CDI Student Conference
From student to registered career development professional
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‘Telling Tales’: exploring and applying a narrative career counselling approach

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Overview - the presentation will:

- Discuss 4 collaborative projects, working with practitioners and their clients, the practitioners, and working directly with ‘clients’ as research collaborators
- Explain the model, with examples
- Highlight the usefulness of the approach, but also the tensions derived from current working cultures
- Uphold the benefits
Background to the research

- Established theory and the narrative turn
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Attention to language and context …
- …change, change and more change
Turning to narrative and biographical approaches – why this, why now?

- Discontinuous employment / diverse contexts
- Shifts in discourses about career/life & life/career
- ‘New lamps for old’
- Building less ‘reductionist’ models is easier said than done
- Narrativity is evident in different communities of practice
- A life ‘story’ as part of considering a life future
‘Career services: a comparison of guidance, education and counseling’ (Savickas, 2011:7)
Busyness vs deep listening

- Attentiveness and time
- The meaning of events
- Dealing with uncertainties
- Targets – constraints – ‘safe’ transitional spaces
- ‘Telling tales’
- A ‘playful’ transitional space
- A space for ‘wavering’
- And a containing space
From theory to practice, project 1

- Moving from ‘telling a story’ to identifying patterns and themes - towards career hopefulness
- Patterns – more illustrative and tentative
- Eight practitioners and two researchers
- Working with young people, range of settings
- Project 1: three ‘meetings’, recordings and reflections with practitioners
Project 2 - Exploring the biographic resonances in the work

- Biographical interviews with 4 of the practitioners
- What impact did the use of the model have on them (biographically) and their work?
- More on this later
Current research – 2 projects

- 1. With 5 participants – 3 stages
- 2. As part of the international ‘Life design’ group. With colleagues at Warwick – 2 ‘clients’
Model derived from the work of Mark Savickas

The Savickas Narrative Career Counselling model: the career construction interview

Working with an adaptation of the Savickas approach

It is 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: “We were experimenting together”

Middles: exploring the story. Using the 6 questions alone (next slide) introduces something new and engaging – you do not have to go deeper.

- A space to play with ideas ... An invitation to ...
- ‘I’d like to try something different...’
- Genuineness and honesty – ‘The reason I asked that question is...’
- ‘It may help us to think about ...’
- ‘How would you feel about having a go at ...’
Exploration: ‘pre-occupations’

1. Role models when young – who did you look up to? Can be a cartoon or TV or ‘cool’ character. Often a teacher – but not family (we do not chose family)

2. Current magazines / TV shows, other media

3. Free time interests

4. Books – all time favourites (films etc)

5. Favourite saying or motto (t-shirt)

6. 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 – write 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?
How do the questions and stories lead to clues for career thinking?

1. Opening statement and career counselling goals
2. Early recollections – pre-occupation that illuminates the life theme – they are what the client needs to hear now
3. Favourite saying – elaborates the life theme and relates to current ‘problem’
4. First story and role models – connect the issue to a potential solution
5. Role models – to understand specific characteristics and qualities the client uses, can use
6. Overall stories suggest areas for growth in career adaptability – hearing advice to self
7. And how do these patterns/themes link with potential next steps?
Follow up - can be ‘phone/email

Following a **short** 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?
Beyond theory: ‘self concept’ and ‘career adaptability’

- Resources: coping attitudes, beliefs and competencies (can help or hinder)
- An extension of an individual's lifestyle and private logic
- The 6 Cs (Savickas)
- Which elements need further work?

- Do I have a future? (concern)
- Who owns my future? (control)
- What do I want to do in my future? (curiosity)
- Can I do it? (confidence)
- Which roles enable me to pursue my life goals? (commitment)
- With whom will I pursue my goals? (cooperation)
Analysis of the interviews

Summary:

- Systematic structure
- Need to avoid a checklist approach
- Adaptation of language and model
- Concerns at the start about being ‘expert enough’, but not about practitioners analysing the clients’ stories
- It is about enabling the client to identify the patterns and themes
- Follow up with young people
- Usually fun, but still valuable when not
How do practitioners approach the ‘so what’ stage?

- Questions that encourage the client to identify patterns and themes, alongside feeding back
- Headlines – often the turning point
- Using silence, trusting the client and avoiding a rescue attempt
- Not “tell me all about your childhood”
- Flexibility and adaptability - key to usefulness
Comments

Practitioners:
- A powerful way to get young people to think in deep and unexpected ways
- Gets to the root of the indecision and leads to more positive outcomes

Clients:
- Yes definitely useful, given me lots to think about – opened my eyes
- Wow, I’ve never thought of that before – and it all came from me!
Points to consider – from the research

- Time - **if also exploring stories** - 50 minutes seemed average
- Time is a constant issue – but using it this way can be more effective, builds resilience
- Not for every client – part of the toolbox – but, not arriving with prepared stories
- The idea is not to replace an existing way of doing things with another exclusive approach – flexibility is key
- Questions need explaining / framing carefully and responses need developing (not a check list) – rapport is essential
- Probe the story for the detail, not just naming the event.
Exploring the biographic resonances in the work with practitioners

- Busy practice, confidence, resilience and risk
- A new approach requires more thinking time
- Constraints— but remember this is a playful approach
- Boundaries, as always
- The word career ‘counselling’ – in a context of instrumentalisation, e.g. targets / time limitations
- Difficulties of implementing any new approach into contemporary practice
Conclusion

- Learning from emotional experience – the affective rather than the rational
- Gets lost in a culture of targets and busyness
- Projects have provided a safe, developmental space for ‘telling tales’ to emerge – for clients and for practitioners
- But, ‘thinking outside the box’ is not achieved without difficulty – it can be challenging
- Practise with colleagues – but make it real, cannot be role plays
- Can be a source of greater meaningfulness for the client and professional inspiration for practitioners, and even renewal for ‘old timers’!
References

2015, Chapter 7, London: Sage