten students and make them reflect. Students interpret the meaning of cultures through their own experiences. The shortage of the current career education can be compensated for by the social culture. Therefore, if Bruner's narration is introduced into career education, the narration comes from culture. Narration is downsized and materialized to be regarded as a carrier of culture and career, which is the way to present cultural psychology. Bruner places individuals in a culture, which is broader than the constructivist narrative, especially at the level of giving meaning. Career education applies narration to provide students with cultural space. The space represents cultures in which people live, and the tool packages and resources cultures offer. From the resources, the meaning of personal career construction will be obtained. Strategies of narrative career education are not personalized, but emphasize people's initiative, cultural supports and what people absorb from cultures. As Bruner expounded, cultures are tools or resources. Rules in life, interpersonal dialogues, presentation of texts, institutional structures are tools and resources for careers. It is easier for people to access local culture, which depends on what kind of resources are employed and the interpretative framework adopted to evaluate the value of those cultures (Cappellen, & Janssens, 2010).

Humans are not isolated islands. They can address problems in study with psychological tools provided by various groups. "Our world is a world of stories". Storytelling is considered to be a natural tendency of mankind, providing a tool for understanding the surrounding world and social interaction (McMahon, 2014). Career education uses resources offered by cultures as tools to connect the needs of contemporary society, the variability caused by cultural changes, the relationship between national development and social cultures, with the development of students themselves. In career development, students face, analyze and address problems all the time, while cultures happen to run through the whole process. When people face a problem, a culture is the background which will tell them how the problem is in reality in this type of culture; when people analyze a problem, cultures are resources which will provide people with modes and channels to solve the problem in common situations; when people address a problem, cultures are tools which will help people choose the best way in testing errors or epiphany. People will find the most suitable "solution" among various tools and resources, and thus make the right choice. In the exploration of career education, the value of cultures shall be taken into consideration and cultures shall be utilized as the support of such education, since they are the crucial providers of resources and tools. Students shall avoid ignoring cultures. Besides, it is necessary to consider the cultural context of future careers, such as space, geographical environment, social regions and time span, before obtaining cultural tools.

Thirdly, teachers can apply narratives as a tool for career education, which employs narration to conduct interaction between men and ego, and integrates such interaction into the process of reflection. Mutations are the common problems facing the mankind. The changeable social and cultural environment brings more changes to careers, a background that cannot be ignored when researchers study the issues of career education. The commonly used method in career education is to summarize and look into career stages, but this ignores the changes brought about by the troubles encountered in the course of career development, which may change the wrong ideas. It is necessary to correct wrong thoughts, adjust to quell old conflicts, and change to enhance self-efficacy (McIlveen, 2012). Modification of narration might occur at any time and at different stages of development. An individual's biased self-narration might come from cognition, emotions and behaviors. This narrative method largely depends on individuals' prioritized cultural or social expectations, as well as the different circumstances and conditions of their new life (Flum, 2015). Narrative career education might help to explore this new self-narration and stories, thereby making it possible to create new and prioritized stories about life and future career plans. Narration which comes from Bruner's narrative view of natural psychology is a way to present "ego", including beliefs, expectations, time concept and personality, between the outer world and the inner world. Cultural psychology is open, and analyzes knowledge from multiple angles without losing its value orientation, which requires the realization of how to accept knowledge and face values. Individuals should be encouraged to express themselves through narrative statements and construct ego when narrating their life. Ego is not an isolated consciousness locked in people's minds, but distributed among people. The appearance of the ego derives its meaning from the historical background, which has a restrictive effect on cultures and is also the embodiment of cultures (Bruner, 1990).

5. Conclusion

The research and practice of career education require great attention to culture. Psychological research may focus on different types of culture. Cross-cultural psychology tends to highlight static culture while cultural psychology enlightens culture of dynamic development. In old age, Bruner shifted his attention more towards cultural psychology, treated narration as the main research method, and highlighted meaning making and metaphor interpretation, which are remarkably helpful in dealing with the frequent and complex changes of contemporary society. Career education must be

based on social development. The former research on narrative career counseling focused on personal construction, but "narration" advocated by Bruner uses narration as the tool and resource and enables students to discover the usable tools and resources in culture for problem solving. This concept will, when integrated into career education, have significance to the development of students' career ability.

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