

Connecting Career, Family and Society

APCDA Conference

Tsinghua University

Narrative career counselling: constructing a career future in context

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Presentation: 426 18th May 2018



Overview

- Research into 'constructivist' approaches
- The narrative 'career construction' model used in the research
- A work in two parts: phase 1 and phase 2
- A word or two on the process
- The challenges encountered and lessons learnt by the researcher
- Findings: phase 1
- And phase 2
- Closing thoughts



Beyond theory: development of constructivist approaches

- Savickas, M.L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.-P., Duarte, M., Guichard, J., Soresi, S., Van Esbroeck, R. & van Vianen, A.E.M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75, 3, pp. 239-250.
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- Nota, L. & Rosler, J. (2015). (Eds.) *Handbook of Life Design: From Practice to Theory and from Theory to Practice*. Germany: Hogrefe Publishing.
- McMahon, M. & Patton, W. (2015). (Eds.) (2nd edn) *Career Counselling: Constructivist Approaches*. London: Routledge.
- McMahon, M. & Watson, M. (2015). *Career Assessment: Qualitative Assessment*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- McMahon, M. & Watson, M. (2010). Story telling: moving from thin stories to thick and rich stories, in K. Maree (Ed.) *Career counselling: methods that work*, Cape Town: Juta.
- McMahon, M. & Watson, M. (2011). (Eds.) *Career counselling and constructivism: foundational constructs*, New York: Nova Science.
- Reid & West (2005)...



Work in progress

- Previous in-depth research with practitioners to:
 1. Experiment with the Savickas model
 2. Evaluate the impact on their practice
 3. Current project
 4. Life design group



The narrative career counselling model

A systematic approach – ‘fits’ with a 3 stage model, but the language and content differs.

Beginnings – negotiating a contract

- How can I be useful? (not ‘how can I help you?’)
- Tell me why is this important now?
- Explaining the format, number of meetings, note taking etc
- Confidentiality
- Agreeing the topic / agenda



Exploration: ‘pre-occupations’

- Role models when young - ‘cool characters’ – who did you look up to? Can be a cartoon or TV character, a ‘star’. Often a teacher – but other than family (3)
- Magazines / TV shows (other media)
- Hobbies / free time interests
- Books – all time favourites (Films)
- Favourite saying or motto (t-shirt message)
- Favourite school subjects / and those disliked...



Exploration: ‘rehearsing the problem’

Stories from childhood – if it is helpful to go deeper

- The 1st story – what happened next
- Asking for two more stories
- *The client reflects on the meanings, begins the ‘identification’ by turning the stories into headlines for a newspaper*
- Listen for the first verb – the first things they say – note it down
- Identifying the themes/patterns and together -relating these to potential interests



Endings

- What are the goals that follow – what action is required?
- So, what has been achieved today – “what is your advice to yourself?”



Follow up email

Following a period of reflection – putting it all together, including the reality check

- What did we get wrong?
- What are your current reflections?
- What are the goals – are these different now?
- What further action is required?
- How will that be reviewed?
- What else needs to happen?



Collaborative project

- Working with 4 participants, ages 17, 19, 25, 40
- Explore and reflect on the many influences that shape their thinking about current and future career decisions, through a narrative career counselling interview
- Collaborate with the researcher in a later evaluation of the effectiveness and usefulness of the approach
- Process: a 50/60 minute narrative career counselling interview, an email follow up and then an evaluation interview (45 mins)



Analysis process

- Based on the work of Merrill & West for biographical research
- Shared transcripts
- Case study
- 'Respondent validation'



Challenges and learning points for collaborative evaluation

- 'Vee' and 'Robert' – contact beyond the initial interview
- Vee age 17 – telling her 'telling' stories
- Robert age 19 – low self-esteem and emotional upset
- A more immediate process for evaluation



Initial findings from the career construction interviews

- They all engaged well with the process
- Even after some hesitation, they all found role models and stories
- A summary useful before the client creates the headlines
- They all made their own interpretations and 'heard their advice to self'
- Saying it out loud made it more real
- The process appears enjoyable, if challenging at times, and even when there were sad stories to tell



The 2 evaluation interviews – Jay (25)

- Unexpected career choice
- His first story “...it was a metaphor for where I am now, not in control and veering off in any direction and hoping for the best”
- “The interview prompted me to do my own research and I talked to my girlfriend, thought about it now properly, away from my busy life ... around what was important to me, the recurring themes that came up”
- “It was personal, related to me, not a check list.”



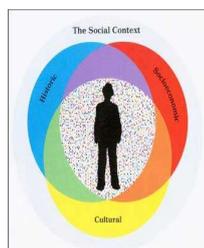
The 2 evaluation interviews - Mark (40)

- The decision not to change his current work at a ‘significant age’
- “It was a thought provoking process.. I did a lot of thinking after the interview and weighed up the pros and cons around what is important for me in my whole life – it focussed my thinking”
- “I can fulfil my other interests outside of work at the moment, so why rock the boat. The interview helped me to not just tick the boxes, but to find which boxes were important. I feel I have made an informed decision and I have not been pushed into it without thinking”
- “It kept coming back to the importance of family and how my current role fits with that. I enjoyed it, it’s not been as much guidance as I expected but I don’t think that is particularly helpful ...as I have realised things are OK as they are at the moment”



Context is all

- Neoliberal discourses around individual resilience, adaptability and employability
- Cultural preparedness
- High levels of youth unemployment
- Career as a middle class concept?
- The need for *psychosocial* understanding



Turning to narrative and biographical approaches – why do these approaches seem useful now?

- Discontinuities in the world of work
- Storytelling is universal as a method of understanding / in a context of migrant populations
- Narrativity is evident in different communities of practice
- Biographicity: a life ‘story’ as part of considering a life future
- Not about ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’
- Established approaches have their place – at the point of readiness
- Yet, building less ‘reductionist’ models is easier said than done, hence the need for further evidence of application to practice.

