

## Phenomenological engagement as pedagogical impetus in career counselling education

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*(Submitted: 6 March 2024; Accepted: 17 July 2024)*

### Abstract

This article aims to present the author's understanding of how a phenomenologically concerned pedagogy can offer an antidote to the influence that a post-industrial consumerist culture has on career counselling education. In the age of mediatization, surges of endless commercialisation and consumption has evolved in a crisis of relationality, characterised by ecological fragmentation and disconnectedness. The present article explains how an overly utilitarian mindset reinforces an instrumentalist approach to career counselling, inhibiting student educational psychologists' capacity for being conscious of the embodied lifeworld situation of a person engaging in career counselling. The embodied lifeworld situation refers to an ecologically integrated person reality, intricately anchored in time, space, and historicity. A pedagogical approach is needed that forefronts phenomenological engagement – relational being and knowing – as a way of conserving students' ability for embodied consciousness.

**Keywords:** career counselling education, consumerist mindset, embodiment, instrumentalism, phenomenological engagement

### Introduction

The ecological crisis that all disciplines, including career counselling education, is experiencing can be understood against the global backdrop of the Capitalocene (Arons, 2023; Moore, 2017, 2018) that describes the rapid modification of the natural environment, such as increased climate change, plastic pollution, and loss of biodiversity, resulting from an imperialist system of power fixated with endless production and destructive consumption. Vetlesen points out that the loss of natural diversity is interwoven with cultural diversity (2015: 3). Since a capitalist outlook on life, characterised by narcissistic entitlement and consumer greed, undermines an embodied, relational way of being, relationships are merely geared towards human-centred ends. The result is that individuals become alienated from themselves, their communities, and the more-than-human world (Morse & Blenkinsop, 2021: 197). In an increasingly consumerist society, there is a strong push toward acquisition and competition, almost always at the expense of relationality,



personal growth and a sense of community. The egocentric attitude of humans who consider themselves independent from the larger cosmic context is not to be denied. It is this Cartesian fulcrum of human exceptionalism on which ecologically disconnected career counselling rests. A separation ideology of this kind firmly cemented the notion of humankind positioning itself in the centre of the world (Biesta, 2022: 327). Despite progressive theoretical strides within career psychology focusing on an environmentally responsive and contextually sensitive approach to career counselling since the middle of the twenty-first century (Maree, 2020; Robertson, et al., 2021), the field cannot deny the influence of modern-day consumerism. For example, it could be argued that contemporary career counselling discourse is in danger of leaning towards a simplistic instrumentalist narrative of efficiency, employability and skills acquisition. This is especially noticeable in the mechanistic language use that is frequently associated with predominantly individualist career counselling, such as '(rational, linear) career choice', 'receiving training', 'acquiring skills', 'invest in your future' which in turn stifles a sustainably just, relational-centred discourse (Barter, 2023: 3), thus, an ecologically conscious approach to career counselling. An instrumentalist approach to career counselling almost exclusively focuses on testing people and matching their profiles to fixed work environments with the ultimate aim of absorption into the market system of paid work (Duffy, et al., 2023; Maree, 2024). Furthermore, within an instrumentalist approach, career development is mainly being viewed as a single, independent domain reflecting a hierarchical and planned series of jobs that are thoughtfully selected (Guichard, 2022). An integrative approach to career counselling, on the other hand, views career development as a part of a larger, interweaved life domain, consisting of intricately entwined personal and environmental related considerations. Since the development of career psychology is characterised by the embeddedness turn, subsequently moving from a matching perspective to an integrative perspective, career counselling education offers a suitable platform to explore the phenomenologist idea of embodiment consciousness. Such a phenomenological oriented pedagogy gives primacy to an interconnected and shared-planet reality, where the focus is on the intrinsic value of life, work and relationships as opposed to their being resources or commodities to be consumed. To stimulate such phenomenological engagement through career counselling education, career psychology theory needs to be taught as embodied knowing: the person (or career counselling client) *is* theory. The deliberate inclusion of phenomenology, specifically by way of the components of *Verflechtungen* (Husserl, 1931/2012) and *Einführung* (Vischer, 1873/1994), as part of career counselling education promote a deepened understanding of embodied consciousness. A phenomenologically oriented pedagogy could furthermore act as a response to the global ecological crisis, promoting career development as belonging to the essence of the lifeworld reality and not a mere consumerist construct geared towards instrumentalist ends. Before explaining the role of career counselling education in restoring a much-needed relational approach, an understanding of the current societal turn, characterised by ecological fragmentation and disintegration, as well as how it relates to the discipline of psychology in general, is required.

### **Informatisation of intricate human lifeworld realities**

Recently there has been a surge in influential scholarly writings about the current societal turn, which can be described as a transition from the industrial age of accelerated development, opportunities and growth to the mediatisation age of ecological fragmentation and disintegration. The post-industrial world, characterised by massive digital data analyses for commercial purposes, seems to find itself in an ecological crisis a state of disconnect and fragmentation. As present generations are born into a digitalised and social media world permeated with frenzied marketing, information, and communication, these digital natives (generations growing up with the internet) are socialised from the very earliest years of infancy into a consumerist system in which the worth of anything is determined in terms of its commodification (Alexander, 2004; Barter, 2023; Chistyakov, 2021).

In his publication, *Undinge* (which can be translated into English as *Non-things*), notable philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2022b) argues that the order of tangible objects of meaning, which contributed to the deeply human need for psychological grounding and substantiality, is rapidly being displaced by the digital order, favouring mainly the amassing of data and information, leaving humans disembodied, ecologically disconnected. In the same vein, the novelist Michel Houellebecq critically dissects the role of mass media in society's blind pursuit of modern desires of convenience in *Anéantir* (annihilate, destroy) (Roussouw, 2023). Mediatisation occurs when the digital-information regime charmingly manipulates society with the allure of alleged enhancement, while all the time stripping away its autonomy almost imperceptibly. According to the philosopher and cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han (in Morgan, 2023), mediatisation constitutes a lifeform, a particular reality in which the real, or that which is authentic, is turned into the artificial: communication without community, collecting information without gaining insight, accumulating followers without encountering others. Unequivocally foregrounded is the informatisation of primordially sacred human lifeworlds composed of indigeneity, rituals, and community. Since these experiences signify 'human modes of being' (Morgan, 2023: 315), the fleeting nature of information consumption deprives humans of experiences traditionally characterised by embodied consciousness anchored in time, space and historicity. In addition, through the prism of fiction, literary novelists like Michel Houellebecq (in *Anéantir*, 2022) and Aldous Huxley (in *Brave New World*, 1932/2022) trenchantly show how the seductive power of informatisation and commercialisation, by way of the biotechnology revolution and accompanying pharmaceutical marketing, conspicuously spawns an uncritical adoration of medicine in pursuit of superficial satisfaction and self-improvement.

For many decades, most knowledge inquiry was underpinned by a mechanistic worldview characterised by fragmented knowing which resulted in the creation of human/non-human and mind/body binaries (Heft, 2012; Van Heerzik & Brymer, 2018; Wiggins & Cromdal, 2020). The prevailing subject-object distinction in social sciences has perhaps worsened with the medicalisation of deeply human conditions over the last few decades. The term 'medicalisation' implies 'a process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorder' (Conrad, 2007: 4). The broader disciplines of

psychology and psychiatry have increasingly bought into a consumerist culture where complex human needs and psychological experiences are reduced to a mere striving towards positivity and prosperity. I share the concern of scholars in both the health disciplines and the humanities about the way contemporary society narrowly views mental health as the absence of illnesses and disorders. Furthermore, such a simplistic view medicalises ordinary human emotional discontent, such as disappointment, grief, loneliness, sadness, and anxiety as disorders, an unfortunate illness of the brain that mainly needs to be treated with medications. As Ağır writes: 'The happiness of the citizens in the World State is purchased at the expense of losing the traditional qualities of being a human including all passions and pains, natural processes of life, and dignity' (2022: 158). In consideration of the current societal turn, there seems to be a lack of proper contemplation of the intricate way human systems and the more-than-human world are woven into each other to create an interconnected lifeworld condition. The world-renowned mental health care scholar and psychiatrist Vikram Patel (2014, 2020) has pointed out that the medicalisation of ordinary psychological discontent as a key part of humanity minimises the role that the deeply human longing for caring relationships and planetary connectedness, compared to relationships as resources (a mere means to achieve human ends), plays in people's wellbeing.

Han (2020) suggests that within a neoliberalist regime reality is mainly perceived in terms of short-lived information, as opposed to interpreted experience. He writes about the replacement of time-consuming practices such as experience, memory, perception, loyalty, commitment, and responsibility with a constant stream of ephemeral information. This kind of 'serial perception', according to Han, 'rushes from one piece of information to the next, from one experience to the next, from one sensation to the next, without ever coming to closure' (2020: 7). One could therefore propose that the teaching and training of student educational psychologists should aim to critique the informatisation of human life as a form of neoliberal domination. A neoliberal regime is characterised by the exploitation of ordinary human fears and insecurities, such as anxiety or uncertainty, in seducing people with the allure of bettered performance, efficiency and convenience. In *Burnout Society*, Han describes the positivity-driven society as follows: 'Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. Also, its inhabitants are no longer "obedience-subjects" but "achievement-subjects"' (2015: 8). In a predominantly achievement-oriented society, career counselling as a practice should guard against viewing a person's career-lifeworld mainly as an entrepreneurial *project* in need of strategic *design*. Packaging the understanding of a person's career-lifeworld – a significant part of what it means to live and develop as a human – as a mere means to achieve satisfaction and optimisation causes the process of sensemaking of the complexity of someone's career-lifeworld to recede into the background.

In the absence of trenchant critique, the professional practice of career counselling will increasingly find itself amidst a neoliberal supremacy littered with a materialist perspective towards career development. Masqueraded as sentimental positivity and superficial fulfilment, career counselling faces the danger of being conceived as a commodity, marketed mainly in terms of a few disconnected and overly factors such as aptitude, personality, interests, and values.

Guichard (2018, 2020) makes a timely plea for career counselling interventions to have at its heart the fostering of ecologically sustainable lifeworld realities of all humans and not only the inclusion of some individuals in existing systems of paid work. He argues that career counselling interventions underpinned by values of ecological sustainability, such as social fairness and dignity, guide individuals to ask, *What can I do to contribute with others to a collective life that is good and just?* (2022: 583). I believe that contemporary concerns, such as the present-day ecological crises, medicalisation and depersonalisation of human conditions, as highlighted by eminent intellectuals such as Guichard (2018, 2020, 2022), Han (2022a & b), and Patel (2014), should also be the concern of lecturers who train student educational psychologists. To deny the influence of an information- and data-dominated era on disciplines such as psychology in general and educational psychology more specifically, would be foolish.

It is suggested that in the context of an increasing influence that consumerist culture has on career counselling education, arises the need for the cultivation of student educational psychologists' sense of eco-responsibility. To achieve this, a shift must be made from an overly instrumentalist career counselling education toward teaching with ecological integrity in mind.

In promoting such a mindset, student educational psychologists may become better capacitated to support people in experiencing career development as belonging to the essence of an ecologically integrated, meaningful lifeworld existence: thus, work as embedded in broader socio-personal realities, as well as a more-than-human world. Consequently, career development is understood as a way of being in the world without being in the centre of the world.

An ecologically integrated lifeworld aligns with philosopher and poet Jan Zwicky's plea for an orientation that ethically engages with the more-than-human world (in Acker, 2021: 23). Zwicky (2003, 2011) describes such an orientation as a particular gestalt experience, perceiving the world attentively and in a direct, unhindered way as ecologically coherent. Zwicky's description echoes the phenomenological notion of embodiment, an existential awareness of 'being-in-the-world' (Husserl, 1931/2012; Moran, 2000), which is at the core of my articulation of career counselling education as a philosophical act. Ideally, and as a critique to neoliberal consumptive ways of *desiring*, our teaching should be the emblem of phenomenological engagement, therefore underlining and valuing relational *being* in the world. The brought-on loss of an embodied, gestalt experience due to a dominating consumerist mindset can be recovered. Such a return to a more ecological perspective will, however, require a philosophical act – an intentional concern with one's teaching and what it perpetuates. I shall now, therefore, explain my teaching of student educational psychologists as a philosophical act or phenomenological engagement, geared towards relationality and embodied consciousness.

### **Teaching student educational psychologists as a philosophical act**

In the summer of 2003, a special issue of *Educational Psychologist* was dedicated to the philosophical roots of educational psychology. In this series of contributions, spearheaded by renowned educational psychologist and disciplinary scholar, Karen Murphy, an eloquent plea was

made to the educational psychology community to rekindle appreciation of the discipline's philosophical heritage. The estrangement between philosophy and educational psychology is often noticeable in the undernourished module offering at universities across the world dealing with the genesis of educational psychology (Murphy, 2003: 137). Concern was expressed by the group of authors that the positivist allure of the behaviourist and cognitive revolutions has led to an overly pragmatic approach to educational psychology, which began to take precedence during the middle of the twentieth century (Rosiek, 2003: 165). This apprehension is not to disregard educational psychology's appreciation of the pragmatic tradition, and rightfully so, as set out in the body of work ranging from Peirce to Dewey and James to Royce (Murphy, 2003). It is by way of the pragmatic tradition that psychology could be positioned as a rigorous philosophic method of intellectual inquiry, exploring hypotheses and evaluating alternatives (Alexander, 2003). It becomes problematic and worthy of critique when the complexity of being human in a more-than-human world is whittled down to fragmented phenomena, diagnoses, and behaviour. This is not to say that these aspects of educational psychology are not without value; that is, identifying symptoms, making diagnoses and recommending interventions. However, an excessive focus on these aspects poses the danger of reducing the complexity of human living into mere codes, checklists, and concessions.

At its core, psychology as a field and profession deals with the exploration and better understanding of the dilemma of beingness and becoming. Emmy van Deurzen and Martin Adams, known for their work in the field of existential psychology, describe the human condition as a constant field of tension between opposites – to oscillate between certainty and uncertainty, intimacy and loneliness, sorrow and joy, fulfilment and loss, life and death (2011). Too often, however, the essence of psychology is related to a one-sided assessment (technocratic, utility driven) of the human complexity mainly in terms of symptomatic, psychological, social, or behavioural characteristics (Van Deurzen & Adams, 2011: 8). It can rightly be asked what could have given rise to this, often functionalist, view of psychology and perhaps even the health professions in general. Possible influences include a reductionist application of checklists of symptoms, diagnostic criteria, and behavioural interventions in mental health. Professional training programmes that do not include philosophy as a key area of education may contribute to students not being accustomed to philosophically considering the phenomenological nature of a referral reason or clinical observation. The increasing marketability of normal responses to adversity (such as disappointment, loss, uncertainty) or being merely troubled as pathological phenomena that should ideally be treated pharmacologically (Gardner, 2016: 89) further contribute to a parochial view of the complexity of living. Mental health does not imply an absence of psychic discontent. Being merely troubled or experiencing intense sadness because of, for example loss, or other forms of adversity, is not necessarily a sign of depression. A philosophically oriented approach guards against reducing psychologically complex human experiences to isolated, often measurable components, which become disconnected from deeply human phenomena. What is thus implied is a phenomenological engagement highlighting the tenderness of the lifeworld reality as a critique of an often myopic, medicalised outlook.

### **The phenomenological attitude as antidote to instrumentalism**

One of the central concepts of the phenomenological attitude is concerned involvement, referring to a meaning-oriented perspective, thus the existential mattering or significance of how people are involved and experience the world. Such a viewpoint is based on the seminal writings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1995) and leading scholars in the field of Heideggerian thought analysis (Dreyfus, 2014; Wrathall, 2013). As explained by Yanchar (2021), concerned involvement denotes existential engagement in practices of everyday life – the whole spectrum of interactions, practices, and relations. Existential concern, therefore, has to do with ‘how people fundamentally exist in the world’ as opposed to a ‘transitory mood state’ (Yanchar, 2021: 28). In this hermeneutic-phenomenological sense, being concerned about that which matters, has to do with a person’s approach to existence.

Prioritising the phenomenological attitude can act as a counterpart to an often-dominant instrumentalist position that regards psychology merely as a transactional instrument for the delivery of diagnoses, recommendations and interventions. Instrumentalism prevails within the broader context of education, including psychology, and is perhaps most observable in the consumerist language being used in educational settings such as knowledge economies, achievement, attainment of predetermined outcomes, acquisition of skills and knowledge, and career choice. Shifted gears towards a predominantly mechanistic and utilitarian orientation within mental health becomes evident when methods and procedures, concepts, and labels gain privilege over the phenomenological attitude, that is conscious engagement. And since conscious engagement denotes a particular philosophical disposition, expressing apprehension by scholars and practitioners about the influence of an overly pragmatic orientation can lead educational psychology to be ‘mesmerized by the demanding quest for right answers’ (McDermott, 2003: 133). The phenomenological attitude is characterised by intentionality and receptivity, as opposed to the mere registering of sensory observations. Such phenomenological meaning-making urges educational psychology students to ask, ‘*What is happening here?*’ rather than the pragmatic question of, ‘*What can I do about it?*’ Suddenly a shift in consciousness becomes possible, moving from a predominantly instrumentalist (*acting on*) focus to *embodied undergoing* – a more unified experience of the greater, ecological situatedness of a particular client lifeworld reality. I explain this by turning to my teaching of career counselling education to student educational psychologists.

### **Career counselling education as vehicle for facilitating the phenomenological attitude**

Career counselling education forms part of the master’s in educational psychology degree, offered at a university in South Africa. The primary purpose of this degree programme is to provide students with scholarly engagement in the discipline of educational psychology and with skills to enable them to practise as educational psychologists, after registration with the Professional Board for Psychology of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2019). The degree programme prides itself on offering a curriculum that is relevant to educational

psychology in the developing countries of the Global South, thus favouring a context-sensitive approach. Consequently, the programme has a strong focus on promoting students' understanding of psycho-educational development and support as meaningful participation within multiple, interdependent relations, as well as diverse socio-cultural communities and contexts, while being sensitive to indigenous experiences as ways of knowing about the world. Such an approach serves as a reflection of the hermeneutic-phenomenological account that has to do with how people are meaningfully involved in and experience the world in knowing ways, as opposed to being strictly subjected to controlling, mechanistic forces. From this standpoint, people are meaningfully (consciously, knowingly) involved by virtue of being 'contextually-situated, fully-embodied participants, that is, as whole persons fundamentally existing in the world and not cognitively separated from it through the dualistic postulation of an internal mind filled with representations of an external world (e.g., schemas, scripts, semantic networks, etc.), or stated differently, an internal mind filled with knowledge of external objects and events' (Yanchar & Francis, 2022: 193-194). Curriculum from this perspective is primarily meaning-oriented, conceptualising psychological development, learning, and support in terms of strengthening people's ability to participate meaningfully in practices of everyday life. Such a meaning-oriented perspective is at the heart of my own teaching and pedagogical orientation, emphasising human experience as essentially hermeneutic-phenomenological, thus conscious engagement in a particular lifeworld reality situated in time, context, and historicity.

Career counselling education provides me with a platform to introduce student educational psychologists to the phenomenology of embodied consciousness, based on the work of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in Moran, 2013: 285-303). Embodied consciousness, as a particular philosophical orientation, refers to phenomenological engagement characterised by being intentionally receptive to the intertwinement of the bodily or physicality and subjectivity as a unified experience. Such a unified experience implies that the body is no longer *in* space or time; it rather *inhabits* these as transcendental situatedness – the lived body or the lived experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 2001). This interlocking nexus of intersubjectivity expresses an ontological relation or single stream of consciousness (Moran, 2013: 289). For Merleau-Ponty embodiment manifests itself culturally and symbolically, in language, myths, stories, and rituals (in Moran, 2013: 292). In the next section I shall explain how the phenomenology of embodiment is manifested as symbolic action.

### **The metaphorical as *Verflechtungen* and *Einfühlung***

A metaphor, as a property of language, is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two objects or experiences where the one is regarded as representative of the other. Thus, metaphors involve symbolic language in which an abstract or concealed idea is expressed as a sensory, concrete idea. In this article, however, I do not view metaphor as an exclusively linguistic characteristic, but rather focus on illuminating the role of metaphor in stimulating students' deepened understanding of embodied consciousness within the broader conception



of phenomenology. What follows is an articulation of the phenomenological function of metaphors.

The connection between metaphor and embodiment can be understood through Husserl's use of the term '*Verflechtungen*' (interwovenness), expressing the way human experience (being-in-the-world) and language are related and intertwined (Moran, 2013: 297). Hence, the lifeworld relationship is not an objective entity, but rather a subjective and relational enactment (imaginative involvement) anchored in structures of experience, such as language, place (internal, psychological experience and context), temporality (past, present, future) and historicity (events, relations). As Blumenberg puts it, there is no direct relation to 'reality'; the only reality we can know is one we have interpreted. Hence, 'the functional importance of symbols, myths, and metaphors' (in Pavesich, 2008: 432). Furthermore, the metaphorical process of meaning-making involves *Einfühlung*, or inner stimulation, characterised by being intentionally receptive to the connectedness of experience as opposed to inattentive, passive registration of external stimuli. *Einfühlung*, as first described by Robert Vischer (1873/1994), refers to the process of internal stimulation or imaginative projection – a 'feeling into' the world, as opposed to mere observation (in Curtis & Elliott, 2014). Essentially, that which is observed is internally imitated. This inherent, intricate neuronal mirroring system is the reason why humans spontaneously react, for example, empathically based on another's facial expression and body language. Humans have the potential, therefore, to project themselves into an event as if they are part of it. The phenomenological relevance of *Einfühlung* lies in the total absorption of an event and inhabiting the moment instead of consuming it as a mere means to an end. Tate describes such presence as that which 'interrupts our ordinary experience of "empty" time and opens us to another, more authentic experience of "fulfilled" time' (2012: 94). From a phenomenological perspective 'empty' refers to unintentional, mindless actions while 'fulfilled' signals the fullness of an experience, characterised by intentional receptiveness, involvement and deep immersion. In essence, the metaphorical as anthropological phenomenon of development constitutes the phenomenological, a Nietzschean foregrounding of the relational self as embodied being-in-the-world; an ontological self-making-in-a-situation (Daigle, 2021: 73-76). One could therefore say that the metaphorical as phenomenological disposition is characterised by an intentional openness to be concerned with interpreting and attributing meaning to existence.

In their classic work, *Metaphors we live by*, linguistic philosophers Lakoff and Johnson (1980) offer a compelling treatise on how the metaphorical process is central to human reasoning in that it structures our understanding of our experiences. Conceptual metaphor theory suggests that human beings have available to them an inherent symbol-making capacity characterised by automatic recognition of similarities and associations and transference of these across perceptual domains (Robert & Kelly, 2010). As human beings we therefore demonstrate a natural ability to respond to our worlds metaphorically, due to our primordial psychological need to comprehend experience in some coherent way. One could argue that based on this development principle, human beings are inherently phenomenological, since meaning becomes assigned to entangled and complex experiences of being-in-the-world. In addition, humans are evolutionary

predisposed to organising psychological experiences in certain universal ways. This inherited psychological content is called archetypes and always consists of two opposite, ambivalent aspects. Archetypes are often activated in times of psychological distress or uncertainty to bring balance, as the opposite psychological elements strive for integration and balance. It is therefore no surprise when most people who, for example, seek career counselling support, experience ambivalent feelings related to chaos and order. The significant developmental event, for example subject or career choice, has activated this particular archetype. As the human psyche strives towards integration and wholeness, it would be necessary to negotiate balance between extreme chaos, which could lead to paralysing anxiety on the one hand, and excessive order, which could result in rigidity on the other. Metaphoric symbols like the mandala serves as manifestation of this integration and has the ability to communicate the abstractness of human complexities and ambiguity far better than functional language, which is not descriptive enough to articulate the lifeworld reality in all its depth.

Metaphor as *Verflechtungen* recognises the important role symbolic language, cognition (association, organisation) and imagination play in making meaning of the lifeworld relationship. It is therefore suggested that the characteristics pertaining to embodied consciousness could serve as a foundation for authentic, nuanced client case conceptualisations as opposed to generalised and fragmented ones. The metaphorical or phenomenological attitude of *Einfühlung*, however, come under attack in a neoliberal, performative society driven by mediatisation and consumption. More and more people, sometimes including lecturers and students, uncritically embrace the zeitgeist which seductively manipulates them with the allure of efficiency, fulfilment, and positivity. Ironically this, according to Han (2015, 2020, 2022b), results in the greatest illness of our time, namely disconnectedness, which translates into depression. This continued separation from that which serves to ground humans leads to the replacement of values such as intimate community with shallow communication, encountering (to experience) with accumulation (consumption). I argue that the formulation of a client case conceptualisation is essentially a gestalt exercise in expressing the phenomenological situatedness or transcendent connectedness of a person's lifeworld (being-in-the-world). For students to understand the phenomenological nature of case conceptualisations, they first need to experience career psychology theory as embodied knowing.

### **Teaching career psychology theory as embodied knowing**

One of the major challenges in the training of career counsellors is to develop graduates' capacity for phenomenologically conscious engagement, which may manifest as a mechanistic utility lens to be matched objectively with a person's lifeworld reality. This challenge can partly be attributed to educational psychology maintaining a weak linkage to its philosophical roots. Furthermore, in a society increasingly dominated by digital informatisation and consumption, the danger exists that students could lose sight of the way our psychological experiences are embedded within our bodily grounding in the world. I sometimes observe this in my students' interpretation of career psychology theory. To help my students experience career psychology theory as enactment, as

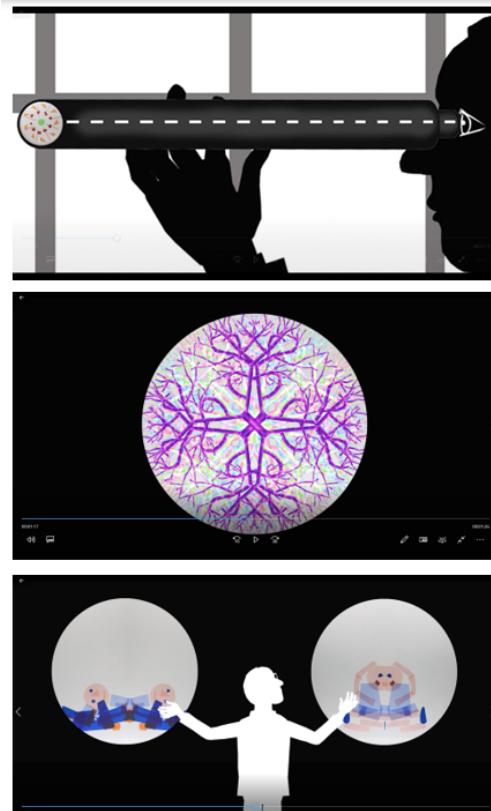
opposed to only viewing it as a disconnected entity which can be matched to psychological phenomena, I teach career psychology theory through the metaphoric process as a function of the phenomenological principle of embedded consciousness, thus suggesting being psychologically and mentally grounded in bodily or sensory experiences of meaning-making-in-a-situation (interconnectedness of the personal and circumstantial, the individual and the contextual).

Enacting metaphors helps my students to engage with career psychology theory in a more integrated way as opposed to viewing it as a static lens or separate entity to be matched with a client case. Enacting moves away from seeking objective congruence between theory and person, to rather using theory in dialogue to bring about deepened understanding of and insight into a person's work-life reality – recognising that human experience is naturally complex, interconnected, contextualised. Therefore, the person *is* the theory. I argue that the enacting metaphor is a natural carrier of the phenomenological attitude. The implication is that theory is not to be used as an objective tool, passively applied to case work, but rather an enactment of the phenomenological condition of embeddedness and relationality through discursive practices (Wiggins & Cromdal, 2020). As part of a recent project that also served as an example of helping students in practising a phenomenological mindset, students were asked to create client-friendly metaphors reflecting the process of career development and counselling by way of relatable (tangible) symbols. The result was not only limited to a helpful career counselling tool, but also served to promote students' understanding of the phenomenology of embodiment. The project culminated in the animated metaphor, *Kaleidoscope*, a digital tool that can be used during teaching and training, as well as by psychology practitioners doing career counselling (see Figure 1 below). It is available in isiXhosa, English and two varieties of Afrikaans<sup>1</sup>.

The career counselling education curriculum that I teach entails a broad overview of the diverse theory base of career psychology theory. My teaching and training of student educational psychologists in career counselling sets out to instil a critical awareness of how career psychology theory has evolved from an almost single focus on professional career development in the market context to capturing a fuller scope of work experiences of all individuals who work and want to work, including caregiving work, volunteer work, and cleaning, as well as the unemployed and those with little choice. The psychology of working as a more inclusive perspective of the working life of an individual has developed as a critique to the traditional, limiting view of career psychology in terms of predictable, hierarchical career development and once-off career choices. In his treatise, *The Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Working*, Blustein (2014: 4-13) describes the psychology-of-working as an emerging perspective, foregrounding certain marginalised aspects. These include 'a fuller scope of [work] activities in both the market and caregiving contexts' (Blustein, 2014: 10), the interconnectedness of multiple life roles, work as well as nonwork experiences, as opposed to viewing it as separate, independent domains and

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<sup>1</sup> View and listen to the [isiXhosa](https://youtu.be/BKA3CpzPxvM) (<https://youtu.be/BKA3CpzPxvM>) and [Kaaps](https://youtu.be/6SHKxmMHNps) (<https://youtu.be/6SHKxmMHNps>) versions of *Kaleidoscope*.



**Figure 1** Screenshots from *Kaleidoscope*

inclusion of 'the entire array of people seeking meaningful and dignified work' (Blustein, 2014: 13), and not only the career development trajectories of the materially endowed – those characterised by having choice and volition related to their working lives. The psychology-of-working perspective treats the work-life reality of an individual as an essential part of human development, instead of something separate and limited to a once-off career choice. The psychology-of-working perspective should allow students, together with appropriate psychometric training and practice in the field, to perform theoretically integrative career counselling. The aim of integrative career counselling is to promote sustainable human development, or in other words to support all human beings in experiencing their work-life realities as dignified and meaningful.

The psychology-of-working perspective reflects a significant turn in the evolution of career development theory, characterised by an altogether embedded, embodied, enactive and ecological perspective. The transitioning from a predominant sensitivity to the universal (that which is objectively measured) to a sensitivity to the particular (that which is subjective, personal, and indigenous) has been widely acknowledged by scholars who are concerned with the diverse theory base of work psychology over the last 25-30 years (Blustein, 2014; Duffy, et al., 2023). For students to understand the interwovenness of the psychology-of-working perspective, they ideally need to have insight into the phenomenological principle of relationality. Career psychology curriculum should therefore enable student educational psychologists to develop an

embodied consciousness mindset that is sensitive to the subjective interdimensional matrix of people's life experiences – life experiences comprising relationships, historicity, developmentally related cornerstones such as personal values, personality preferences, interests and aptitudes, social and economic barriers to a dignified life, life roles and circumstances, intergenerational influences, unpredictable occurrences, losses, disappointments, as well as dreams and ideals (Moran, 2013).

One of the key competencies to be developed as an educational psychologist doing career counselling is the ability to formulate an integrated, theory-based case conceptualisation. A case conceptualisation refers to a contextually sensitive person-situation view, inclusive of the client's integrated lifeworld experiences, needs and preferences, strengths, affordances, themes, hopes and ideals across time. The term 'case conceptualisation' generally refers to the process of evaluating, assessing, and synthesising the totality of clients' presenting challenges and case histories while looking for emergent patterns (Schwitzer & Rubin, 2012; Sperry & Sperry, 2020). The resulting, unique synthesis of information is then used to decide upon an intervention or support plan for clients. The effectiveness of a support plan aimed at helping a client make progress towards reaching therapeutic outcomes is largely related to the thoroughness, or quality, of case conceptualisations (Eells, et al., 2005; Padesky, 2020).

For students to be able to offer richly nuanced client case conceptualisations, they need to develop an integrated theoretical frame of reference, reflective of the diverse theory base of career psychology. Authors have argued that the role of career psychology theory is to inform practitioners' understanding and guidance of the intricate intersection of a person's career developmental concerns and transitions, including multiple systemic influences, relations and processes (Matthews, 2017; Parker-Bell & Osborn, 2023). Theory, accordingly, assists student educational psychologists in becoming systemic in the way they build up an integrated image of a client's lifeworld (embedded) reality, consisting of intricately interwoven biological, psychological and social events, experiences and influences over time. In addition, theories provide students with a set of questions they can ask in an attempt to understand a particular lifeworld reality more fully. Thus, theory stops us from missing things because we forget to ask about it. It is further suggested that having solid theoretical knowledge, a student can appropriately frame typical client conversation questions in promoting thoughtful case conceptualisation – for example, by using the chaos theory of careers to prompt reformulation of the client's question '*I do not know what to do?*' (client assuming that there is only career, job, plan) to '*What can happen next for me/How can I possibly act on it?*' Or employing social cognitive theory (focussing on vicarious learning): '*What have you learned to do while spending time with family/friends / teachers?*' instead of '*What are your skills?*' It is suggested that a comprehensive career psychology theory background can capacitate a student in formulating an integrative, nuanced and empathic case conceptualisation of a person's phenomenology or lifeworld reality (being-in-the-world). My students are exposed to a wide spectrum of career psychology theories, ranging from traditional to more contemporary theories, with a strong focus

on contextually integrative, personally meaningful, socially just and environmentally sustainable theoretical frameworks.

Critical insight into career psychology theory assists student educational psychologists in formulating a set of conversational questions they can use together with their clients to make sense and thoughtfully create an image of people's lifeworld realities. Accordingly, the attentive formulation of such career development related questions assists in promoting intentional case conceptualisation reflective of the various embedded influences, relations and processes which contribute to a person's lifeworld reality. Table 1 below provides an extract of a career development conversation tool. It demonstrates how questions aimed at case conceptualisation transpire from various career psychology theories, as well as how aspects of lifeworld reality are wrapped up in it.

**Table 1** Extract of a career development conversation tool

<b>Client conversation question</b>	<b>Mirrored career psychology theory (Blustein, 2014; Lent and Brown, 2013; Parker-Bell and Osborn, 2023; Savickas, 2019)</b>	<b>Aspect of lifeworld reality to be explored by student psychologist</b>
<p><b>How will you describe your current/previous situation?</b></p> <p><b>What about the world in which you live, concerns you?</b></p> <p><b>What is the experience of ...?</b></p>	Narrative approach: Developing stories (meaning-making) about current life-career development concerns, transitions and events	Understanding present career development experiences, for example challenges, transitions and considering alternatives, awareness of environmental interactions
<p><b>What does that mean to you?</b></p>	Career Construction Theory (CCT): Constructing enabling views of self, roles and settings	Supporting client to articulate a stable, albeit adaptable, identity (view of self)
<p><b>How did it get this way?</b></p> <p><b>What happened for the situation to exist?</b></p>	Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (STF): Considering systems of influence from past to present – identifying themes and patterns Psychology of Working Theory: Role of low levels of free choice, social class, poverty, marginalised identities in career fulfilment	Reflecting on how the intersectionality of personal and contextual influences shape and/or constrain the client's current life-career development experience across time Personal influences include for example health, gender, race, ethnicity, predispositions, skills, abilities, personality preferences, metacognition, self-knowledge, self-concept and values. Socio-environmental influences include for example geographical location,

Client conversation question	Mirrored career psychology theory (Blustein, 2014; Lent and Brown, 2013; Parker-Bell and Osborn, 2023; Savickas, 2019)	Aspect of lifeworld reality to be explored by student psychologist
		membership in different groups and communities, education institutions, workplace, societal/ideological discourse, political climate, socio-economic status and the employment market.
Who else was or is currently involved?	Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (STF): Considering client's membership in different groups and communities	Exploring quality of relationships, identifying possible resources, support
<p>What is it like to be a male child / female child / queer child / adolescent in your family or community?</p> <p>What competencies have you gained growing up in your family, community groups, and education institutions?</p>	Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): Self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations impact goal setting. Additionally, exposure, availability of learning opportunities, encouragement by others is believed to enhance realistic decision-making, competency and establish interests.	Identifying strengths, self-efficacy beliefs, and exploring the nature and/or quality of exposure and encouragement (reinforcement) by others
<p>What do you value in most situations?</p> <p>What do you need to fully engage in activities?</p>	Career Construction Theory (CCT): Emphasising how motivation, needs, beliefs, personality shape identity and career decision-making	Identifying priorities (for example life roles, personal values), possible career interests
<p>What can possibly happen next for you?</p> <p>How can you possibly act on it?</p>	<p>Narrative framework: Developing a future-oriented story (client agency)</p> <p>Happenstance Learning Theory: Emphasising active engagement to increase self-knowledge and world of work knowledge (options)</p>	Action-taking, decision-making, creating unexpected career opportunities (chance events)

It is apparent from the above integrated career development conversation tool that developing a deepened understanding of people's lifeworld realities depends on theoretically informed exploration and analysis of the relationality of clients' career development experiences.

It can therefore be deduced that the formulation of a high-quality case conceptualisation is a key competency in the professional development of student educational psychologists who practise career counselling. The significance of the exemplar conversational questions firstly lies in the formulation thereof, as they should ideally 'comprise an element of wonder: discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary, the strange in the taken for granted' (Van Manen, 2014: 15). The student educational psychologist asking such carefully crafted questions employs the phenomenological attitude or disposition characterised by a conscious awareness of 'the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualise, categorise, or reflect on it' (Van Manen, 2017: 2). Secondly, questions functioning as a dialogical aid during career counselling have the potential to cultivate students' awareness of the lifeworld reality of the client as an embedded or unified consciousness.

The embodiment thesis, as previously explained, suggests that mental schema such as conceptualisation and reflection are grounded in existential experiences of relation, time, place and body, thus lived perception of being in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 2001). Guiding my students in viewing these questions not as highly controlled, typical interview questions, but as phenomenological questions anchored in time, place and relation, I facilitate opportunities for aesthetic experience (Brinck, 2017). Such experiences are characterised by a sensuous, imaginative and subjective engagement, reflective of the attentive, phenomenological attitude. One such experiential opportunity is to ask student educational psychologists to use the questions they have crafted in improvised scenarios. As part of the enactment, I want them to become consciously aware of what the words feel like in their mouths and sound like in their ears, thus inhabiting the experience. To help them replace deliberate control of the situation with deliberate attentiveness, I ask them to respond with saying what they feel and hear (direct encounter), and not what they think they feel and hear (interpretation). By including enactment exercises in my teaching and training, I attempt to facilitate the phenomenology of *Einfühlung*, the act of 'feeling into' a phenomenon, and *Verflechtungen*, the interwovenness of various layers of the inhabited (lived) experience.

To help my students experience theory, as opposed to only studying theory as if it is a disconnected entity which can be matched to a case, I invite them to make use of enacted, experiential learning, thus inhabiting theory as opposed to fitting or matching theory to a case. Below is an example of a classroom activity inspired by the embodiment thesis of being psychologically and mentally grounded in bodily or sensory experiences of being in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 2001): '*If you had to **express** a particular career development theory in any of a variety of mediums, such as a **story, poem, collage, drawing, action or dramatised improvisation**, what would it **look, sound, and feel** like? Please **perform** and describe your creation to the rest of the class.*' The bold words in the above task are significant because they allude to enactment and embodiment as part of a phenomenological attitude or aesthetic consciousness, which I wish to facilitate with my students. An example of a phenomenologically embodied performance is the action of knitting with blended yarn, to illustrate the focus of Career Construction Theory (CTC) as developed by Savickas (2019). In other words, the physical



enactment of constructing a unified narrative (knitted piece), emphasising the interrelatedness (blended colours of yarn) of various person characteristics, life circumstances and personal history, life roles and significant transitions, relationships, needs, challenges, environmental events and opportunities. The action of knitting becomes an enactment of a phenomenologically embodied whole, that is the weaving of intricately connected lifeworld parts, such as personal, situational and relational factors into an integrative and meaningful lifeworld reality.



**Figure 2** The action of knitting as enactment of phenomenological embodiment

Metaphor, or symbolism, as a natural carrier of the phenomenology of embodiment allows my students to *inhabit* theory instead of studying it as separate, disembodied lenses.

### **Concluding thoughts**

I have highlighted through this article that the phenomenology of embodiment as pedagogical impetus is essential to conceptualising the lifeworld situation of a person engaging in career counselling. Phenomenology as epicentre offers a more connected knowing and being – thus relationality – within the world, and it is suggested to serve as a necessary pedagogical antidote to the dominant mechanistic and utilitarian status quo. To echo Morse and Blenkinsop: ‘The rapidly accelerating environmental and social crisis urgently demands a response from us all – and educationally this must include opportunities for being differently with oneself and in the world’ (2021: 207). Teaching career counselling to student educational psychologists as a philosophical act can stimulate a new awareness of desirable action to counteract the prevailing doctrine. In my argument, I have used career counselling as a vehicle to illustrate how the phenomenology of embodiment can be facilitated with the deliberate inclusion of enacted, experiential learning. In conclusion I submit that learning by enacting appears to promote my students’ capacity to articulate abstract career psychology theory as embodied knowing. Therefore, by purposefully including expressive learning activities characterised by a metaphoric process in my repertoire of teaching, I hope to stimulate and promote educational student psychologists’ understanding of career development as a meaningful work-life - a relationally embedded reality. Essentially, the phenomenology of embodiment presupposes a more consciousness-oriented psychology, characterised by ontological contemplation and the

metaphorical. Certainly, an intellectual ability that needs to be honed and protected against the technocratic materialism of mass psychology.

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### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Professor Liezel Frick and the reviewers for their constructive comments.

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