The Profession
Professionalism
Professional Identity

And remind me: why am I doing this?

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Aims for today

- To explore concepts of the profession; professionalism and ‘professional identity’
- To share with you the findings from my research
- To suggest some implications for practice
- And a little bit about me...
Me...?

- Started my career in Personnel (as it was called in those days...)
- HE career guidance
- ESF project worker
- Head of Careers; and then Director of Student Services
- Also sub-contractor for Adult Guidance contract
- AGCAS Board member and President
- Current role
My interests

• How people make meaning in their everyday contexts: the interplay between agency and structure
• Organisational behaviour
• The effects of policy on practice
• Strong belief in ‘giving back’ and the power of collective endeavour in professions
• Education as transformation
Questions

- Do career guidance (or development) practitioners have a common professional identity?
- Is career guidance ‘a profession’?
- Why has it been so easily biffed about policy and appeared powerless?
- Is CG the victim of ‘attempted murder’ (Roberts, 2013)
- Why do ‘we’ bother?
- Is there a different story to tell?
Activity 1

• For you, is Career Guidance a profession?
• If so, in what ways?
• If not, why not?
A definition of a ‘profession’

- Professions are occupations with special powers and prestige. Society grants these rewards because professions have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge linked to central needs and values of the social system, and because professions are devoted to the service of the public, above and beyond material incentives.’ (Larson, 1977: x)
Activity 2

• Do you feel you have, or are developing, a professional identity?
• If so, what would you say are the features, or ingredients, of it?
• If not, why not?
• Is having a professional identity important to you?
Identity...professional identity

• Incredible amount of literature concerning ‘identity’
• Knowing ‘who’ you are; a ‘stable’ sense of self; ‘I am.’
• Social identity: self in relation to others, and the idea of belonging to a group
• Ibarra (1999) – professional identity centres on a ‘professional’ self-concept as defined by values, beliefs, experiences and motivations
My Research

• Presented at IER, Warwick; corrections’ stage
• Qualitative approach; Grounded Theory Method with strong, Straussian overtones!
• 19 in-depth interviews from participants from all sectors: school; adult; FE; HE; private practice
Findings

• Common motivations to enter the profession
• Seen as a profession
• Qualification level...?
• Common commitment to client-centred, impartial values
• Professional *value* and *expertise* being a commitment to expert knowledge
• Networks and communities of practice
• Knowledgeable social actors
Formation and Development?

• Impact of qualification: NVQ; DipCG; QCG; level 3, 4 and 6
• Mentoring and ‘examples’ of professional practice
• Colleagues; and organisation
• Feedback, especially from clients, that ‘validates’ the values and motives
• CPD...maybe
Reservations?

- Accountability is fine but targets as the be-all and end-all...?
- Organisation not understanding and/or valuing work
- Feedback by exception
- Ethical conflicts
- Esteem of career guidance
- Development of profession as a ‘profession’
Growing or nourishing your identity?

- CPD (Neary, 2014)
  - Labour Market Information
  - Reflective Practice
- Networking and sharing
- Mentoring and feedback
- ‘Daily’ or ‘weekly’ ways of keeping up to date
- Being more aware of your professional identity
Some conclusions?

• There is a different story of the profession, and our professionalism and identity, to tell
• Knowledgeable, committed, self-aware social actors: professionals, indeed
• Continuing challenges
• Growing and nourishing
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