

# Using narrative

## Narrative elements

### Characters

- Who are the influential people in the client's story?
- What effect have the other people had on the client?
- What roles does the client play?
- What stereotypes might the client be working with?
- What stereotypes are you working with?

### Settings

- How does this person fit into his/her environment?
- How has background influenced the client's view of his/her story?
- How does the client change between environments?
- How does the social, political or economic context affect this client's story?

### Dialogues

- What has been said to the client?
- What has the client learned from conversations?
- What has the client expressed to others about himself/herself?
- How have the client's opinions been affected by conversations with other people?
- What specific words and phrases have significance for this client?

### Events

- To what extent has the client influenced events or been influenced by events?
- How has the client learned from events?
- How has the client responded to / dealt with events?
- How has the client prepared for events?

### Meanings

- What interpretation has the client put on this story?
- Where (or who) has that interpretation come from?
- What alternative interpretations are possible?
- What has been classed as important and what as insignificant in coming to this interpretation?

### Themes

- What patterns occur regularly in the client's story?
- What are the main forces driving the client?
- What mistakes does the client keep making?
- What issues keep cropping up as significant?

## Questioning narratives

### Deconstructive

Explore how the client has constructed and interpreted particular narratives; situate narratives in context.

- *Where did the idea that you need a professional qualification come from?*
- *How did you discover you are not an "office type"?*

### Naming (renaming)

Allowing clients to build new constructs and clarify existing constructs for dealing with their situation; give a sense of control of their own story

- *Can you think of a positive name to describe your desire not to work for a commercial organisation?*

### Perspective

Explore other people's views of the client or the situation

- *Does anyone else have a different idea of what your skills are? Tell me about them.*
- *What other attitudes to this have you come across?*

### Opening space

Allow hopeful thoughts or actions to be explored

- *Are there times when you feel less confused about your direction? Tell me about these.*
- *What was the most successful application you made?*

### Hypothetical (miracle)

Stimulate the client's imagination to envision different, more hopeful futures

- *Suppose a miracle happened and you were more confident, how would your life be different?*

### Preference

Check that the client prefers the outcome of positive situations to those of habitual negatives

- *How did you feel after you had plucked up courage and talked to the employer?*

### Story development

Explore and linger on elements of the positive story

- *Tell me more about what happened when you spoke to them.*

### Re-description

Help client to recognise preferred qualities in themselves and probe implications for identity

- *What does it say about you as a person that you were able to deal with this situation?*

### Audience

Identify supportive witnesses to the developing story

- *Who in your life would be least surprised that you are able to make this change?*

## Reading

- Chen, C.P. (1997) Career projection: narrative in context. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 49(2) 311-26.
- Cochran, L. (1997) *Career Counseling: A Narrative Approach*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Articles and handouts on narrative from Bill Law at [www.hihohiho.com/magazine/index/cafmgmwknrtv.html](http://www.hihohiho.com/magazine/index/cafmgmwknrtv.html)