

# Orientation to Self and Career: Constructivist Theory and Practice in the Classroom

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## Abstract

***As the world of work becomes increasingly dynamic and complex, career courses must shift to reflect the growing diversity of those in the beginning stages of career exploration. Constructivist career development has emerged as one way to help young adults meet the challenges of the 21st century. Yet, there is a dearth of constructivist career development curricula and coursework. The current paper provides a detailed overview of one constructivist career course for culturally diverse college students called "Orientation to Self and Career." The paper includes a description of the course's theoretical underpinnings, modules, activities, and outcomes.***

**A**s the world of work becomes increasingly dynamic, flexible, and complex, career development courses must shift to reflect the growing diversity of backgrounds, needs, and meaning sought by those in the beginning stages of career exploration. Classroom preparation for this constantly changing, more globalized world of work has truly outgrown a dominant reliance on trait and factor approaches. Part of the foundation of the vocational guidance movement, trait and factor approaches to career development assume that finding one's place in the world of work is primarily a matter of uncovering one's traits and abilities, learning about the job market, and finding the match between these two factors (what one can do and what is available in the job market). However, in the current post-industrial age where students are being prepared for jobs that may not even exist yet, developmental and postmodern perspectives that provide young adults with a balanced, comprehensive, and meaningful process for exploring and making sense of the interconnections between identity and vocation seem most relevant.

In particular, constructivist career development has emerged as one way to integrate trait/factor, developmental, and post-modern perspectives to help young adults meet the challenges of the 21st century where careers

are forged rather than foretold (Chen, 2003; Hoskins 1995; Peavy, 1995; Savickas, 1996; Watts, 1996). Yet, there is a dearth of constructivist career development curricula and coursework. With hopes of inspiring similar initiatives, the purpose of the current paper is to provide a detailed description of one constructivist career course for culturally diverse college students entitled "Orientation to Self and Career." In addition to describing the constructivist activities embedded in the course, the current paper will (a) describe the theoretical underpinnings and thematic bridges connecting the course activities, (b) illustrate how the course unfolds over one semester—including the three course modules, and (c) discuss the effectiveness of the course, including findings from recent outcome studies.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of Orientation to Self and Career**

At the core of the "Orientation to Self and Career" course is a focus on constructing one's identity and subjective career through meaning-making (Savickas, 1993; Schultheiss, 2007). Super's self-concept (1990) and Savickas' subjective career (1993) are central to this process. In order to develop the self-concept and subjective career, the course draws from three major perspectives of career development—career as self-realization, career as growing experiences, and career as context conceptualization—and includes the basic constructivist tools of narrative (authoring or telling one's own story), action (exploring aspects of oneself such as culture, values, and beliefs), construction (constructing identity within context), and interpretation (using personal identity and meaning to inform career directions) (Chen, 2003). Trait/factor and developmental approaches to career are integrated into the course via the three thematic bridges and basic constructivist tools.

The first theme, career as self-realization, is based on the fundamental idea that a person's internal sense of self plays a key role in his or her career across the life span. In order to extend students' self-concept and subjective career, the course includes the constructivist tools of narrative, action, construction, and interpretation to integrate predominant trait/factor approaches such as Holland's RIASEC codes (i.e., six basic personality types and work environments, including Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional; 1997) and Myers Briggs Typology (i.e., 16 different personality types, including how one perceives the world and makes decisions about information; Pinkney, 1983). The second theme, career as growing experiences, takes into account the long, developmental process which begins in early childhood where children's first career choices are expressed through fantasy (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951) and attends to the process of evolving and implementing the vocational self-concept through the exploration of work roles and lived experience (Savickas, 2005). The constructivist career course uses narrative, action, construction, and interpretation to help students integrate and understand the role of growing experiences in contributing to their self-concept and subjective career. The third theme, career as context conceptualization, examines the multiple contextual variables that come together to create meaning in one's life, including gender, race/ethnicity, and class, and again the course uses the basic tools of narrative, action, construction, and interpretation to help students explore the role of gender, race/ethnicity, and class in contributing to their self-concepts and ideas about appropriate career options. Through

career as context conceptualization, the "Orientation to Self and Career" course also makes room for circumscription and compromise, (i.e., how young people recognize and select from the many vocational choices currently available to them; Gottfredson, 1996). Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the course activities, themes, and constructivist tools.

Constructivism is not only a dominant emerging perspective in career theory but also part of the current zeitgeist in the field of education (Larochelle, Bednarz, & Garrison, 1998). The course draws upon constructivist practices in education where the classroom is made up of active, engaged students who are viewed as collaborators in the process of teaching and learning and who are empowered to search for novel solutions to problems (Gray, 1997). In the constructivist classroom, the teacher is considered the facilitator of learning rather than all-knowing expert, and the process of learning is considered just as important as the outcome (Gray, 1997). As in constructivist career theory, the focus of constructivist practices in education is on the process of meaning-making.

The "Orientation to Self and Career" course sets the stage for a constructivist approach to education in the career classroom by using collaborative inquiry, play, negotiation, and active learning. For example, one of the first activities on the first day of class is "Chair Mates" (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1983), a game implemented to help students learn one another's names and take risks in a fun and engaging way. In addition, ice-breakers such as "Fantasy Island," "Slogans that Fit," "Life Events," and the "Color, Car, Character" exercise (John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1983) are included to help students (a) get to know each other and feel comfortable in the classroom, (b) incorporate creative vantage points for extending their self-concept and subjective career, and (c) remain active and engaged in course activities.

Developing a safe space for collaborative inquiry is paramount in setting the stage for a constructivist learning environment. Collaborative inquiry involves the sharing of ideas and experiences where students offer their own thoughts and respond to the views of others (Staples, 2007). Through the process of collaborative inquiry students generate shared meaning and construct knowledge and understanding as part of a community of learners. In "Orientation to Self and Career," play and negotiation are key elements for developing collaborative inquiry. Play makes room for imagination in the classroom which facilitates creative approaches to problem-solving and permission to question, investigate, and hypothesize. Play also facilitates positive relationships and a sense of openness and community in the classroom. The sense of community, openness, and rapport provides a safe base from which to engage in collaborative inquiry. Particularly in the "Orientation to Self and Career" course where students are expected to engage in deep personal exploration in order to extend the self-concept and subjective career, play, comfort, and rapport are important. Comfort taking risks in low-stakes playful situations can help facilitate the group cohesion, interpersonal sharing, and interpersonal learning needed for more meaningful self-exploration, disclosure, and risk-taking.

In addition, negotiation is used to develop a safe space for collaborative inquiry. In the "Orientation to Self and Career" course, teachers and

students work together early in the semester to develop and negotiate class norms, i.e. rules for engagement. In this process, the teacher and students both generate ideas about the characteristics needed for a positive learning environment (e.g. respect, humor, and openness to diverse opinions) and commit to working together to incorporate and maintain these elements in the current learning environment. Developing a safe space for collaborative inquiry sets the stage for a constructivist learning environment in which students can actively engage in narrative, action, construction, and interpretation to develop their self-concept and subjective career. Meeting once a week for two hours over the course of a 15 week semester, "Orientation to Self and Career" unfolds through three class modules: "Exploring the Past and Present," "Constructing the Future," and "Planning, Action, and Integration."

### *Module 1: Exploring the Past and Present*

The structure of the course is based on the notion that students must develop a solid sense of self in the present in order to successfully project themselves into the future. Developing a solid sense of self in the present requires making sense of and understanding the past. Thus, the course begins in the past and focuses on authoring a coherent self-narrative. The narrative begins with students' earliest memories of identifying with a career or "wanting to be something." Students' first homework assignment—to uncover and write about their earliest career fantasy—taps into career as self-realization and growing experiences using narrative and action. During the following class period when students explore the relationships, role models, and environments that influenced the development of their earliest fantasies, career as context conceptualization is emphasized.

Students' second homework assignment—the career genogram—continues the focus on career as self-realization and context conceptualization using construction and narrative. The genogram activity (Brown & Brooks, 1991b) also taps into a developmental process relevant for many college students—the process of transitioning into adulthood. For many, the transition involves individuation; that is, carving out a unique identity from parents and family. However, particularly for more collectivist college students, the transition can involve gaining an understanding of the family values, traditions, and missions that they will honor and pass on. The career genogram helps facilitate the transition to adulthood by (a) uncovering family legacies and messages that have been passed on to students across generations, (b) providing the opportunity for students to rewrite messages taken in from the family that no longer fit for the individual, and (c) providing the opportunity to reaffirm the family missions, values, beliefs, and traditions that students desire to honor and carry on.

To help students integrate the past and present, experiential activities using action and narrative further promote career as self-realization and context conceptualization. The identity experiential, for example, calls for posting several aspects of identity, such as race, class, gender, religion, spirituality, work, education level, ability, family, and neighborhood/community around the classroom (National Conference for Community and Justice [NCCJ], personal communication, March 30, 2007). Students listen as the instructor reads from a list of eight statements including (a) I think about this aspect of my identity most; (b) I think about this aspect least; (c)

This was emphasized most in my family; (d) This was emphasized least in my family; (e) This part of my identity most affects how people treat me; (f) I feel the most discomfort about this part; (g) The most painful experience I have had was a result of this; and (h) The most rewarding experience I have had was a result of this. In response to each statement, students silently walk to the label that best fits, and following the activity, students reflect on their experience and identity through writing and discussion. The values (NCCJ, 2007) experiential continues the focus on career as self-realization through action and narrative and unfolds much like the identity experiential, except 23 different values are posted around the classroom and students respond to 17 statements. The “Who Am I” exercise (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972) attends to career as self-realization and context conceptualization using action, narrative, and construction as students pair up to explore elements of their personas or public and private selves. In pairs students are given 5 minutes each to respond to one question: “Who are you?” As one student talks, the other student listens without interrupting. Then students are given additional time to respond to a second question: “Who do you pretend to be?” As with the values and identity experientials, the “Who Am I” exercise is followed by reflective writing and class discussion.

The exploration of career as self-realization and growing experiences is implemented using action and narrative. Specifically, students engage in life story writing focused on uncovering character qualities and identifying their achievements across the life span. Uncovering and articulating character qualities through life story writing not only helps students define core aspects of themselves in their own words but also challenges students to think dialectically about the positive and negative aspects of the same trait. As with the reflective writings, the achievement and character stories become part of the self-narrative.

Toward the end of Module 1, the course emphasizes synthesis, and students are required to integrate the reflective and life story writings, early career fantasy, and career genogram with career assessments through a midterm self-analysis paper in which they interpret the results from their “Strong Interest Inventory—College Version” (2007) and “Do What You Are Self-discovery Assessment”—college version (2008). Career assessment from a constructivist perspective focuses on how one makes meaning of test results, and opportunities to explore oneself prior to assessment are essential for creating a context for meaning-making (Chen, 2003). In the “Orientation to Self and Career” course, the interest and personality inventories are included only after students have had numerous opportunities to explore and narrate their experience through homework, discussion, experiential learning, and reflective and life story writing. Then to synthesize a coherent self-narrative, the midterm requires students to integrate the pieces of the narrative they have constructed over the semester with their “Do What You Are Self Discovery Assessment” and “Strong Interest Inventory-College Version” assessments.

### *Module 2: Constructing the Future*

Once students have had the opportunity to make sense of the past and develop a solid sense of self in the present, “Orientation to Self and Career” extends students’ thinking into the future. As students explore their conceptions of how the past, present, and future relate to each other,

the "Circle Test" (Savickas, 1991) facilitates career as self-realization and context conceptualization using construction and narrative. Tapping into these same two themes using action, construction, and narrative, the "Career Gender Role Reversal Fantasy" (Brown & Brooks, 1991a) provides students with the opportunity to test new identities and the relative importance of gender to their self-concepts and subjective careers. As the exercise helps students reflect on various life pathways across gender, the processes of circumscription and compromise become clear. The "Who Will I Be/What Will I Do," "Career Lifeline," and "Obituary" exercises (Savickas, 1991) extend the density and range with which students can imagine their futures and tap into career as self-realization, growing experiences, and context conceptualization using construction and narrative. Other activities such as the "Career Visualization" exercise and the "Vision Statement" also focus on self-realization and context conceptualization using action, construction, and narrative. A guided fantasy, the "Career Visualization" exercise brings into focus a day in the lives of students ten years from now, starting with when they wake up and ending with when they go to bed. Following the visualization, students discuss their fantasies and create a vision statement articulating future goals, potential obstacles, and ways to overcome obstacles. The course then moves from constructing the future to planning, action, and integration.

### *Module 3: Planning, Action, and Integration*

Planning is the bridge from present to future, and the "Force Field Analysis" (Lewin, 1938) helps students begin conceptualizing that bridge. Tapping into career as self-realization and context conceptualization, the "Force Field Analysis" focuses on driving forces that move one forward and restraining forces that hold one back. To conceptualize the driving and restraining forces in their own lives, students in the "Orientation to Self and Career" course engage in action, construction, and narrative, and through Brott's (2004) "Goal Map" students identify resources, barriers, and action steps. Developing a vocational self-concept through work roles is also emphasized in module 3 along with Krumboltz and Levin's (2004) idea of doing in the present to create opportunities for the future. Through activities such as internships, job shadowing, informational interviews, and employment, the idea of career as growing experiences is underscored, and using construction and narrative students are required to research and select an internship or employment opportunity for which they are currently qualified and write about how they can use the position to create opportunities for the future. What follows is that students develop a résumé and cover letter for the position of interest.

Practice constructing résumés and cover letters involves active learning and small group collaboration, whereas during an in-class activity, students work in groups of three or four to develop one résumé and cover letter for an employment position selected by the instructor. Each group is given large poster-size sheets of paper to work on, and students are encouraged to combine their experiences and backgrounds to strengthen their résumés and cover letters. The importance of career as context conceptualization is emphasized as students are challenged to determine the information most relevant and appropriate for the résumé and cover letter by reading through the job description, sifting through their background experiences, and using

the résumé/cover letter handout. Upon completion, each group posts their work on the classroom wall, and the teacher and students critique the résumés and cover letters by identifying those that seem particularly well-suited to the employment position and those that do not, discussing what makes some applicants weak and others strong. For homework, students create an individual résumé and cover letter for the internship opportunity identified earlier.

The “15 Step Plan” (Savickas, 1991) also taps into growing experiences through construction and narrative and represents the pinnacle of planning in the career course. The “15 Step Plan” is divided into three phases, where students first identify and write down 15 steps that will lead to a goal; then students identify and write down potential positive and negative outcomes that could occur at each step, and finally they identify and write down what they will need to do or how hard they will need to work at each step. Again active learning and collaboration are underscored, and students are encouraged to share their plans with peers for ideas and feedback. In line with constructivist educational strategies, the process of planning is just as important as the outcome; and once students have gone through the process of developing a solid plan to achieve a goal, the course pushes them to integrate and act upon the insights and future constructions they have developed over the semester. At this point, students take a class trip to the college career center to find career and major information relevant to their specific interests and are then given the next week off from class to explore on their own.

As the semester comes to an end, students conduct oral presentations integrating their insights, actions, and progress. In the oral presentation, students discuss their career journeys over the semester, including where they were when they started the course, where they are now, how they have used the course, potential career directions they are interested in pursuing, and next steps. The oral presentation brings together career as self-realization, growing experiences, and context conceptualization through narrative, action, construction, and interpretation. The career portfolio and final paper also integrate the three major course themes and four constructivist tools. The portfolio is made up of all significant course assignments completed over the semester and concludes with a final paper in which students identify and discuss themes in their self-concepts and connections across their past, present, and future. Table 1 provides a summary of the course assignments, major themes, and constructivist tools included in all three modules. Table 2 provides an example of the semester calendar.

### **The Effectiveness of the Course**

Outcome studies of the “Orientation to Self and Career” course have found significant increases in students’ career decision self-efficacy and significant decreases in students’ dysfunctional, self-defeating thoughts (Grier-Reed & Skaar, in press; Grier-Reed, Skaar, & Conkel-Ziebell, 2009; Grier-Reed, Skaar, & Parson, 2009). We believe that developing students’ self-concepts and subjective careers are integral to the success of the course. With a subjective career based in self-understanding, students can more

Table 1

*Summary of the Course Assignments, Constructivist Tools, and Thematic Bridges across the Three Modules*

<b>Module 1: Exploring the Past &amp; Present</b>	<b>Career as Self-Realization</b>
<i>Earliest Career Fantasy Essay</i>	Action and Narrative
<i>Career Genogram</i>	Construction and Narrative
<i>Identity Experiential Exercise &amp; Reflective Writing</i>	Action and Narrative
<i>Values Experiential Exercise &amp; Reflective Writing</i>	Action and Narrative
<i>Who Am I Experiential Exercise &amp; Reflective Writing</i>	Action, Construction, and Narrative
<i>My Character/My Story Writing</i>	Action and Narrative
<i>My Achievements Writing</i>	Action and Narrative
<i>Do What You Are and Strong Interest Inventory Comparative Analysis Midterm Paper</i>	Narrative, Action, Construction, and Interpretation
<b>Module 2: Constructing the Future</b>	
<i>Career Gender Role Reversal Fantasy &amp; Reflective Writing</i>	Action, Construction, and Narrative
<i>Circle Test</i>	Construction and Narrative
<i>My Life, My Decisions Reflective Writing</i>	Action, Construction, and Narrative
<i>Who will I Be, What will I Do?</i>	Construction and Narrative
<i>Career Lifeline &amp; Obituary</i>	Construction and Narrative
<i>Career Visualization</i>	Action and Construction
<i>Vision Statement</i>	Construction and Narrative
<b>Module 3: Planning, Action, and Integration</b>	
<i>Internship Search &amp; Creating Future Opportunities Writing</i>	
<i>Force Field Analysis &amp; Goal Map with Next Steps Reflective</i>	Action, Construction, and Narrative
<i>Internship Resume &amp; Cover Letter</i>	
<i>15 Step Plan</i>	
<i>Oral Presentation</i>	Action, Interpretation, Construction, and Narrative
<i>Integrative Final Paper &amp;</i>	Action, Interpretation,

Action—Exploring aspects of the self such as culture, values, and beliefs

Construction—Constructing identity within context

Narrative—Authoring or telling one’s own story

Interpretation—Using personal identity to inform career directions



<b>Career as Growing Experiences</b>	<b>Career as Context Conceptualization</b>
Action and Narrative	Action and Narrative
	Construction and Narrative
	Action and Narrative
	Action, Construction, and Narrative
Action and Narrative	
Action and Narrative	
Narrative, Action, Construction, and Interpretation	Narrative, Action, Construction, and Interpretation
<b>Module 2: Constructing the Future</b>	
	Action, Construction and Narrative
	Construction and Narrative
Action, Construction, and Narrative	
Construction and Narrative	Construction and Narrative
Construction and Narrative	Construction and Narrative
	Action and Construction
	Construction and Narrative
<b>Module 3: Planning, Action, and Integration</b>	
Construction and Narrative	
	Action, Construction, and Narrative
	Construction and Narrative
Construction and Narrative	
Action, Interpretation, Construction, and Narrative	Action, Interpretation, Construction, and Narrative
Action, Interpretation,	Action, Interpretation, Construction,

Table 2

*Semester Calendar*

Date	Activities and Assignments	Assignments Due
Week 1:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Earliest Career Fantasy</b></li> </ul>	
Week 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Identity Experiential &amp; Reflective Writing</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Career Genogram</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Earliest Career Fantasy</li> </ul>
Week 3:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Values Experiential &amp; Reflective Writing</i></li> <li>◆ <i>Who Am I Experiential &amp; Reflective Writing</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Career Genogram</li> </ul>
Week 4:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>My Character/My Story</i></li> <li>◆ <i>My Significant Life Achievements</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Complete DWYA and SII</b></li> </ul>	
Week 5:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>SII and DWYA Interpretation</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Midterm Paper: DWYA/SII comparative analysis</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ DWYA</li> <li>◆ SII</li> </ul>
Week 6:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Career Gender Role Reversal Fantasy &amp; Reflective Writing</i></li> <li>◆ <i>Midterm Preparation</i></li> </ul>	
Week 7:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>My Life, My Decisions Reflective Writing</i></li> <li>◆ <i>Informational Interviewing &amp; Job Shadowing</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Research Internship</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Midterm Paper 1<sup>st</sup> DRAFT</li> </ul>
Week 8:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Career Lifeline</i></li> <li>◆ <i>Vision Statement</i></li> <li>◆ <i>Goal Map and Next Steps Reflective Writing</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Obituary</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Internship Printout and Statement about using the position to create future opportunities</li> </ul>
Week 9:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Creating a Résumé and Cover Letter</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Résumé and Cover Letter</b></li> <li>◆ <b>Oral Presentation Instructions</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Midterm Paper: Final Draft</li> <li>◆ Obituary</li> </ul>
Week 10:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>15 Step Plan</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Résumé and Cover Letter for Internship</li> </ul>
Week 11:	<i>Meet in Exploratory Transfer &amp; Career Services Center</i>	
Week 12:	<i>Time off for Individual Exploration &amp; Preparing Presentations</i>	
Week 13:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Oral Presentations</i></li> <li>◆ <b>Portfolio &amp; Final Paper</b></li> </ul>	
Week 14:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Oral Presentations</i></li> </ul>	
Week 15:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <i>Oral Presentations</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Portfolio &amp; Final Paper</li> </ul>

effectively engage in the processes of career exploration and planning. In an age where young people are often bombarded with information and overwhelmed by information overload, developing a subjective career that can aid in efficiently identifying and sifting through relevant and irrelevant career information is essential. Moreover, the "Orientation to Self and Career" course attends to the four major sources of efficacy found in Bandura's social cognitive theory—performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, anxiety management, and encouragement (Betz & Vuyten, 1997)—through (a) life story writing focused on student achievements across the life span, (b) interpersonal sharing and learning through class discussion and oral presentations, (c) ice-breakers, play, relaxation and fantasy exercises that facilitate comfort and rapport in the classroom, and (d) instructor feedback, group cohesion, and positive relationships among peers.

Another reason the course seems to have potential to yield positive outcomes may be that rather than starting with action, it begins with contemplation; the curriculum takes into account the five-stage transtheoretical model of change, involving pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). Given the findings in one outcome study including a comparison group (Grier-Reed et al., 2009) where students who enrolled in the constructivist career course started with significantly lower levels of career decision self-efficacy and certainty and significantly higher levels of vocational indecision than their counterparts, we believe that students who register for "Orientation to Self and Career" tend to be beyond the pre-contemplation stage, recognizing that there is a problem even if they are not yet sure of the steps to rectify it. This course, therefore, begins with contemplation by orienting students to the past and present. It then moves to preparation by helping students construct the future. Modules 1 and 2 focus on the contemplation and preparation stages of change, and module 3 moves to action where students are expected to act on the insights gained and constructions of the future developed and to present their knowledge and actions through individual oral presentations. The oral presentations further push students to attend to maintenance by discussing how they will continue to make progress on their career paths after the course has ended (e.g. who they will meet, who they will talk to, the opportunities they will take advantage of, and the courses they will enroll in).

Finally, we believe the effectiveness of the course lies in its theoretical underpinnings. With an integrative approach to constructivism including trait/factor and developmental perspectives, the "Orientation to Self and Career" course has a sound theoretical foundation for developing students' self-concept and subjective career. With a focus on career as self-realization, growing experiences, and context conceptualization, "Orientation to Self and Career" starts with a question of central interest and importance to most college students—the question of identity (i.e. Who are you? Where do you come from? How has your past shaped who you are now?). The course then integrates constructivist educational practices and constructivist career tools to quickly and actively engage students in the process of self-exploration. As students explore their subjective realities and lived experience, they can make meaning of how personal identity is influencing their career

paths. Thus, rather than looking at career through dispassionate, objective lenses, students can develop and extend a subjective career based in their identities, values, and aspirations. Furthermore, using personal history as the cornerstone for constructing the present and future sense of self not only renders the career course more personal, meaningful, and connected to the self-concept, but also provides students with the tools to narrate the subjective career in their own words. The result: students are empowered as their career decision self-efficacy significantly increases and their dysfunctional, self-defeating career thoughts significantly decrease (Grier-Reed et al., 2009).

### Conclusion

In the current post-industrial age where change and uncertainty are hallmarks of the time, young adults need to feel empowered to construct their lives and forge their career paths. The constructivist career development course presented in this current paper shows the potential to empower young people (Grier-Reed & Skaar, in press; Grier-Reed et al., in press; Grier-Reed et al., 2009), and constructivism has been linked to empowerment across a number of fields (Gray, 1997 ; Greene, Lee, & Hoffpauir, 2005; Hoskins, 1995; Larochelle et al., 1998; Lee, 2001; Kiraly, 2000; Weissglass, 1990). In an era where "careers are forged, not foretold" (Watts, 1996, p. 46), empowering young people to make the shift toward self-efficacy and control of their career development is of utmost importance, and given the relative dearth of constructivist educational curricula for career development, we summarize the theory and practice of "Orientation to Self and Career" with hopes of inspiring greater future initiatives.

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