



Prompting reflection and learning in career construction counseling



Hazel Reid ^{a,*}, Jenny Bimrose ^b, Alan Brown ^b

^a Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU, UK

^b University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research, Coventry, CV4 7AL, England, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 February 2016

Received in revised form 5 June 2016

Accepted 27 July 2016

Keywords:

Narrative approaches

Career counseling

Constructionist

Qualitative research

Case study

Outcome analysis

ABSTRACT

Adopting the overall framework provided for an international inquiry into career counseling interventions, this article reports on a qualitative study into the efficacy of a relatively new approach to practice in England. Using career construction interviews as the counseling intervention, research involving two adult participants was undertaken. Interpersonal process recall (IPR) was used to explicate the perceptions and understandings of both the participants and the counselor in the process. Outcome analysis framed the approach used to making sense of the data collected. Two contrasting responses were immediately evident from participants in the counseling intervention: one positive and one negative. The use of the IPR process enabled an understanding of the value of a structured process of reflection.

Overall, the approach used was found to be of value to both participants, but in different ways.

Crown Copyright © 2016 Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The principle of public funding for career counseling and employment services in England, especially for young people, has been established through various iterations of legislation over decades (Peck, 2004). As with all publicly funded services, career counseling has become particularly vulnerable to spending cuts in times of labor market volatility, with the most recent period of global economic turbulence and austerity proving to be no exception (Roberts, 2013). Marshalling carefully constructed arguments that demonstrate the efficacy of careers support for clients, based on a sound evidence base of robust research, has become critical for safeguarding services for all clients in need but particularly those who can least afford to pay for access. Alongside the imperative for demonstrating the positive impact of services for clients beyond reasonable doubt, is the vital and urgent need for counseling professionals to stay abreast of the best and most innovative practices. One example relates to the integration of an understanding of context into career counseling.

Despite increased acknowledgement of the importance of the social and economic context to the delivery of effective careers counseling services that are meaningful to clients across their lifespan (Blustein, 1997, 2015; Richardson, 2012; Richardson & Schaeffer, 2013), evidence for the successful integration of theoretically informed frameworks that foreground context are scarce. Where new approaches have been developed (e.g., Savickas et al., 2009), what seems to be lacking are clear, robust, accessible and detailed accounts of how, exactly, these new approaches have been integrated into practice generically, particularly those that demonstrate benefits to clients. Experimenting with new approaches in practice is always challenging. Compared with the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hazel.reid@canterbury.ac.uk (H. Reid), jenny.bimrose@warwick.ac.uk (J. Bimrose), alan.brown@warwick.ac.uk (A. Brown).

need to secure the survival of services, theory, and research underpinning practice is always at risk of being marginalized (Reid & West, 2011).

In the UK, the professionalism of career counseling has come under significant pressure (Hughes, 2013; Mulvey, 2013), with questions about its positive impact raised by politicians and funders of careers support services. The recent failure of practitioners to integrate new approaches into practice has been attributed to the ‘technicizing’ of the career counseling sector, through the introduction of work-based qualifications that have resulted in a reduction in scope for professionalizing practice (Reid & West, 2011, p. 398). This process has exerted particular pressure on career counselors, who now also need to develop and deploy the types of coping strategies required by their clients, including career resilience and career adaptability (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012), to facilitate the construction of different occupational identities. The merit and importance of crafting different identities by clients has been discussed in relation to new approaches for practice (e.g., McMahon & Watson, 2013). This has relevance to all client age groups who are entering or navigating volatile labor markets.

Brown and Bimrose (2014) have drawn attention to the complementarity of a threefold representation of key factors influencing learning and identity development at work. The first representation, learning as becoming, views learning as a process of identity development. The second way relates to learning and identity development occurring across four domains of development: relational, cognitive, practical and emotional. Learning may involve development in one or more of these four developmental domains. The third way that learning and identity development at work can be represented acknowledges how learning takes place in the context of opportunity structures within which individuals operate.

The research inquiry presented in this article contributes to the existing evidence base, relating specifically to the efficacy of a career constructionist approach to career support for adults in England. It complements the other practice based, international research studies reported in the symposium by using a case study approach. A small scale, multi-perspective exploration of the value of the career construction interview (Savickas, 2011) was undertaken with two adult participants. A key feature of this study was the way in which the views of the client and the counselor on the value of the career counseling approach were compared with the judgement of an independent expert witness or third party.

2. The career construction approach to career counseling

Supporting individuals as they construct their career identity suggests a purposeful activity that places career into a life, rather than assuming that life must fit into a career. The term career biography, an individual's career story, may be a more preferable term to career identity as it appears less fixed. The related concept of *biographicity* (Alheit, 1995) has been used by Savickas (2011) in thinking about how individuals construct a career future. Biographicity can be thought of as the processes by which individuals reflect on new, and sometimes troubling, experiences, rethinking and absorbing them into their life story. A career construction approach for career counseling (and other narrative approaches) views the practitioner as someone who works ‘alongside a client, to explore their life themes in order to build biographicity’ (Reid, 2016, p. 106) for career construction. In recognizing that indecision, or what Cochran (1997) refers to as wavering, is often part of the process, the approach encourages biographic agency. It does this by reframing disruptions as transitions and turning points, highlighting the connection to the future that links with continuities from the past. New ideas, experiences and information can be built on existing knowledge in a way that has meaning for the individual: in other words, the client decides what is important, what to take forward and what can be left behind (Savickas, 2011).

The way an individual develops a career biography, or is constrained in the attempt, takes place in a social context, co-constructed with others. As discussed above, managing a career biography has become more unpredictable and uncertain, and has evolved into an expectation that the individual takes responsibility for their own career/work patterns. In many communities, within and beyond the UK, traditional structures of work across generations have been lost, due, in part, to globalization and neo-liberal economics. Biographical and narrative approaches in career counseling represent a move away from what was a dominant Western, scientific orientation of measuring traits, using objective psychological testing and matching these to relatively stable occupations; towards a greater focus on more subjective understandings of the meaning career plays within a life in a particular context. Contextual understanding is important to avoid the slide into psychological approaches that place responsibility for career decision making on the individual, as if the individual is always in control of their own future (Reid & West, 2016). The clients that seek career counseling experience various degrees of agency, or self-determination, within the social, economic, historical and cultural structures that affect their particular life chances.

If it is accepted that constructing a career biography is learning work and in current times not static, then the individual learns about self in a process of becoming, sometimes as active agent and at other times within structural forces beyond their control. At times of career transition and turning points, individuals may question and be troubled by perceptions of what constitutes their sense of who they are: biographies can get disrupted and de-storied. At such career transition points they can experience disturbance, particularly when decisions that affect their future have to be made. There may be numerous factors to consider, thus the ability to make choices independently is affected by a range of social, economic circumstances and cultural expectations. From this viewpoint the methods and approaches for career counseling interventions cannot be based solely on a psychology of the individual from the “inside out”, as it were, the “outside in” must also be attended to: hence the argument here is for a more *psychosocial* understanding that places such constructivist approaches within a social context (Reid, 2016, p. 105).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5035139>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5035139>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)