



Life Design Counseling outcome and process: A case study with an adolescent



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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the relationship between clients' narrative transformation and the promotion of vocational decidedness and career maturity in a mid-adolescent case of Life Design Counseling (LDC). To assess LDC outcomes the Vocational Certainty Scale and the Career Maturity Inventory – Form C were used before and after the intervention. To intensively analyze the process of LDC change two measures of narrative change were used: the Innovative Moments Coding System (IMCS), as a measure of innovation emergence, and the Return to the Problem Coding System (RPCS), as a measure of ambivalence towards change. The results show that the three LDC sessions produced a significant change in vocational certainty but not in career maturity. Findings confirm that the process of change, according to the IMCS, is similar to the one observed in previous studies with adults. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

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Life Design Counseling (LDC; Savickas, 2011a) is an approach to career counseling that supports clients in constructing a narrative of their past, present and future by providing a sense of continuity and coherence. In other words, it intends to facilitate the development of a narrative identity (McAdams, 1993). In this approach, career plans are integrated into the individual's psychosocial dynamics to become one of the dimensions in which the self is projected into the future.

Studies with adults receiving individual (Rehuss, Del Corso, Glavin, & Wykes, 2011) and group counseling (Di Fabio & Maree, 2011) have supported LDC's efficacy. In recent studies, an intensive analysis of the cases of a young adult (Cardoso, Silva, Gonçalves, & Duarte, 2014a) and an adult (Cardoso, Silva, Gonçalves, & Duarte, 2014b), using the Innovative Moments Model (IMM; Gonçalves, Matos, & Santos, 2009) illustrated the patterns of change promoted by LDC.

However, one may question whether the pattern of change in adolescents is similar to the one found in adults, as the capacity to elaborate mature autobiographic thought is gradually developed during adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985). The emergence of internal resources during this life period, such as cognitive abilities, contribute to this process by facilitating the awareness of causal links between biographical events and self and personal development, the ability to construct interconnected and globally coherent life narratives and the acquisition of cultural knowledge about normative aspects of life (Habermas, Ehlert-Lerche, & de Silveira, 2009). On the other hand, external factors, such as confronting developmental tasks (e.g., the need to commit to educational and vocational pursuits) motivate the construction of a global and coherent life story (Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1948).

Understanding the types of narrative elaboration that LDC can promote in adolescents may help practitioners adjust their interventions to clients' capacities and strengthen and enhance our knowledge of the process of change in LDC. Therefore, similar to

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previous studies (Cardoso et al., 2014a, 2014b), we have employed the IMM (Gonçalves et al., 2009) to analyze the patterns of change promoted by LDC in the case of a mid-adolescent female. The current study expands upon previous studies and evaluates not only the process but the efficacy of the intervention as well.

1. Life Design Counseling

Within the epistemological framework of social constructionism, LDC is an application of the Career Construction Theory (CCT; Savickas, 2013) to career counseling. With the goal of facilitating the construction of career plans through re-authoring narrative identity, the intervention begins with an exploration of the client's life story using the Career Construction Interview (CCI; Savickas, 2011a), which is a semi-structured interview in which a practitioner inquires about five topics that form life themes and can inform decision-making about the current transition. The topics are: (1) role models for self-construction; (2) magazines, television shows or websites for manifest interests, (3) a favorite story from a book or movie for creation of the script of the next episode; (4) sayings or mottos for advice to self; and (5) early recollections for perspective on the present problem or transition. In the second session, the counselor helps the client construct a narrative that creates coherence to the life episodes previously identified. In a meaning co-construction process, the client is helped to identify a life theme, namely the core problem in his or her life and the solutions he or she has sought to solve it (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979). The understanding of this thematic core is essential in enabling the client to construct a self-narrative endowed with continuity and coherence (Savickas, 2011a). As life themes in the vocational domain are expressed in relationships between needs, interests, and goals, the counselor's task is to support the client in elaborating on the episodes of his or her life story to create an understanding of the role of precociously structured needs (past) in the definition of goals and plans (future) that allow for the fulfillment of those needs. Clients are also helped to understand how their interests (present) are instrumental to the achievement of goals and, consequently, the fulfillment of needs (Savickas, 1995).

Finally, the third session of the intervention is focused on the establishment of connections between life themes and career plans. The construction of realistic plans, that are not limited to the role of worker, is facilitated. In this manner, more than a simple career plan is developed; the client constructs a true life project, as one may project solutions for the global theme or themes of one's life in several career roles (Savickas, 2013).

Throughout the three sessions the counselor provides a secure space in which clients are supported in the analysis of their subjective experience both to construct new meanings about themselves and to build new career intentions (Savickas, 2015).

Table 1

Examples of innovative moments regarding a dominant self-narrative underlying career decision-making problem of "valuing others".

Adapted from Gonçalves, Ribeiro, Mendes, et al., 2011.

Types of IM	Subtypes	Definition	Examples (Problematic narrative: valuing others)
Low level IMs (creating distance from the problem)	Action I	Performed and intended actions to overcome the problem	C: You know, I'm calling companies and sending my resume and all of that stuff.
	Reflection I	New understandings of the problem	C: I have all of these ideals and values that I like, and it's a matter of just bringing them and then making sure I incorporate them into my life.
	Protest I	Objecting to the problem and its assumptions	C: Right. I'm getting tired of that. T: And you're getting tired of it, and it's not an intriguing game; it's time for a new game. C: That game sucks. Time to move on to the next game. Right. I'm getting tired of that.
High Level IMs (centered on change)	Performing change (Action II)	Generalization into the future and other life dimensions of good outcomes (performed or projected actions)	C: Yes, yes. I am starting to see that I can't forget about myself, not only at work but also in other dimensions of my own life. Before I just tried to answer to everybody's needs, but now I am making time to do things that I really enjoy, that actually make me feel alive.
	Reflection II	Contrasting Self (what changed?) OR Self-Transformation process (how/why change occurred)	C: That's why I'm so easy, you know, more comfortable with you telling you all these things versus if I was to tell my parents or tell my friends (...)
	Protest II Re-conceptualization	Assertiveness and empowerment Moments distanced from the experience (meta-positions) where the self is repositioned outside the problematic experience AND also understands the processes involved in this transformation	C: Why would I bother? That's my life C: Not knowing which direction to take, or which decisions and choices to make to find myself... It made me feel confused, without peace. Now it's different. To know where we are, what we want and the career we want to embrace gives us peace and tranquility.

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