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**Narrative career counselling: telling tales in a hopeful
space**

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Overview - the presentation:

- Argues for the importance of narrative-based approaches in an uncertain, unpredictable world
- Suggest a need for a paradigm shift in thinking
- Discusses a 2 stage collaborative project, working with Professor Linden West at CCCU, eight practitioners and their clients
- Explains the model, with examples
- Highlights the usefulness of the approach, but also the tensions derived from the working cultures of the practitioners.

Background to the research

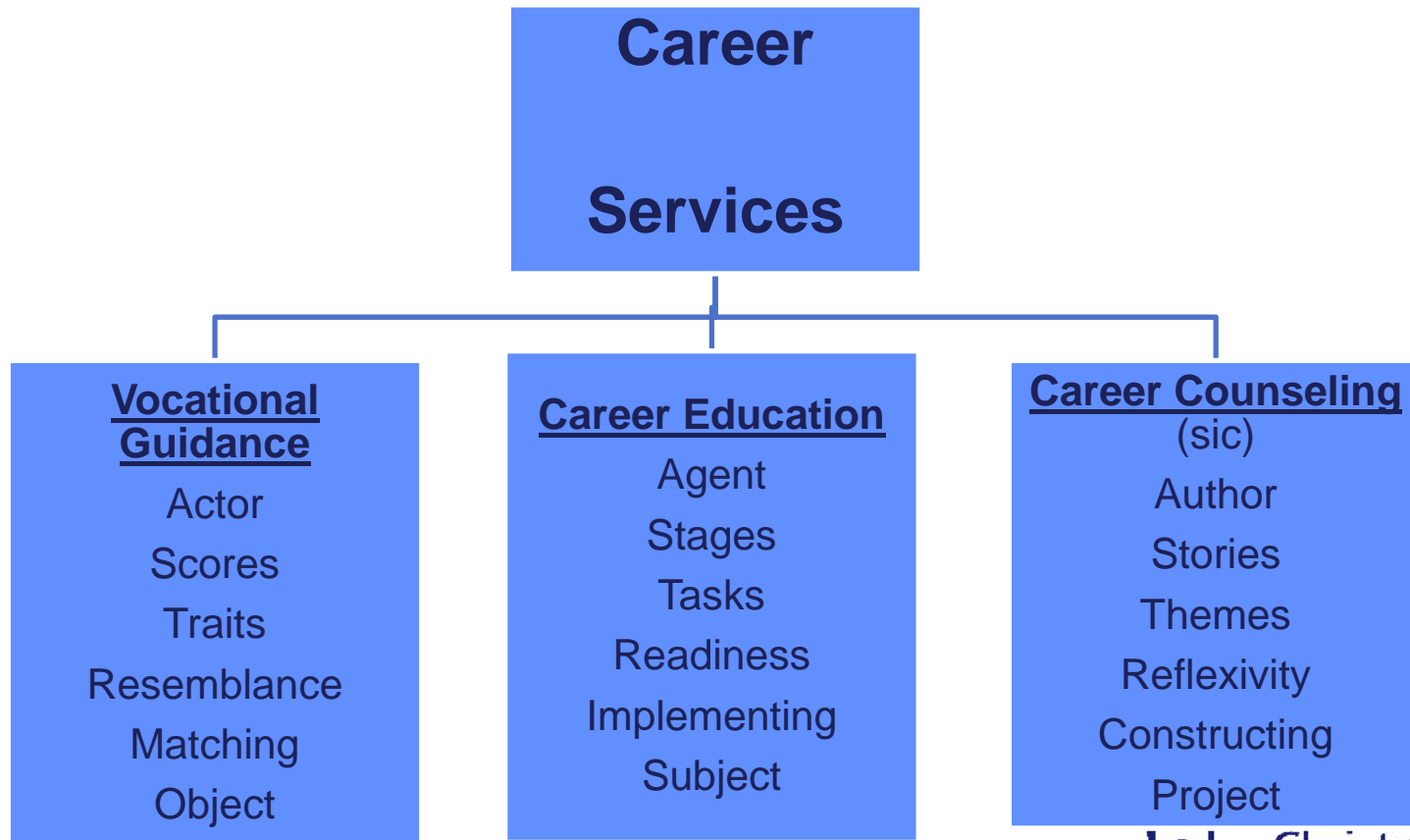
- Established theory and the narrative turn
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Attention to language and context ...
- ...change, change and more change



Turning to narrative and biographical approaches – why this, why now?

- Discontinuities in the world of work
- Shifts in discourses about exclusion
- ‘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, stillness & openness

- Attentiveness and time
- The meaning of events
- 'Felt presence'
- Dealing with uncertainties
- Targets – constraints –
'safe' transitional spaces
- 'Telling tales'
- A playful space



From theory to practice

- 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
- Phase 1: three 'meetings', recordings and reflections

Phase 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?
- In both phases used a research proforma developed for auto/biographic and narrative research



Derived from the work of Mark Savickas

- Savickas, M.L. (2011) *Career Counselling*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ~ (2006) *Career Counselling* (Specific treatments for specific populations video series). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ~ (2009) *Career counselling over time* (Psychotherapy in six sessions video series). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.



The Savickas Narrative Career Counselling model

Practitioners adapted the Savickas approach

Savickas has 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'

- Role models when young – who did you look up to? Can be a cartoon or TV character! Often a teacher – but not family
- Magazines / TV shows
- Hobbies / free time interests
- Books – all time favourites
- Favourite saying or motto
- 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
- Identifying the themes/patterns and together -relating these to potential interests

Endings

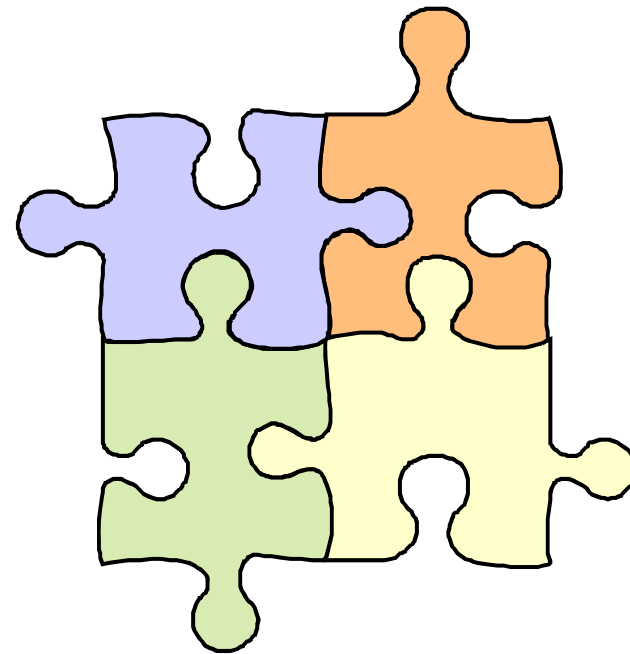
- What are the goals that follow – what action is required?
- So, what has been achieved today?



Follow up - can be 'phone/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?



Analysis of the interviews with young people

- 10 IVS – fully transcribed (there were others)

Summary:

- Systematic structure
- Need to avoid a checklist approach
- Adaptation of language and model
- Identification of the patterns and themes
- Concerns about ‘expert enough’

How did practitioners approach the 'so what' stage?

- Questions that encouraged the client to identify patterns and themes
- Headlines – noting verbs
- Using silence
- Not “tell me 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 – open my eyes
- Wow, I've never thought of that before – **and it all came from me!**

Points to consider – from phase 1 of the research

- Takes time (50 minutes seemed average – if also exploring stories)
- 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 essential
- Role models – not family and can be TV etc
- Probe the story for the detail, not just naming the event.

Phase 2 - Exploring the biographic resonances in the work

- Busy practice, confidence, resilience and risk
- A new approach requires more thinking time
- Constraints and personal impact
- Boundaries for all
- Model based in counselling – in a context of instrumentalisation, e.g. targets /time limitations
- Difficulties of implementing *any* new approach into contemporary practice

How do the questions and stories lead to clues for career designing?

1. Opening statement and 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 link with potential next steps?



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)

Positioning within a narrative approach

- Narrative/story
- Meaning and identity
- Constructivist
- Slow time / play
- Emotions /empathy
- Auto/biography
- Opening up space for creativity
- Targets and Outcomes
- Behaviourism and focus
- Realist
- Fast time / seriousness
- Cognition / logic
- Objective distance
- Instrumental – ‘what works already’

Conclusion

- Learning from emotional experience
- Gets lost in a culture of targets and busyness
- Project provided a safe, developmental space for ‘telling tales’ to emerge – for clients and for practitioners
- Practitioners welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their professional practice – away from that ‘busy’ practice
- But, ‘thinking outside the box’ is not achieved without difficulty – risk is involved
- Yet can be a source of greater meaningfulness and even professional renewal.

References:

- Reid, H. & West, L. (2010) "Telling tales": Using narrative in career guidance, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. 78, p.174-183.
- Reid, H. & West, L.(2011) Struggling for space: narrative methods and the crisis of professionalism in career guidance in England, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*. 39, 5 p.397-410.
- Savickas, M.L. & Hartung, P.J. (2012) *My Career Story: An Autobiographical Workbook for Life-Career Success*. PDF version available: www.vocopher.com