CAREER STORIES:

APPLYING NARRATIVE APPROACHES TO GUIDANCE IN A NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICE CONTEXT

ORLA C. HICKS

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Department of Adult and Community Education
National University of Ireland Maynooth

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Supervisor: Rita Meagher

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> This book, being about work, is by it very nature, about violence- to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.
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> (Studs Terkel, 1974, p. xi)

So begins Studs Terkel's oral history of the working lives of Americans in the early Seventies, when he travelled around, capturing the voices of ordinary people reflecting on their daily toils. For many, as illustrated in the quote above, work represented a type of prison, a daily grind which had to be endured for survival (Cohen, 2004). However, amongst the stories are glimpses of those who, even in apparently mundane jobs, have found a sense of purpose and meaning to their work; there are some who display extraordinary pride in their duties, and others for whom work is a true expression of themselves and their values (ibid, 2004). Is it just luck or chance which leads people to an occupation they are happy in? How can some people find this sense of contentment in their working lives, while others are forced to settle, or worse, endure 'daily humiliations'? One of the core values underlying my own work as guidance counsellor is the belief that everyone is entitled to have a chance at finding meaning in their work, whether that be the pride exhibited by the supermarket worker in Turkel's narratives, or the satisfaction and accomplishment displayed by the fireman (Turkel, 1974). The search 'for daily meaning as well as daily bread' is central to my work with clients, as I try in some way, to help them find 'a sort of life, rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying' (Turkel, 1974, p. xi).

Richardson et al., (2005) in redefining vocational psychology for the modern era, incorporated in their definition a commitment to 'the importance of work and relationships in people's lives, to helping people live healthy and productive lives, and to social justice' (p. 59); and it is from these values that I try to operate. This research was an opportunity for me to try out new, and perhaps better ways of facilitating career exploration with clients to ensure that I am continuing to live out these values in my work. It was a chance to observe myself in my work practices and to extend on

earlier research, which had led me to the newer constructivist and narrative approaches to guidance.

Objectives of the Research

My purpose in carrying out this study then is to improve my practice and to understand the guidance process more thoroughly. I set out to do this by adopting a narrative approach to guidance with clients; documenting the experience from my perspective and then, once the process has been completed, getting feedback from the clients about how they experienced the sessions. My aim is not to prove or otherwise that this approach works; instead I hope to improve my understanding and use of narrative guidance tools; to see what impact adopting this approach has on sessions, and to illuminate the guidance process as lived by both myself and the clients. I will argue that, while not without its challenges, the narrative tools I used within this research assisted in facilitating a positive, meaningful experience for the participants involved. I will also illustrate how beneficial practitioner research can be in improving skills and developing better reflective practice while making an important contribution to research, policy and guidance education.

Why a Narrative Approach?

My career did not develop in a linear fashion; in fact I would say I drifted into a few different fields, developed skills in a variety of areas before settling in an environment which felt right. This environment was more than just a 'congruent fit' (Brown & Brooks, 1996, p.6); instead it was an unfolding history of my life, experiences and environments which led me to where I am now. So, having invented and reinvented my professional identity a number of times, when I started studying guidance theories I couldn't always relate my own experiences to them. The trait and factor approach developed by Parsons and enhanced by Holland (Brown & Brooks, 1996), seemed too crude a measurement and, instinctively I felt that if I had been given a Self Directed Search[1] to complete as a teenager, or even in my early 20s, I'm not sure how useful it would have been to my career choices. The developmental and social learning theorists such as Super and Krumboltz (ibid, 1996), offered more to which I could relate, but I struggled to understand how I could use these theories in a practical sense

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[1] Holland's interest inventory assessment tool

with clients. Added to this, more recently, given the erratic nature of the Economy and Employment in Ireland in the last 2 years, these theories were having less resonance with what I was experiencing in work.

During my post graduate studies I was developing a range of counselling skills which lent depth and meaning to my work, however, when I turned to career guidance tools to enhance the career development side of my practice I felt that they fell short. The two disciplines for me weren't resting well together; using psychometric tests and interest inventories seemed harsh compared to the softer counselling skills I was developing. When I came across the narrative approach in my research, I felt that incorporating this would help me to remain client centred, and it seemed to mesh counselling skills and guidance approaches well. It focused on the way a person was thinking; the meaning they ascribed to things and the contexts they existed within (Whitson & Rahardja, 2005). It allowed for the messiness and unpredictability of career and working life which I could relate to. In essence, it enabled the development of an individual career trajectory which was not governed by stages, but by interaction with the environment and people, to create meaning and reality (Reid, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; McMahon & Patton, 2006a).

Economic and Policy Context

From both a National and European policy perspective, access to life long guidance is seen as a fundamental tool in assisting Europe to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world' (EACEA[2], 2010, p.4; NGF[3], 2007; ELGPN[4], 2010). The economic turbulence of recent times coupled with the changing nature of work and career have served to re emphasise the important role guidance can play in 'facilitating positive outcomes for both the individual, and for the smooth functioning of the labour market' (EACEA, 2010, p.7). The National Guidance Forum in Ireland was established in 2004 in recognition of the need to 'support individuals' self-management of their lives, their learning and their career paths for their own fulfilment…'(NGF, 2007, p. i). While recognising the strengths of guidance provision in Ireland, their analysis of services also identified a number of gaps in existing

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[2] Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (European Commission)
[3] National Guidance Forum, Ireland
[4] European Life Long Guidance Policy Network

structures. The subsequent report recommended that access to guidance services be increased across the lifespan; that discrepancies in levels of service, and issues of duplication and quality be addressed, alongside the development of more integrated service provision (NGF, 2007). Similarly, the European Life Long Guidance Policy Network is working towards developing European policy which addresses the priorities identified by the EU resolution of the Education Council (2004 & 2008). These four priority areas are: the development of career management skills; increasing accessibility of services; developing quality assurance policies; and the integration and co-ordination of services (ELGPN, 2010).

Local Employment Services

The Local Employment Services (LES) were established in 1996 as a separate arm of the existing FAS National Employment Service (OECD, 2002). Originally the LES were set up to address the needs of 'those most disadvantaged in the labour market as a direct response to the local context within which (they) operate' (FAS, 2011). The National Employment Action Plan also commenced in 1996 through which persons in receipt of a social welfare payment were identified and referred to FAS for support in their job seeking (ESRI, 2011). If they required more intensive support, or were considered more distanced from the labour market, they were referred to an LES for guidance (OECD, 2002; ESRI, 2011). When I commenced work as a Mediator in one of these Local Employment Services in 2006 the guidance work and client profile reflected the nature of these policies. Alongside assisting clients in exploring opportunities for education, training and employment, much of the work involved liaising with external agencies in areas such as disability; addiction; mental health and literacy services to help them overcome a range of personal difficulties which may have been impacting on their ability to secure employment.

Economic Downturn

The global recession has had a huge impact on the Irish economy with unemployment escalating rapidly from 4.5% to 13% between 2007 and 2010 (ESRI, 2011). As a result, the structures within which we work have changed considerably. While the National Employment Action Plan is still in operation, the referrals are no longer made by FAS. Instead, The Department of Social Protection refer clients directly to our service and there are no specific target groups underlying these referrals. The

number of clients accessing the service with University degrees and full work histories has increased dramatically, and our traditional target groups have diminished proportionally on our caseload. To deal with the huge increase in numbers, a group registration and intake process was introduced, and the service has gradually been changing to meet the needs of these new clients. While some of the work described above is still carried out, there are significant time constraints which limit the potential to offer more in depth guidance to clients.

Research Question and Thesis Overview

It is within this rapidly changing policy and service context that my research takes place. While guidance policy is, on the one hand, emphasising the importance of increasing access for specific target groups (NGF, 2007), Social Welfare are referring huge numbers to our service making it challenging for us to offer the targeted approach which many clients may need. The inherent nature of this day to day busyness can make us lose site of the values which brought us to the profession in the first place; this project then, was an opportunity for me to realign these values to my practice. The research question I set out to answer was: How can I improve my practice by adopting a narrative approach to guidance in my sessions with clients? In doing this, my overall objectives were to, a) improve my skills; b) to learn how clients experience the process; c) to describe that process; and d) to reflect on the theoretical and policy implications this has. This research is practitioner in nature and I have adopted an action research methodology throughout to document my development and reflect on my action. The next section offers a brief overview of the thesis structure and some of the main themes covered.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter reflects on the underlying paradigms of the research and describes the rationale for choosing an action research methodology, alongside describing the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The literature review provides an overview of constructivist and narrative approaches to guidance and explains the context in which they have emerged. It also provides a critique of some of the tools which have been developed within this school of thought.

As action research is collaborative in nature, I have also incorporated some feedback from my colleagues, on the tools described in this chapter. Finally, I take a look at process research in guidance, and discuss areas in which further development is required.

Chapter 4: The Narrative of the action

As this is not a traditional research project, the term 'findings' doesn't adequately describe the results of my research. Instead, this chapter describes the action I took to try to improve my practice. It describes the process in detail and incorporates both my reflections, and those of the clients.

Chapter 5: Analysis

In this chapter I analyse the main themes which have emerged from the research. I reflect on them in the context of my own learning and within the broader context of theory and policy.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Conclusions.

Finally, I will reflect on whether I accomplished what I set out to achieve at the start of this project. I will also make some recommendations for further research, and highlight the challenges I perceive in work practices and guidance policy.

Having outlined my motivation for carrying out this research and locating it in a service and policy context, the next chapter will set out how I proposed to complete this research and will explain the rationale for choosing a qualitative action research methodology.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research describes my experience of attempting to improve my practice by adopting narrative methods in my work with clients. It reflects my experiences of the process and also incorporates the perspective of the participants. It is an action research project in which I reflect on my work to 'question and improve taken for granted ways of thinking and acting' (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2009, p. 7). In the section which follows, I will consider the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research, before both outlining the rationale for choosing an action research methodology, and describing the methods I used throughout.

Questions of Ontology

The description in the previous chapter of what I propose to do and why, firmly locates this research within the paradigm of the contextual worldview represented by Social Constructivism (Mason, 2003; Ponterotto, 2005). Traditionally, within career counselling and psychology, the nature of how the world is viewed (ontology), and its underlying epistemologies have been firmly rooted within a positivist paradigm which makes the assumption that one truth or universal reality exists (McIlveeen, 2008; Mason, 2002, Ponterotto, 2005; Blustein et al, 2005). Knowledge about this world is generated by objectively studying phenomena (Mason, 2002) and the researcher's role is one of objective scientist (Blustein et al, 2004). The goal of the enquiry is to uncover the rules which govern how things and people work; the 'prediction and control' of phenomenon is the focus (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). Understanding this goes some way to explaining my discordance with some of the traditional theories of guidance which were developed under this paradigm; seeking a universal understanding of career choice and development was not reflecting my personal experience nor the diverse realities of individuals' experiences I was coming in contact with in my work.

Within the field of psychology there has been a distinct movement away from this positivist tradition, to the contextual ontological stance represented by social constructivism (Ponterotto, 2005). In contrast to the positivist tradition, the social

constructivist worldview makes no claim to knowledge that is universal, instead, multiple realities develop through shared experiences (Pontoretto, 2005) and both knowledge and truth are socially constructed (Mc Ilveen, 2008; Blustein et al, 2004). The researcher, rather than being an objective observer is embedded, along with the participant, in the process of knowledge generation (Cohen et al, 2000, Ponterotto, 2005). In this way behaviour is not predicted, instead knowledge is 'generated through relationships and reflective inquiry' (Blustein et al, 2004 p. 431). This collaborative relationship between researcher and participant opens the discourse on knowledge to influence from a diversity of voices (Cohen et al, 2000; Blustein et al, 2004; 2005); the goal of research being to understand the complexities of these multiple constructed realities through 'lived experiences' (Scwandt, 1994, 2000 in Ponterotto, 2004, p.129). As a guidance counsellor and researcher practitioner, I cannot remove myself from the research process. I impact on and influence the guidance process as experienced by the client, and our shared experiences are essential to creating knowledge about guidance practices (Hill et al, 2005).

The fact that research has been deeply rooted for so long within the positivist tradition has placed limitations on progress within the field of psychology (Ponterotto, 2005). More specifically within career theory, it has meant that long held beliefs about career development have remained unchallenged (Blustein et al, 2005). The limitations of quantitative data produced in this type of inquiry have increasingly been highlighted (ibid, 2005). Personal meaning and the nuances of emotions related to experience are being lost in statistics which attempt to explain behaviour (Herr, 2002 in Maguire, 2004). Herr (2002), highlights that clients' views, feelings and a rich tapestry of insight are not being captured in the number crunching and coding inherent in the quantitative approaches taken by positivist researchers of outcome and process enquiries. These methods essentially 'hinder understanding and ability to isolate and precisely describe' (Herr, 2002 in Maguire 2004, p. 181). Likewise, Hearne notes that a quantitative approach taken within her own study 'downplayed the subjective and contextual experiences of clients progression' (2009, p. 108). In essence, the diversity in the nature of the work between counsellor and client does not lend itself well to generalisations (Mc Leod, 2003). Increasingly, qualitative research within a social constructivist paradigm is being carried out to develop deeper clarity on how something is experienced (Blustein et al, 2005) and could be key to understanding

what impact guidance has on individual clients (Maguire, 2004). It allows for flexibility and fluidity (Mason, 2002) in the research process within which the participant's perspective is integral. Based on my research question and what I hope to achieve I adopted a qualitative approach to this inquiry in the hope that it would allow for more depth and insight into the process as is experienced by both myself and the clients.

Reflexivity

As described in the introductory chapter, this study was borne out of an intuitive knowing that I needed to change my approach with clients, and that the counselling skills I had developed weren't enough; I wanted to experiment more with the newer narrative approaches to guidance which I had discovered in earlier research. Schon (1983; 1995) discusses the value of practitioner knowledge, seeing it as an untapped resource in knowledge generation. In practice, he explains, skills used, and ways of working, often become unconscious; that is, professionals act intuitively and react instinctively to circumstances their day to day work presents them with. The methods and reasoning behind their actions are often hard to describe or explain and are not sufficiently valued as a source of insight and learning (ibid, 1995). In contrast, theories which have been generated within the traditional academic sphere are regarded as superior to this everyday 'tacit knowing' generated by practitioners (Polyani in Schon, 1995, p.32); they exist on a 'highground' which is a rational and almost sanitized version of the truth (Schon, 1995, p. 27). As a practitioner encounters difficulties in his work he adjusts and experiments with his methods and intuitively develops new ways of working (ibid, 1995); the 'swampy lowlands' (Schon, 1995, p 27) into which he immerses himself are messy and confusing, but, Schon argues, they are a rich source of knowledge and insight which should be tapped into. As practitioners, we know what we do, but often can't or don't express it (ibid, 1995). Reflecting on what we do (reflection in action), and analysing it, allows for a deeper understanding of practice and is an integral part of professional development (Schon, 1995; Whitehead, 2000). Also, by stepping back to look at our work processes, we avoid becoming over familiar with our practice and falling into habitual ways of working which may make us miss important information (Schon, 1983). Schon argues that the knowledge generated from this type of reflection should be the source of our learning and the driving force behind research. By taking time to reflect and study this

intuitive knowledge we can better understand it and therefore be in a better position to teach it (Schon, 1995).

The Research Cycle and Action Research

In my original research project, it was through observing and reflecting on my work that I was able to understand what was happening in guidance sessions with clients; these observations have led to further research and the desire to adjust my practice and develop my skills. In this way the research was not occurring in a vacuum but was very much a part of my everyday work; this cycle of action and reflection combines the often disparate worlds of theory and practice to hopefully develop new ways of working (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2009). It reflects the Deweyan philosophy of enquiry described by Schon (1995), by engaging with a problematic situation through action and reflection, to contribute to the theoretical discourses of guidance practice.

This notion of reflective practice is what underlines an Action Research methodology (Whitehead, 1991 in Herr & Anderson, 2005). Practitioners are motivated or inspired to engage in research when they identify a difficulty within their work and a desire to improve a situation (Mc Niff et al, 1996; Mc Niff and Whitehead, 2009). It is a means of formalising the reflective process by experimenting with their working environment to bring about changes which are in line with the values underpinning their work (ibid, 2009). This method goes beyond statistics, and can provide insights and opportunities for change (Somekh, 2006). In essence, it is an opportunity for the creation of 'living theories of practice' whereby a practitioner engages in critical reflection on their work in collaboration with others to create new knowledge (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2009, p. 15). The objective then is not to prove a hypothesis, but to bring about development and improvement to personal and organisational practice (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2009). In contrast to more traditional forms of research, conclusive results are not established, instead the research cycle continues to spiral so further adjustment and enquiry takes place; the inter related elements of values, logic and practice driving the enquiry (ibid, 2009; Smoekh, 2006).

A difficulty often ascribed to this type of research is that it is subjective and perhaps too individual to be of value to others in different contexts (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Herr and Anderson (2005) highlight that despite its perceived subjectivity it has huge

value and can greatly contribute to the generation of new knowledge; it helps to make sense of the swampy lowlands described by Schon (1995), and lead to the creation of new, practice based theories which capture the lived experience more effectively (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). New ideas, tools and practices can be developed and applied to other settings and it makes more tangible and concrete the tacit knowledge of the practitioner so that others can benefit from their experiences (Herr & Anderson, 2005). It is an opportunity to gain perspective and re examine everyday actions so that assumptions and taken for granted perceptions are looked at critically (ibid, 2005; Blustein et al, 2005). This knowledge is often more valuable to new practitioners than views of academic researchers (Corey, 1950 in Herr & Anderson, 2005; Schon, 1995).

Selection of Participants and Ethical Considerations

> Career counselling facilitates individuals self reflection and elaboration of self concepts toward an enhanced self understanding and personal meaning.
>
> McIlveen, 2008, p.83

Mc Ilveen (2008), using classifications devised by Herr (1997), describes the range of activities which may be incorporated under the heading of 'Career Development Practice'. These are illustrated in figure 1 below and, it is useful to consider them in explaining the selection of participants for this research project.

1. How do I get a job? (occupational placement)
2. What shall I choose (vocational guidance)
3. Who am I (Career Counselling)
4. How do I shape my career (Career Education)
5. How can work help me grow (Career Therapy)
6. How can I do Better (Position Coaching)

Figure 1: Range of Activities in Guidance (Herr 1997, in Mc Ilveen 2008)

While in practice, many of these activities overlap, it was primarily the second and third categories which were of most relevance to this research. A range of clients access our service bringing with them a variety of needs; this type of exploration, however, was most suited to those who had lost their way to some extent, and were seeking guidance in terms of their next step.

The selection and involvement of participants in itself brought up a number of ethical issues which I had to be conscious of throughout. In particular, because of the connection our service has with Social Welfare, I was very aware of not taking advantage of this situation for my own purposes. Currently, clients are referred to us on a weekly basis by The Department of Social Protection through the National Employment Action Plan. They initially come in for a group session where we describe the supports and services which are available to them. At this stage they can decide whether they wish to engage with the service or not. If they decide not to, they are deemed 'independently job seeking', and an appointment is set for 6 weeks time to review their circumstances. If they feel the service can be of use to them, we meet with them briefly on an individual basis and arrange a follow on appointment with a guidance worker; enterprise officer or jobs club facilitator, depending on their needs. It is important to note at this stage that, while initially clients are quite sceptical arriving, they are usually pleased to hear about the supports available as many were unaware such a service existed before. It was those who expressed an interest in our guidance service who I approached in relation to this research project. Two of the clients in this study were referred under this process, and one was a former client who had returned to the service.

West (2002) discusses the ethical challenges in carrying out research in the counselling field and questions whether it is ever completely possible to arrive at informed consent. He suggests that we should 'face the doubt and uncertainty involved' and work from Bond's (2000) notion of 'ethical mindfulness' (p. 261). One of the ways he suggests we can achieve this is by avoiding what he calls 'hit and run' researching, where researchers get what they need from clients and leave them with no follow up support (West, 2002, p 264). I was conscious of these ethical dilemmas throughout and tried to address them in a number of ways. As part of the consent process, I outlined the purpose of the study, what it would involve and what, with their permission, I would use in the report (I have included the consent forms and letters in the appendix). I emphasised that participating in the research in no way effected the service which they would receive; that it was completely voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. In addition any biographical details which may identify them were removed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. I also limited

the research itself to four sessions, and although I continued to work with the participants after that, this is not included in my findings. In addition, there was originally a fourth participant whose personal circumstances changed during the process; he is not included in the findings as I felt it would not be appropriate. Finally, when I was conducting the feedback interviews I went through the consent process again and made sure they understood what the research was about and how I would be using their information.

Action research is collaborative in nature, and by asking for the feedback from these clients, the research was not being done 'to' them, rather, I was interested in hearing their experiences of, and getting their insights on the process; this I feel allowed us to form a 'good research alliance'(Grafanaki, 1996 in West 2002, p.264). The purposive sampling (Polkinghorne, 2005 in McIlveen, 2008, p. 219) of participants who were seeking guidance meant the research 'maximize(d) its usefulness and minimize(d) its intrusiveness' and also meant that I intentionally excluded clients who were more vulnerable (West, p. 266), or who could be considered reluctant or resistant in terms of counselling (Kennedy and Charles, 2002). In so far as I could achieve, I ensured that those who participated did so because they felt it would be of benefit to them.

Gathering Data

To meet criteria for trustworthiness and fairness in qualitative research, Morrow (2005), discusses the importance of including different types of evidence and data. By including my own observations, along with the feedback from participants and colleagues helped in 'capturing and respecting multiple perspectives' (Patton, 2002, p.546 in Morrow, 2005, p.253)

Data Sources:

Reflective Journal

Mc Niff et al (1996), highlight the value of journals and diaries in dealing with data, as they can be an effective method of recording an accurate account of events; allowing for introspection and self reflection along with assisting in analysis (Mc Niff et al., 1996). In my reflective journal I kept details of each guidance session, the activities I used and my reflections, both on the sessions and the research process in general. I also kept my reflections on the feedback I received from colleagues in this

journal. These 'critical friends' (Mc Niff et al, 1996) were from Education and Psychology backgrounds respectively; they both had a conceptual understanding of what I was doing, and shared my values in relation to the work we do.

Participant Questionnaires and Interviews

There were two stages in the data collection process for participant feedback. Initially, clients filled out a questionnaire, and then we had a follow up interview which gave the opportunity to clarify what they had answered in the questionnaires, and to expand on some points. The final client, Robert, didn't fill out the questionnaire, but read over the questions before attending for the feedback interview. In order to confirm that I had captured their insights accurately I gave them a copy of the tape-scripts and a summary of what I had understood from their feedback.

Questionnaire and Interview Design

I wanted to understand how the participants experienced the process; what their expectations had been prior to commencing, and what previous experiences of guidance may have been influencing this. I also tried to capture their reflections on what they had learnt from the process, and to shed light on what were, for them, significant 'session events' (Heppner & Heppner, 2003, in McIlveen, 2008, p.201). In both the questionnaire and interview design I used open questions to 'to reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent' (Denscombe, 2007, p. 166), and for the interviews themselves I used semi- structured interviews (Denscombe, 2007) which allowed for flexibility while addressing key areas of concern. In preparing the questions I was influenced by the process research carried out by Peter McIlveen (2008). Although his research was not practitioner in nature, it did focus on the guidance process and clients' experience of it. So, in designing my questions I incorporated some of the themes he had included in his questionnaires and interviews which were based on the 'Client Reactions System Questionnaire', and 'Helpful Aspects of Therapy Interview' (McIlveen 2008, p. 218).

Data Analysis

I engaged with the data, my own journal entries, the questionnaires and the interview transcripts at a high level. I re-read my journal and made further reflections and highlighted themes I saw emerging; I listened to the recordings and made notes;

transcribed the tapes and listened again making further notes and identifying themes. I worked between the tapes and the questionnaires, comparing these to themes emerging from my own reflections, looking for differences and similarities.

Sorsoli and Tolman (2008) criticize the 'traditional reductive coding of narratives' which rely on the 'quantification of qualitative data' (p. 496), and describe their 'listening guide' process of analysis. Similarly, McIlveen describes the use of 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' while listening and reading transcripts to 'actively re engage with the interviews; making notes; re reading transcripts and making more notes' (p. 175, 2008). While I didn't follow as formal a process as described in both these methods, I engaged in complete 'immersion' in the data (Morrow, 2005, P. 256) which helped to ensure 'adequacy of interpretation' (ibid, 2005, p. 256).

Presentation of Findings

I struggled with how to present my findings in an interesting way. I didn't want to just analyse themes, and, describing the process in an engaging way was important to me. As the theme and approach of the study is narrative, I decided it would be suitable to represent the story of the research in narrative form. Mc Niff and Whitehead (2009) highlight narrative as being the most suitable form for action research, and it provided the opportunity for me to illustrate in detail my research story It seems that in my reading of other research, insights into ups and downs, the pitfalls, and the voices of both the practitioner and participants were missing; using a narrative style gave me the opportunity to offer that rich description by allowing me to 'render life experiences…. in relevant and meaningful ways' (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p.10).

Research Limitations and Personal Reflections

The Research Process

The research took place in a very busy Local Employment Service and I was constantly trying to juggle the quality of the research I wanted to develop and the practicalities of time pressures, duties and obligations which I had to fulfil as LES worker. I feel that sometimes this impacted on the research and feedback process: guidance sessions were placed in the middle of a day full of new registrations; a

feedback interview squeezed in at the end of the day, and there were distractions and interruptions to deal with. I also think I was sometimes too flexible in terms of times for the feedback interviews; I did the interviews whenever the client was available-even if this was at the end of a long day, or in the middle of a very busy one- I felt I had to grasp the opportunity when it arose, as I wanted to be respectful of the fact that clients were committing time for the purposes of my research. So, in this regard, I think quality may have suffered to some extent.

As practitioner, I was both the subject of, and researcher into my practice. The learning which this facilitated has been invaluable, however, it was also quite exhausting being involved in all levels of the project, and, as it was a study of my day-to-day work, it became somewhat all-consuming. Allied to this, I worked with these clients both before and after the research, so how can I be sure the feedback they gave was an accurate reflection of their experience and how comfortable would they have been to give criticism? I tried to overcome this somewhat by keeping the focus on the process and their experience, rather than on me as the guidance practitioner. However, this was challenging given that I was very much part of that process. I developed a good working relationship, and strong empathy with the clients which does come across in the feedback, and could be considered biasing. However, this relationship developed as a result of the process, and is perhaps a testament to its value in developing empathy with clients. In terms of how I was reporting and presenting my findings, I consulted with my colleagues throughout the process.This corresponds with the notion of peer validation which Mc Niff and Whitehead (2009) discuss and helped in tempering my enthusiasm for new knowledge with practical voices, and indeed criticism from those who weren't so involved in the project.

Why was this research important to me?
I have often wondered, if I had received some better guidance when at school, would I have been able to make clearer career decisions earlier in life? Or, has my meandering into different occupations made me better at what I do now? I have a deep curiosity about careers and how people develop in different directions. I think this curiosity motivates me greatly in assisting people to work out who they are, and what they can become. From my family background I saw lost opportunity and potential in both my parents who only received a primary education; their voices and lost dreams are

echoed in the narratives recounted in Turkel's oral histories (1974). My mother was always adamant that we should get an Education and go to University, even if she had to beg, borrow or steal the money, thus reflecting her own sense of loss at not having had that opportunity. Perhaps this is where the values underpinning both my work and this research are derived. Richardson et al, 2005, talk of the role vocational guidance has in promoting social justice and equal access to opportunity, and if we believe that somebody's background or social class shouldn't determine the size of their dreams, then providing an inadequate service could potentially reinforce the injustices which as guidance counsellors we should be fighting (Richardson et al, 2005).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the rationale for choosing a qualitative action research methodology and has explained the methods I used in collecting, representing and analysing my findings. The next section then focuses on the literature related to narrative approaches to career guidance and explains the context in which they have emerged, and how they are relevant to the modern world of work.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The objective of this research is to try to improve my practice by implementing a narrative approach to my work with clients. Therefore, in the literature review which follows I want to convey an understanding of the context in which this approach has emerged and how it differs from other, more traditional approaches. I will also describe some of the techniques and frameworks which have developed as a means of applying this technique and I will consider how appropriate I feel they are to my own work context. Finally, I will reflect on the lack of process research within guidance and illustrate how I feel my study can add to the literature in this regard.

The Industrial Economy and the Birth of Vocational Guidance

Vocational psychology evolved in an industrialised world where a Taylorist approach to work was dominating (Collin & Young, 2004). As new industries expanded, workers were required to fill these new roles, and labour was being divided in such a way that demanded the matching of workers to specific job tasks (ibid, 2004). It was in this context that early trait and factor practices emerged in order to assist people choose a suitable occupation in the expanding employment market (Richardson et al, 2005; Savickas et al, 2009). These early theories were dominated by a worldview which was positivist in nature, and the role of the counsellor in this context was one of expert (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a; Bujold, 2004; Brott, 2001; Peavy, 1992; 1995) The career guidance process itself was therefore quite diagnostic, with quantitative assessment revealing to clients the most congruent fit between personality traits and an occupation (Kidd, 2006, p. 13). Reflecting the values of white, middle class American culture (Arthur, 2006; Maree & Molepo, 2006) these early approaches to guidance became 'a micro tool for the industrial state' (Arthur et al, 1999, p.163, in Savickas et al, 2009, p. 2), where the concept of a job for life predominated, and a person's career progressed in a linear fashion (Savickas et al 2009 Blunstein et al. 2004; McMahon and Patton, 2006a). People's traits, like their jobs, were assumed to be 'for life' (Savickas et al, 2009), and career decision making was therefore based on the notion of 'stable traits within a stable environment' (ibid, 2009, p. 240). Later theories adopted a more organismic understanding of career choice, and while external factors were recognised as impacting on this choice (Krumboltz; Gottfredson,

in Brown & Brooks, 1996), the individual was still seen as moving towards career maturity through developmental stages in a linear fashion (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a; Savickas et al 2009; Arthur, 2006).

Are they still relevant?

The world of work and the global economy has changed dramatically since these theories were first developed; and, just as these emerged to meet the needs of the new industrialised world, so too are changes occurring to meet the demands of the global economy (Savickas et al, 2009). What happens when working life is in constant flux? When a job for life is no longer feasible and career maturity does not equate to stability or security (ibid, 2009)? These complex realities of day to day practice are being addressed in emerging new perspectives, as researchers start to question the relevance of traditional theories in the context of a globalised economy (Reid & West, 2010; Savickas et al, 2009).

Contemporary Labour Markets

The growth of large global corporations over the last number of decades has had huge implications for nature of the world's Economies, and cultures (Webb, 2004). The increase in Free Trade, alongside advances in communication technology, has facilitated this growth of Transnational Corporations across nations, creating a new division of labour whereby the world is quickly becoming 'one economic space' (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 81). These changes to the economy and the world of work hold an array of implications at an individual level, which in turn impacts on career theory and practice (Watson, 2004; Savickas et al, 2009). This globalised, knowledge economy demands individual flexibility to cope with the constant shifting of environments in which people find themselves (ibid, 2009). Uncertainty and anxiety prevail (Vance, 1995; Savickas et al, 2009), and the individual, while on the one hand has more opportunities for creativity and 'self actualisation', the uncertainty within which they exist requires a constant re writing of their identity (Reid & West, 2011a; Giddens, 1991 in Richardson et al, 2005). Allied to this, the phenomenon of globalisation and the increase in movement of workers has led to more diverse cultures, bringing with them underlying differences in the meaning of work or career (Arthur, 2006). These changes lead us to question the notion that there is a standard ideal in career development towards which people want to develop, and point to the

need for the evolution of a more dynamic framework within which guidance professionals can work (Stead, 2004). It is clear that traditional theories, either from the trait and factor school of thought, or the more developmental approaches do not deal effectively with this new reality; An 'internationalisation' of career counselling to compliment the trend towards globalisation and mobility is required (Savickas et al, 2009; Savickas 2007; Stead, 2004). A framework which facilitates the reflection on this constant flux of self, along with the underlying emotion inherent in this negotiation, is essential (Cohen et al, 2004a; Reid & West, 2011a; Sennet, 1998, in Webb 2000). So, how can career counselling remain relevant and vibrant and offer effective practices in the post modern society?

Constructions

A movement towards a constructivist world view is being seen as the means by which career theory can adapt to the needs of this post modern society (Savickas et al, 2009; Guichard, 2005; Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a). While the mechanistic and organismic world views, as represented in earlier career theories, emphasised cause and effect, or progressing through stages, the constructivist world view moves towards a more contextual framework incorporating the individual and the context or environment in which they act (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a). In contrast to the positivist stance, constructivism focuses on how people make meaning of their world and the environment in which they find themselves (ibid, 2006; Reid, 2006). It posits that in moving away from 'mechanistic' perspectives or 'organismic' views of development (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006, p.3), a 'contextualist' view facilitates an understanding of how the individual interacts with the systems in which he exists and through which he creates meaning (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a, p. 3; Reid, 2006; Stead, 2004).

The dualist notion, which sees context as a variable impacting on development, is replaced by 'a nondualistic interpenetrating person-in-context unit' (Richardson et al, 2005, p. 58). In other words, an individual is not separate from their context, rather, their reality is a product of their interaction with the environment, the systems in which they act and the subsequent meaning they attach to this (Mc Mahon & Patton 2006a; Savickas et al, 2009). Identity therefore 'manifests in discourse' (Lapointe, 2010, p1), in a constant re working of self in relation to current circumstances and relationships (Reid, 2005, Savickas et al, 2009). The reality which is created is 'more

multilayered and internally contradictory' than traditional descriptions of career choice could explain (Mc Adams et al, in Bujould, 2004, p.470), with individuals developing diverse or 'polyphonic' identities, constructed from the various environments in which they exist (Peavy, 1995, p3, Stead, 2004). Personal meaning is central to this framework, and the emotion around career decisions is given prominence (Collin & Young, 2004; Amundson, 2006b; Mignot, 2004). The relationships and culture through which people construct meaning, and within which they make their decisions is examined, (McMahon & Patton, 2006a; Savickas et al, 2009) allowing for cultural differences to be expressed and not overpowered by dominant discourses (Reid, 2006; 2006). Concepts such as 'career maturity' and 'self concept', which were the holy grail of early theorists, are social constructs themselves; the theories social constructs of the societies in which they evolved (Stead, 2004; Law et al, 2002). Instead, constructivism reflects the reality of people's lives; the circumstances, and often the constraints, in which they are making career choices (Cohen et al, 2004a). By looking at what work and career mean to an individual, in this context and at this time career theory becomes individualised and more adaptable across cultures (Savickas et al, 2009).

How does it relate to practice?

These are complex ideas which are developing in a complex world; so how do they translate to practice? If there is no map or developmental stage to move towards (Richardson et al 2005), how do we make sense of this, and as counsellors how can we assist clients navigate this new terrain (ibid, 2005)? In this regard the narrative approach to guidance has emerged as a means of facilitating the client to 'make sense of the world through stories' (Mcleod, 2003, p. 226). These stories connect events and construe meaning, and they become the foundation from which to create the next life chapter (McIlveen, 2008; Brott 2001). In this model the practitioner no longer takes on an expert role, carrying out assessments and offering a diagnostic type experience for the client (McIlveen & Patton, 2007). Instead, the individual is the crucial element in the framework, and it is they, not a theory, who are driving the process (Mc Ilveen & Patton, 2007). The client becomes the expert, and the guidance process revolves around assisting them develop their narrative; listening for 'silenced stories', themes, and conflicts (Mc Leod, 2003; Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a p. 20). It is in the retelling and deconstruction that the client can begin to 're-author' their own

future career narrative (Mc Mahon, 2006, p. 20; Brott 2001). 'Career stories portray individual's unique conceptions of their personalities, from their own point of view' (Savickas, 2010, p1); the client is no longer compared to vocational types or categories, instead their uniqueness and difference is in focus, the objective chronology of events becomes a subjective account rich with meaning and emotion (Christensen & Johnston, 2003). This approach is collaborative in nature (Mc Ilveen & Patton, 2007; Peavy, 1995), and facilitates an exploration of 'possible selves' moving away from 'linear causality to non linear dynamics' (Savickas et al, 2009, p. 243).

This narrative approach is a 'way of thinking or set of values' which the practitioner needs to adapt into their work, and this concept makes it challenging to see how the ideals of constructivism can align with the everyday nature of work and services offered by organisations (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a, p. 10). With this in mind Reid (2005) asks 'will narrative approaches be viewed as ivory tower thinking or can they be grounded in the day to day realities of guidance practice' (ibid, p. 129). In an attempt to provide clarity to an approach which may seem 'fuzzy' compared to traditional models (Law, 2003, in Reid 2005 p 128), a number of frameworks and tools have been developed. Mc Ilveen & Patton (2007) offer an overview of some of these models, and I have elaborated on the ones most relevant to this research below.

Frameworks and Tools in Narrative Guidance

Emplotment

Larry Cochran, a major proponent of this narrative approach, developed one of the first frameworks (Savicaks, 1997, in Cochran, 1997) which provides practical insights into how counsellors can implement a subjective narrative approach to their practice. Cochran saw employment as 'the proper vehicle through which a certain character can be enacted in a certain kind of drama (ibid, 1997, p. viii), and, the process through which a counsellor can facilitate this is one of 'emplotment' rather than matching. He outlined seven episodes of career counselling (fig 2) to elicit and reflect on past and future narratives; the episodes are not intended to be followed in a sequential way, but adpated depending on the clients needs (Cochran, 2007). Drawing on a range of literature he describes practical techniques to engage with clients in a meaningful way, and to elicit insights into their subjective career. His framework is in my view,

one of the most comprehensive practical guides on how to implement this approach and many of the techniques described in the sections which follow this elaborate on his ideas.

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Cochran's Seven Episodes of Career Counselling
Elaborating a Career Problem,
Composing a Life History,
Founding a Future Narrative,
Constructing Reality,
Changing a Life Structure,
Enacting a Role
Crystallizing a Decision.

Techniques for Elaboration and Empowering Narration
Lifeline (future and past)        Life Chapters
Guided Fantasy                    Role Models
Early recollections               Vocational Card Sort
Construct Laddering               Anecdotes
Writing                           Success Experiences (future and past)
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Figure 2: Cochran's Seven Episodes adapted from Cochran, 1997

In a similar way Campbell and Ungar (2004b), outlined seven aspects they considered important to the story telling process within guidance counselling. They highlighted the strength of the narrative approach as one of enabling and empowering clients to 'have different conversations with themselves and the world' (ibid, 2004a, p.22). In this way clients can 'critically analyse the discourses that frame their lives' (Blustein et al, 2004, p.436). Self limiting beliefs and restrictive discourses are weakened and clients are assisted in re negotiating their identity by asking them to: know what you want; know what you have; know what you hear; know what constrains you; map your preferred story; grow into your own story; grow out of your own story (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b, p 30)

Stories and Recollections

Elaborating on his theory of career construction Savickas developed a 'career style interview' to elicit client narratives (Mc Ilveen & Patton, 2007; Savickas, 2010). He believes that through client stories a glimpse into their true nature can be gained, along with clues to the resolution of their presenting problems (ibid, 2010). He uses seven questions to elicit these stories; themes are extrapolated and made sense of as

the client 'headlines' episodes. A key moment in the process is when the presenting problem is put in light of these discussions to help reframe the problem and develop a success formula.

Career Style Interview

How can I be useful to you as you construct your career?
1. Who did you admire when you were growing up/ your role models? Tell me about them.
2. Do you read and magazines or watch TV show regularly? Which ones? What do you like about them?
3. What is your favourite book or movie? Tell me the story
4. Tell me your favourite saying or motto.
5. What do you like to do with your free time? What do you enjoy about these hobbies?
6. What are your three favourite subjects in school? Which subjects did you hate ?
7. What are your earliest recollections? I am interested in hearing three stories about things You recall happening to you when you were three to six years old.

Figure 3: Mark Savickas, Career Style Interivew, adapted from Savickas, 2010)

Smiliarly Brott (2001) adopts a 'storied' approach which involves 'co construction…de construction… and construction' (McIlveen & Patton 2007, p. 231). She uses the life line as a tool in this process, and clients are asked to fill in different episodes in their lives. The episodes are given titles, and the chapters are filled with characters and emotions as 'sparking moments' emerge (Brott, 2001, p. 308). The process then moves to a future perspective where the client is encouraged to re author their preferred future, and imagine the steps they need to take to get there (Brott, 2001; McIlveen & Patton, 2007).

Active Engagement and Creativity

Much like the techniques described by Cochran, Amundson's notion of active engagement (2006a), encourages the use of creativity when working with clients to help them 'think, act and feel more productively in relation to some dilemma or trouble in life' (Peavey, 1992, p.222). It is the counsellor's role to help clients fashion a career and make meaning out of their stories (Amundson, 2006a). In his methods a range of tools are used to generate discussion and reflection. He describes how to use metaphors; guided fantasy; flip charts, and getting clients to 'walk their problem' to make the experience memorable (ibid, 2006a). Clients are asked to imagine their problem has been solved, and, looking at things from this perspective they work out what steps were taken to get there. The meaning of expressed interests and

achievements is not taken for granted but explored in a way which illustrates the client's constructs and the meaning they attach to it (ibid 2006a). Some of these exercises are illustrated in figure 4 below.

20 things I like doing:
Write on a blank piece of paper 20 things you like doing

For each activity reflect on some of these questions:
How long has it been since you did each one?
What were the costs?
Are they done alone or with other people?
Are they planned or spontaneous?
What do you like about them?
How do they help in finding overall fulfilment

(Adapted from Amundson, 2006, in McMahon and Patton, Part III, Chapter, 7, paragraph 5)

Achievement Profiling/ Success Experiences
Describe an achievement from any area of your life
Talk about it with these questions in mind:
What did you actually do?
What made it successful?
What led up to it/ what happened after?
How does it relate to other aspects of your life?
Why did you do it?
Who did you do it with?
Why was it important to you?
Now, thinking about what you have described, what skills and characteristics did you use to accomplish this?
Write the accomplishment in the centre of the page and add skills and characteristics around it like spokes on a wheel.

The story of each success experience holds insights to skills and characteristics

Figure 4 (Adapted from Amundson, 2006, in McMahon and Patton, Part III, Chapter, 7, Section 8)

Biographies

Written exercises have been identified as one of the successful interventions in career counselling (Brown & Krane, 2000, in Brown & Mc Partland, 2005), and within the constructivist approach writing a personal biography can facilitate reflection on ones own personal narrative. In McIlveen's 'My Career Chapter' (2008), clients work their way through a written narrative of their life, and then narrate and edit their story from a past present and future perspective. This integrates the notion of the 'polyphonic' and 'dialogical self' (Hermans, 1996, in McIlveen, 2008; Law et al, 2002; Peavy,

1995), and allows the client to take up different 'I' stances from past, present and future contexts, thereby helping to clarify future plans and objectives (McIlveen, 2008).

Systems Theory

The System Theory Framework (STF) and the corresponding tool the 'My System of Career Influences' (MSCI), (Mc Mahon, 2005; Mc Mahon & Watson, 2008) emphasises that an individual does not make career decisions in isolation but as part of a number of systems which interact with one another and therefore impact on decisions made (Mc Mahon, 2005). The individual system is at the heart of the STF and encompasses all which is personal and specific to the individual including, and is the starting point for the client's narrative (Mc Mahon & Watson, 2008). However, this system is in constant interaction with the social system in which the client finds themselves, as well as the Environmental – Social systems. (Mc Mahon, 2005). Talking through the aspects of this framework allows for a 'self as narrative view' to develop as opposed to 'self as trait' and ensures that the counsellor develops a deeper understanding of the clients reality and the systems in which they operate (Mc Mahon, 2005, p 34).

Critique

The constructivist concept and underlying narrative theory is very complex and while a very compelling argument is made for its application into practice, it was daunting to approach this task and I was concerned as to how well it would translate to practice. While the notion of constructivism is lauded as being flexible in terms of intercultural diversity (Molepo and Maree, 2006), I feel that some of the theories and tools presented above may still be linked to the cultures in which they emerged- particularly some of Savickas's seven questions. This is being addressed in current and ongoing collaborative research (Savickas et al, 2009) which is attempting to 'formulate innovative responses in an international forum (ibid, 2009, p. 239).

In addition, the process demands a high level of reflection and I would be concerned that not all of our clients have developed the reflective skills to be effective within this process; how can I help them develop this, given the time constraints in which I work. Indeed, Cochran mentions that this process may be too demanding for someone

who 'was not mature, or ready.. to participate in a more collaborative form of career counselling' (Cochran, 1997, p. 123).

At this stage in my research, the exposure to the literature was both inspiring me to try something new and filling me with uncertainty as to whether I really understood the nature of the concepts. Given my confusion I turned to my colleagues, or 'critical friends' (Mc Niff and Whitehead, 2009) to get their perspective on the theories and to assess what they felt could be used in our practice. Below is a summary of the main points they made.

Positive:
How can I be useful to you? This was considered a very empowering way of commencing sessions (Savickas, 2010).

While they wouldn't use the exact questions in the 'Career Style Interview', they liked the idea of getting clients to tell them stories about things which weren't directly related to career so they could get a better insight into their way of thinking.

Some of the questions Savickas asks could be woven into other activities so that they are more subtle and less off putting for clients (Such a doing a CV).

The steps to a future scenario could be used to good effect with professional clients and also possibly to gauge unrealistic expectations as to how something can be achieved. It could also be used as a recap method when exploration has been completed and clients have the information they may have been lacking before.

They recognised the value and impact of writing as an exercise.

Tools:
Success Experiences; Achievement Profiling; Lifelines and Vocational Card sorts, were all tools they felt could be used to very good effect and in a number of scenarios with clients to generate ideas and discussions, especially with clients who were 'stuck' or not so chatty.

Negative:
Some of the techniques described would require a high level of skill (Career Style Interview; theme extrapolation) and the narration of the themes described by Savickas sounded a bit horoscope like- he still seemed like the 'expert' in the scenario.

It seemed a very long process and they were concerned how feasible it would be time wise.

Some of the ideas and questions seemed a bit abstract, clients may be too self conscious or answer in a way they think you want to hear.

The role models and personal motto questions they would struggle to answer themselves; in addition the early memory questions may scare clients off if they are not expecting it.

In imagining steps toward possible future a lot of our clients may be simply unaware of the 'how to' and may become disillusioned and frustrated if being asked to create the steps themselves as sometimes they simply don't know where to start.

The picture and framework of the STF and MSCI could be overwhelming visually- too much going on.

'My Career Chapter' was considered too long winded and complex for use with many of our clients.

Interestingly, in recent research completed in the UK (Reid and West 2011a;b), the practitioners involved voiced concerns echoing both my own misgivings and those of my colleagues. Specifically, they were concerned at not being 'expert enough' (Reid & West, 2011b, p. 180) to facilitate the process successfully. They also felt the identification of life themes as somewhat more directive than they were comfortable with, identifying a cultural difference in the style of questions and interventions (Reid and West 2011b, p. 180).

I would add to these concerns by stating that a social constructivist epistemology is quite challenging to grasp, as is applying it to career guidance practice. And while the importance of self – reflexivity is very evident, particularly in the uncertain economic times we are experiencing, I am unsure whether the people who access our services have altered their way of thinking beyond the trait and factor approach which has been the dominant discourse for so long. I do appreciate that it is our role as guidance counsellors to assist clients in developing this new way of thinking to help them adjust to the new world of work, however, I am concerned about our capabilities to do so within the restrictive structures in which we sometimes operate.

On the shoulders of giants

In light of these changes to guidance practices, can we afford to dismiss the concept of development, career maturity and all the preceding theories in our work with clients? McMahon and Patton (2006a) are quick to illustrate that the insights provided by adopting a social constructivist perspective serve to enrich the knowledge gained from past theoretical developments rather than dismiss them. Indeed, Vondracek et al, (2010), go as far as saying that by neglecting the importance of development, some social constructivists gain only a partial understanding of the complexity of things. They see the developmental process as 'the dynamic interaction between a changing, developing individual, embedded in a changing context' (Schoon & Parsons, 2002, in Vondracek et al, 2010, p. 131) and dismiss notions of two separate paradigms according to positivist and constructivist epistemologies. Instead they herald a movement towards the 'sciences of complexities' 'conceptualising individuals as self constructing, self regulating and self organising living systems that function in multiple contexts' (ibid, 2010, p.131).

Process Research

Career guidance research has been criticised for focusing too much on theory and not enough on practice (Dagley & Salter, 2004, in Bernes et al, 2007 p 83), and, while much research has evidenced the effectiveness of guidance practice, little is known about what specific tools or interventions work across differing populations (Whitson, 2002; Whitson and Oliver, 2005). Recent research, particularly related to the narrative approach, has addressed this somewhat, illustrating the narrative processes which have been used successfully with disadvantaged groups (Maree et al, 2008; Mc Mahon & Watson, 2009), and providing insights into the process from the practitioner and client point of view (McIlveen, 2009; Reid & West, 2011). In general, more of a focus on process research is needed which would benefit both researchers and practitioners (Whitson, 2002; Whitson and Oliver, 2005). In particular there is an interest in 'descriptive field studies using actual client and practicing counsellors' (Bernes et al, 2007, p. 89). There has also been a call to adopt 'scientist-practitioner' models in career guidance research (ibid, 2007) which has so far been neglected. Counselling and psychology have benefitted from insights gleaned by adopting this approach but career guidance research has yet to exploit this valuable source of knowledge (Guider & Richmond in Bernes et al, 2007; Richardson et al, 2005). Indeed what I felt was lacking in doing my own research, was this richer process description, and the challenges or difficulties associated with it. Articles have been published outlining how the process has worked through case studies and description, (e.g. Brott, 2001; Savickas, 2010; Maree et al, 2008), but it seems to me they describe ideal, smoothly flowing sessions- with none of the bumps I was experiencing! Reid & West (2011), have gone some way to addressing this in their recent research, however, it was not until I had completed my own research that their article was published.

Conclusion

In adopting an action research model, I was able to contribute to this literature by providing a description of the processes I used in my work. I have included both my reflections and those of the participants, in the hope that other practitioners, and indeed researchers, can find value in what I learned on this research journey. The chapter which follows outlines the narrative of the action taken, so to speak; it is a

description of my 'reflection in action (Schon, 1995), as I attempted to implement some of the approaches discussed in this chapter into my work

<h1 style="text-align:center">CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH NARRATIVE</h1>

Introduction

This chapter describes the narrative of the action undertaken to improve my practice, and at this stage does not engage in an analysis of the themes and issues emerging. It documents the nuts and bolts of the process so to speak, the activities and tools used to both elicit the participants' stories, and to help them make sense of them. It incorporates the voices of the clients by asking them what it felt like to experience this process, and what it meant for them. In doing this I do not statistically measure outcomes on a scale, instead I attempt to provide a richer, more vivid picture of the guidance process with 3 clients over four sessions. It also tells my story, as a practitioner in a busy Local Employment Service attempting to understand my practice more and develop a wider range of skills. My objective is to develop my skills in narrative guidance methods, to observe their impact and to reflect on the implications this has for my practice.

Expectations and Anticipation

The Graduate

A year out of college Ciara has been grappling to find her place in the world. She has worked before, but is a bit confused and perhaps disillusioned about what her future might hold. She graduated into an economy which is in recession; bright, bubbly, sensitive and curious, her youthful optimism has not allowed her to give up. She has yet to find meaning in her work and is unsure what she wants; she comes to the process tentative and unsure what to expect.

The Newcomer

Gary arrives with experience and knowledge, but finds himself in foreign shores. He has grappled with the challenges of the immigration system and has struggled to navigate the challenging economic conditions before him. Out of work since arriving in Ireland, he was, 'struggling against the tide' and fearful about the future. In the grip of panic he was suffering a loss of self esteem, and confidence in his abilities; the two years out of work outweighing, in his mind, the 20 years of experience he brings with him.

The Outsider

Never really comfortable in school, feeling a little different, Robert didn't reach his full potential and sometimes felt he didn't belong. He spent his early adulthood figuring out who he was and finally learned to be comfortable in his own skin. Still tentative, still not confident in his abilities, he knows there is something else he wants- but is not sure what that is or how he can get there.

The Researcher Practitioner

Embarking on this research project, I was, to be honest, a little nervous as to whether I would be able to do justice to the techniques. I had spent the months preceding reading every journal article and book I could get my hands on around narrative approaches; consulting with my colleagues about what they felt would work or not, and I think I was perhaps a little overwhelmed by the information. There was also a lot going on in the office during that time: we had a huge increase in numbers and these added pressures meant less time was available to spend with clients- the diary was booking up really quickly leaving long waiting times between appointments.

Themes of hope, cynicism, confusion, frustration and anxiety pervade as these clients enter. While I am not attempting to claim that they are representative of all entering the service, certainly this array of emotion displays what we may meet when trying to assist clients navigate the muddy waters of career exploration. The next section describes the process, and my reflections on what I felt worked or didn't work while I was carrying out the research. It is interspersed with commentary from the participants which was gathered from the questionnaires and interviews.

How can I be useful to you?

Mark Savickas uses this question in his career style interview to develop an insight into the client's presenting career problem and, for me, it was a really good starting point with all of the clients, allowing me to step back, right from the start, and get a clear indication of what was troubling them. Stories of confusion, a lack confidence, and overall feelings of being lost emerged. Clients didn't know, or had lost sight of, what they wanted to do, making it impossible for them to move in any direction, and they had little idea of how they could help themselves. They had all come from a very

information based approach to guidance at school and consequently, weren't anticipating the depth to which the sessions would go. This led to some surprise and discomfort in the early stages, particularly with the first client, Ciara.

> **Ciara**: It was very odd, it was very unusual, because the only experience I said like, I had with Career guidance was, kind of more so, very one dimensional, it was never anything to do with yourself as a person, you know, and what sort of values you had, what sort of skills you had, you know, what kind of person, you were, it never had that kind of sort of thing, kind of ever asked of me … it was a bit difficult at first, cos I never really thought I had any experiences, or like, skills or anything, so yeh, it was kind of unusual but it was very helpful definitely
> **Me**: and was it kind of uncomfortable at the start to be asked that kind of stuff?
> **Ciara**: Em, slightly, cos I didn't have clue who you were (laughs) do you know what I mean !

Initially, I had decided that, rather than follow one specific technique I would try to weave some of the ideas throughout the discussions, however I faltered and stumbled in doing this in early sessions with Ciara. I hadn't prepared well enough before hand, and was flailing between some of the ideas I had spinning in my head. I also hadn't explained the process or prepared her properly, so, while I elicited some interesting anecdotes and stories about her life, it wasn't as useful as I thought it might have been and I suppose I struggled to know what do to with the information I had gleaned.

Backswing and Lifelines

Reflecting on this early session, I decided I needed to prepare myself better in terms of how I was going to approach the sessions, and also prepare the clients so that they understood what to expect. I really liked Amundson's notion of 'backswing' (2006a) as a metaphor for explaining the process to clients: in order to gain momentum before moving forward, it is sometimes necessary to take a step backwards. I also introduced a lifeline exercise to provide focus for our discussions, and this allowed me to weave some of Savickas's questions into the sessions, developing ideas around early experiences, memories and role models. With Gary, we traced through his life at school, old dreams to become a pilot, developing a career in sales, different opportunities that had passed him by, and difficult times in his life.

> **Gary:** golly, I think to a great extent I was drifting, and if I look back at my past, a lot of my successes were as a result of my own hard work, and not so much as a

result of doing what I really wanted to do and loving it, and that is the difference; it wasn't a scratch of the surface, it was going below the surface

By exploring the past and understanding what was in my way to finding gainful employment, really opened up areas of possibilities and opportunities

Robert had been a client of mine before, and I was anxious therefore to see whether he would experience the process differently this time- would I be able to engage in a more meaningful way with him? Although chatty, he is quite sensitive and shy, and I think the prop of the lifeline was useful in generating stories about his past; I wasn't questioning him and he was reflecting on aspects of his life the way he saw them.

Robert: em, I was a bit confused trying to think back …. but when I did start thinking back, lots more came back. And, it's kind of good to talk about things like that anyway… to have someone to open up to aswell

After struggling initially, he settled into the session, enjoying the space provided to talk about his life.

Revelations and Reaffirmations

Ciara: I didn't expect the first few sessions where I had to delve into thinking about things. It really helped me see what skills I had and gave me confidence. I thought I had no real skills.

I was consistently surprised at how much of a sense of themselves these clients had lost during their time unemployed, and that a graduate or somebody with 20 years experience could have lost all sense of their own abilities. I adapted Amundson's achievement profiling exercise in different ways with the clients, to try to 'deconstruct' some of the stories, interests and achievements which were emerging. With Gary, a 'skills audit' revealed 'hidden talents and ….explored areas of anonymous ability' Ciara's 'success achievements' reminded her that she actually had 'done stuff', and Robert's- '20 things I like doing' allowed me inside his world a little bit more than before.

Robert: I think I gave you more of an idea what to work with so, I think you knew, kind of, where I was aswell

Gary: The sessions provided insight into skills that I felt I never had, and how these skills can be utilized across a number of enterprises

It wasn't all plain sailing however, and difficulties did emerge throughout the sessions in generating ideas and memories. Being put on the spot to try to remember incidences or influences was not always successful, and I found that giving follow up homework was a useful way of providing space to reflect a little bit more, and generate more ideas. Ironically, Gary, who was the oldest of the three, seemed to be able to relay early memories more easily than the two younger clients.

> **Ciara:** I was like a rabbit in headlights….couldn't think of anything….complete mental block! so when I'm at home, sitting with my cup of tea or whatever, it much easier 'cos you kind of have more time to think about it and stuff

Getting Robert to elaborate on themes was sometimes difficult; he described his childhood as 'grand' but trying to think of earlier memories, people or significant events, was difficult and the sessions sometimes fumbled along a little awkwardly. Apart from his mother, he couldn't think of anyone who he may have looked up to or admired when he was younger, and couldn't really think of many early events or memories. He talked about primary school in general terms- it was neither good nor bad; he did ok, and had a nice group of friends, but no real 'defining moments' or 'sparkling moments' emerged at this point (Brott, 2001 p. 306).

He was not the only one who had difficulty with the notion of role models; thinking of somebody they admired in the past, whether real or fictional, proved a difficult question, and didn't seem to provide any significant insights for these particular clients.

> **Rober**t: em, its just hard, cos I don't know who I look up to, the only person I could think of is me ma, but that's, I don't really admire anyone else for anything else

> **Ciara**: I don't know, I don't really have that many role models I know some people do, people kind of aspire to be very like someone or whatever, I kind of sort of aspire to be kind of like myself, do you know what I mean….. it might be a good question for some people but for me I was kind of stuck…I was sitting at home going to my boyfriend, role models?? ….I couldn't think of anyone really

Having completed the analysis of the past, extracting and identifying relevant themes emerging from our discussions was more difficult than I thought it would be. I was conscious not to label the themes myself as I didn't want to impose my interpretation on events and perhaps skew the meaning they ascribed to things (Reid, 2011a). Eventually, Gary highlighted hard-work and tenacity as the common threads running through his story, and also sometimes compromising his wishes for the sake of others. With Robert, we circled some of the words which we had written on the lifeline as being significant; themes of feeling like an outsider, to becoming more comfortable in his own skin emerged.

Enlightenment

Looking at the original concern in light of the stories told in these sessions, helped clients gain perspective on their circumstances and think more rationally about it. For Gary, in his time unemployed he was losing sight of his professional identity, and this was working against him in his job search; applying for anything and everything in a panic was counterproductive and yielding no results. Likewise, Ciara had been blind to past experiences and skills, and therefore, she had dismissed the possibility of developing a career. For Robert, it seems he was an outsider for a lot of his earlier life, and lacked confidence in himself to try things out, which really held him back.

> **Robert**: I think, I don't know, I think me confidence kind of went down after school, and then, like to look back on things, and see where I was back in school and, then where I am now… its like, 'get yourself together and do things', you know what I mean like

Talking about changes in his life, and experiences of when he had felt comfortable and confident seemed to give him a boost and made him more optimistic.

> **Robert:** I just have a better outlook on things now; its kind of given me a positive attitude like to go out and do stuff like.

Creating Possibilities for the Future

The purpose at this point is to assist clients to start relating the previous discussions and themes into a vision of a future career story for themselves. The ideas generated earlier are explored more, and the client is asked to reflect in a number of ways. In comparison to where they are now, what steps need to be taken to get to where they

want to be? Are their previous patterns and behaviours bringing them in the direction they want, and if not what changes do they need to make? What obstacles are in the way and what routes are open to them? What external supports and hindrances impact on their decisions?

With Robert and Ciara I used a vocational card sort exercise, which overlaps between this and earlier stages of the process. In using this I was trying to move away from placing clients into a personality or occupation 'type', to focusing on themes which illustrated their uniqueness (Savickas, 2010). Choosing to be a barber, may mean independence and self employment for one person, but for someone else it could mean being creative or sociable; and it was these meanings I wanted to understand.

Using the cards was, from my perspective, a very different experience to reading through an SDS report. I felt it took all the pressure off me; the client was generating content, focus and meaning. I really liked the visual and physical element of the activity and the explanations were lively. With Ciara I heard stories about past attempts in the beauty industry; a childhood memory of wanting to be an airhostess and a youth spent on GAA pitches with her family. The groupings she created represented glamour, style, creativity, activity and high profile jobs. With Robert it helped to remind him of experiences which hadn't come up in the lifeline exercise: a recent TV programme he had taken part in before Christmas; a festival which he and his friends put a float together for; fundraising he took part in; and the fact that he would love to do something for the young people in his local area such as run a talent show. I think it was empowering for him to leave having identified themes which could be related to career, which he hadn't connected with previously.

Although we spent a lot of time looking at the meaning which clients associated with occupations, I am not sure they took away the significance of these; they still, in a way, saw the exercise as a means of narrowing down alternatives and eliminating choices, similar to the results of a more traditional matching exercise.

> **Ciara**: (It helped) me start thinking about what I liked and how it could be formed into a career and to help me narrow down the huge amount of career choices I had originally began with

I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do, em, and, I think it was that I wanted to do too many things, and was afraid to pick one thing in case it didn't work out, or whatever like. So that was kind of, it put me on the spot, and visually seeing the cards in front of me, and seeing the names or whatever it was easier to kind of sort it out, you know having it all in front of me and deciding which I like better and which I didn't

Robert: I thought that was very good, cos, it gives you like a broad, like a broad … opinion ? is that .. a broad opinion yeh…and em, it just gives you all different ideas… you can put yourself in different things; like, maybe, yes and no, you know what I mean so…. it narrows it down like
….I felt like I had more of an idea of what I wanted to do then; cos I knew I definitely wouldn't do that one, and I'd maybe do that one, and by the end we had a good structure on it like

Constructing a future reality

By combining a future life line, with the themes generated from the vocational card sort and other exercises we were able to start making a clearer vision of the future. Again, not taking any interest or comment at face value, facilitated a thorough understanding of the clients' meanings, and opened up areas of possibility which had previously been closed off. For example, with Gary we had an interesting discussion about the bar trade: he has always had an interest in pubs and hotels, but it was an interest which was never really developed. When doing the life line activity earlier, it was an idea which had surfaced during lulls in his career, and was always swept back away when other work opportunities emerged. He had recently been applying for bar jobs, but without success as he had no background, skills or experience in the industry at all, and breaking into this area at this stage in his life seemed like an insurmountable task. Further conversation revealed it was not so much a wish to work in a bar, but a huge interest in the licensed trade in general. He avidly reads trade magazines in this field, and also publications in other areas of interest such as transport, cars and travel. In light of this discovery we started discussing his skills in relation to this – who published these magazines, what advertising did they have in them; did they have sales teams selling advertising space within them- could he use his sales skills in this environment, thereby combining his interests and skills? We followed this for a number of interests and environments, looking not at what they had on offer at the moment (if anything)- but where he saw himself fitting in (Bolles, 2011).

Gary: My outlook has changed; I've experienced a transformation of methodology! ….whether the intended conclusion steers towards an area of further education, employment or a combination of the two, I have unreserved confidence in an assured future!

Once Ciara had developed different visions of the future on the lifeline, we then reflected on what the hindrances were to getting there, both internal (her confidence in herself), and external (the current economy; financial implications of choices; how to build more experience). From this, we discussed alternative routes; I think she had some difficulty imagining possible steps to the future she had envisioned for herself, other than just trying to get a job in one of the industries. She struggled to come up with suggestions and I was generating a lot of the ideas. Once she was pointed in the right direction however, what followed was an active researching phase which enhanced her knowledge of industries, opportunities and possible routes. All of this knowledge made the eventual task of creating a CV more meaningful and reflective of her abilities and the way in which she wanted to present herself.

> **Ciara**: I have the confidence to look for jobs, I have a professional looking CV, I have more resources to search for these jobs and can genuinely for the first time see myself in a 'real' job and have the ability to begin a career.
> you know I've never really had a proper, you know, real 'career' job like, and I thought I couldn't really get one …so its kind of given me a bit more confidence

Again, some of this was a little more challenging with Robert. In one session when I ask him what he wants for himself in the future, he smiles and tells me he would love to be famous, but quickly dismisses this and says he would be content with a nice house and a job he was happy in. We focus on fame a little bit, and what it means to him: being admired, being liked and respected; themes of being accepted, and no longer being the outsider re emerge. I asked him to imagine his life five years from now and to describe what the ideal would be for him, he struggles to fill in details and is a little self conscious, so we use the themes and fields generated from the cards to fill in the other end of the lifeline. His knowledge of the world of work was very limited and coming up with ideas of the steps he would take to get to his desired future was difficult for him, as he genuinely didn't know how to go about it. Here I stepped in a little more, generating ideas and showing him some websites which might be useful to start his research with.

Advice to past and present self

> **Robert:** I thought that was good aswell, 'cos it kind of sets you a goal, to reach that goal, and then to be able to look back and say 'that's where I was, and I'm here now'

An interesting devise I used with Robert (adapted from McIlveen's 'My Career Chapter', 2008), was to ask him to give advice to his 'younger self' which was represented in the lifeline. He considered for a minute, and he said he would tell himself to get a bit of confidence and not to be afraid to do things. We did the same, considering himself, this time, from a future stance. Again, action was his main advice: if I don't do something I am never going to get anywhere.

> **Robert:** just to get up and do it, get up and do things, and don't be afraid and get more confidence in yourself

He found a festival which interested him which was looking for volunteers; heeding his own advice he got in touch with them and arranged a meeting for the following week, this activity gaining him some momentum, and hopefully it is his first step to making a clearer future for himself.

Reflections

> **Gary:** A sense of belief in myself in restored… considering some of the original problems which weighed heavily on my sanity, I can state that, with certainty, that they have been massively diluted to the extent that logical thinking can prevail
> Its been a very enlightening system and I just feel that everybody should be able to have this type of thing

> **Ciara:** This sort of thing should definitely be taught in school… if we had a class like this, a module like this in school, I think it would really help me so much more.

The issues and themes arising from this research will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter. However, in setting out to try something new as a guidance professional within my practice, I have learned a lot, and really developed my understanding of the narrative approaches. I think as the sessions progressed I gained in confidence, and it is certainly something I will be using in the future with clients. In this chapter, I wanted to focus on the process itself; what worked for me and what I found difficult,

in the hope that I could provide some insights to others wishing to learn more about, and to implement, a narrative approach to their work. The next chapter will discuss further the main themes emerging and the implication this has for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

Introduction

> if we want to teach about our 'doing' then we need to observe ourselves in the doing, reflect on what we observe, describe it and reflect on our description.

> Schon, 1995, p. 31

The last chapter presented a description of what I observed 'in the doing'. It provided an insight into the guidance sessions and snapshots of how the activities and tools were used; as such, it presented the narrative of the action taken. The following chapter moves towards a reflection on that description and an analysis of the emergent themes. Remembering that my main motivation for commencing this research was to improve my practice, I will reflect on to what extent this has been achieved, and will then outline the implications this has for my practice, the service in which I work, and guidance practice in general.

The Process: Active Engagement, Reframing and Motivation

The social, economic and personal impacts of unemployment are well documented (Mayston 2002; Bell & Blanchflower, 2010; Vondracek et al 2010). The loss of social contact, and a sense of purpose which accompanies unemployment (Jahoda 1981,1982 in Vondracek et al 2010) had led to an erosion of self esteem and confidence in all three of the participants in this project. Their feeling of being 'victim(s) of unchangeable circumstances' (Christensen & Johnston 2003, p. 150) and the resulting 'crisis of imagination' (Amundson, 2006a), was disabling their attempts at seeking work. Gary in particular was so consumed by panic to get out of his situation that he could not see the wood for the trees, and was applying for anything and everything. Ciara and Robert, who had limited work history, discounted the learning and skills they had developed in a non paid capacity whether in college, hobbies and entertainment. This reflects the huge value placed primarily on paid work in the modern world which leads to a sense of deskilling and loss of identity when it is not available (Blunstein, et al, 2004). If we consider that, alongside economic and educational factors, a person's perception of their abilities can have a significant impact on actual future success (Maree et al 2008; Osche 2003), the effects of unemployment, exemplified by these participants, had the potential of creating further barriers to re entering employment.

Gary: I was starting to loose a sense of belief in myself, severely affecting my self esteem. This loss of self esteem had further repercussions in its own right insofar as I was concerned about my home life and what negative opinions my friends, (who were employed), would have of me.

Robert: it's good to get stuck into something when you haven't got, when you're not doing anything as it is, like, cos you kind of fall into a hole

Amundson (2006a) emphasises the need to engage in a creative way with these clients to get them thinking in different ways to overcome the 'crisis of imagination' they present with, and, the main premise behind Savickas's career style interview is 'the more stories you know the better' (Savickas, 2010). I have always espoused a client centred approach, and engaging clients beyond superficial facts was not new to my work. However, when faced with someone who didn't engage easily in conversation, I had very little alternative methods of eliciting their stories; if a client had no ideas or answered 'I dunno' (Reid, 2011a p. 181), I struggled, and reverted to using an overly directive response. In this regard, the tools and exercises I used within the process proved really useful in stimulating ideas, and helped shift control away from me, removing the pressure to come up with answers. How do I know I have improved in this respect? Consider the contrast in tone and content of the sessions described in the table on the next page(figure 4). Joanne is a participant from my earlier research who I was struggling to engage with in a meaningful way. Robert, who would have similar characteristics to Joanne, opens up more during the process and, I feel, there is more of a sense of collaboration.

Joanne:	Robert:
Joanne needs a lot of encouragement to elaborate on and discuss ideas, so getting an insight into who she is and what she wants proves quite difficult. Open questioning, probing and reflecting back do not succeed in eliciting elaboration on her part, and her answers are brief and general. For example, when I ask her what it is about childcare that interests her, she says that she doesn't know, she just thinks it would be good. However, when we are doing her CV it turns out that she has done some babysitting for friends and family, but hadn't offered that as knowledge of childcare when we were discussing her course choices. My interactions with Joanne are challenging for a number of reasons. She is quite shy and reserved and it seems that the repertoire of skills I have been developing do not elicit open responses. From our conversations it seems that her vocational identity is underdeveloped and her lack of self confidence is a challenge in getting her to articulate her feelings and knowledge. She is very cooperative in the sessions, arrives on time and completes all tasks that I set her to do; she even has a notebook that she records all her information in. However, I am conscious that she sees me as a type of teacher figure and throughout our meetings I am unsure as to whether she is playing the role of a conscientious student and is just telling me what she thinks is the right thing to say. I am unsure as to how authentic she is being and I am reacting to her behaviour by becoming more teacher-like in my interactions with her and more controlling. It is also clear that she expects answers and is looking to me to provide them. I think our sessions are quite formulaic and I have a tendency to be more directive than I would normally be. (Hicks, 2010)	It helped to remind him of experiences which hadn't come up in the lifeline exercise: a recent TV programme he had taken part in before Christmas; a festival that he and his friends put a float together for; fundraising he took part in; and the fact that he would love to do something for the young people in his local area such as run a talent show. In one session when I ask him what he wants for himself in the future, he smiles and tells me he would love to be famous, but quickly dismisses this. We focus on fame a little bit, and what it means to him: being admired, being liked and respected; themes of being accepted, and no longer being the outsider re emerge. I asked him to imagine his life five years from now and to describe what the ideal would be for him, he struggles to fill in details and is a little self conscious, so we use the themes and fields generated from the cards to fill in the other end of the lifeline. (On giving advice to himself in the past): he said he would tell himself to get a bit of confidence and not to be afraid to do things. We did the same, considering himself, this time, from a future stance. Again, action was his main advice: if I don't do something I am never going to get anywhere. **Robert:** just to get up and do it, get up and do things, and don't be afraid and get more confidence in yourself ..I think, I don't know, I think me confidence kind of went down after school and then like to look back on things and see where I was back in school and then where I am now… its like, get yourself together and do things, you know what I mean like… …I think I gave you more of an idea what to work with so, I think you knew kind of where I was aswell so

Figure 4: Comparison of Research

Reid and West (2011a) mention the tendency of some practitioners to 'name the event and then move on' (p. 180) and I think this is what I had been doing previously. However, using the tools within this approach I feel allowed for a more thorough

exploration and brought more life and fun to the sessions, allowing me to step back a little. 'I want to be a bar man'- turned out to be 'I want to use my knowledge and appreciation of wines and spirits'; 'I want to be famous' became a desire to be accepted and to belong.

In his Career Style interview Savickas asks clients to think of role models or people they admired when they were younger, and this proved a challenging question for the clients in my research, with both Ciara and Robert struggling to come up with an answer. Likewise, the colleagues with whom I had consulted before commencing the research had expressed their concern at this question, and wondered, if asked, would they be able to think of someone? This difficulty however, was not mentioned at all in the literature and makes me wonder why it proved challenging in this context; was there something in the way I was asking the question, or did the difficulty experienced by the participants, and my colleagues, reflect a cultural self consciousness not present in the American context in which the framework was developed? Are old modesties associated with not getting 'above your station' and echoes of 'its far from that you were reared' holding us back? In my practice, outside this research project, anyone with whom I have used this question has struggled a bit, either drawing a blank or citing, as Robert did, their parents. I do need to explore whether the ghosts of my own self consciousness are impacting on this, and perhaps other areas of the counselling sessions. However it is worth noting that Ciara did eventually think of a role model, not because it was something to which she had attached any great meaning, but merely because she felt she had to come up with an answer. There is a risk then, that by merely posing the question, clients may come up with convenient answers and thereby distort the process.

Maree et al (2008) illustrated how a narrative approach to guidance can impact on the 'achievement motivation' (p.55) of young clients whose environment was characterised by high unemployment, low levels of educational attainment and limited employment prospects. They describe how their intervention with a young South African teenager helped alter his self belief and his perception of possibilities for the future, which in turn motivated him to action. Likewise, in this study, placing the clients presenting difficulty in the context of our discussions allowed them to gain perspective. It facilitated a personal transformation in how they viewed their skills,

experiences and future outlook. It reawakened in them old dreams and past influences and started the process of putting them back on track. This perspective allowed for clearer future planning and a more rational assessment of obstacles and current environmental constraints.

> **Gary:** focusing on where I would be good, and where I would be happy, and where I would be comfortable…..I've realised that there is a lot out there that I can do.

Robert however, didn't, seem to be able to make the connection between themes emerging, and insights into himself as readily as the other two. Although he describes enjoying the process of opening up and talking, he hadn't, consciously at least, taken away significant learning.

> **Me:** so it was useful to kind of open up and that; what kind of stuff did you learn about yourself do you think?
> **Robert**: em……I don't really know em… what did I learn..??
> I don't really know…. I can't think.. !! em

However, later he attributes his new found optimism to our sessions together

> **Robert**: I have been looking at more jobs em, I've thought about the voluntary work. I'm actually going to go and do the voluntary work this week
> ..I don't know I just have a better outlook on things now

Overall, the process seemed to facilitate a re awakening for these clients to varying degrees, and gave them a new sense of purpose and meaning.

> **Gary:** The sessions were enlightenment to my accepting that there are factors beyond my control that were inhibiting my job search…I left feeling very optimistic and positive about the future. This transformation of thinking or, method of career guidance, could be used for both an employer and an employee viewpoint with massive benefits to them both.

While the depth of exploration which this approach facilitated can be considered a huge strength, it did come as a surprise to the clients whose previous experiences of guidance had been limited to information based approaches. Indeed, all three described these earlier experiences in negative terms, and this impacted on their expectations of what we would do together. The contrast between client and

counsellor expectations is illustrated in research literature (Millar & Brotherton, 2001; Howieson & Semple 2000) and highlights the need to 'make explicit with clients the goals they seek and the process by which they will work to achieve them' (Newton & Caple 1974, in Millar & Brotherton 2001, p 106). Reid and West (2011a) describe how the most successful interviews carried out in their research were by workers who took the time to explain the process thoroughly to the client. This too was evident in my research; the later sessions with Gary and Robert having a smoother start than with Ciara.

In practitioner research an inquisitive stance is taken towards habitual ways of working, it slows down the process so we can observe ourselves in the action of our work and question taken for granted ways of doing things (Schon, 1995; Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2009). Caught up in everyday routine I had somehow forgotten that this experience is something new, different and may be anxiety inducing for the client, and I had really taken it for granted that they knew what to expect. Interestingly, while I was keen to get the participants insights on specifics of the process we used, I feel they saw things in more general terms, unable to pinpoint specific moments or processes which were particularly useful. Similarly, in other studies, clients overall impressions related more to how they were listened to and the relationship built with the counsellor, rather than moments or tasks within the process (Millar and Brotherton, 2001). The participants in this project spoke of outcomes in terms of a personal transformation in confidence, a re awakening of skills and experiences, a transformed outlook on the future, and a clearer plan of action on how to get there. They now possessed a better CV, and a proper job seeking strategy to approach job applications. I feel these 'better CVs' were facilitated by the depth of the discussions we had; the objective career becoming a subjective history (Savickas 2003, in McIlveen & Patton, 2007; rather than an 'empty sack' of facts (Pirandello, 1998, in Christensen & Johnston, 2003, p.153). No longer was Gary a square peg being foisted into a round hole, as was his experience with recruitment agencies. Interviewing the participants and getting their feedback in this way, reminded me of the vulnerability of their circumstances when coming to the service, listening to their anxieties and the telling of their personal transformations even in a small way, was a very powerful experience for me as a practitioner.

Freedom from Hindering Discourses

One of the roles narrative approaches is to help clients free themselves from hindering dominant discourses. Campbell and Ungar (2004a) describe how people draw on their own constructed realities and related discourses to create their idea of the future. The discourses in which they exist may be limiting them, but they have nothing else to draw on to articulate a different vision. This was clear with the clients, particularly with Robert whose vision of the future was very vague. People come to counselling when there is discordance between their experience and 'the words they have available to describe their lives' (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a p. 21). Robert was experiencing such discordance between his desire for something more, something better, and an environment where early school leaving and Long Term Unemployment was the norm, even during the Celtic Tiger years. It was challenging for him to generate ideas or imagine future possibilities. 'Actively engaging' with him in a creative way I managed to glean more insights than merely talking had in the past (Amundson, 2006a). While he wasn't able to express what he learnt from talking about his past experiences, and didn't readily make the connection between this and his career decisions- he did value the space to be listened to. The small exercise of giving advice to himself was an opportunity to take up a different 'I' position while looking at different forms of himself in the lifeline from a past and future perspective. In a small way it got him to look at himself differently and view patterns and themes from an objective stance (McIlveen & Patton, 2007). What I think we achieved was the seed of something; the possibility that something better was feasible for him perhaps 'changing (his) sense of who (he) is by having different conversations with the world' and indeed with himself. (Campbell & Ungar, 2004a, p 21).

> **Robert**: it's kind of given me a positive attitude, like to go out and do stuff like

Is Narrative Enough?

At this point I think it is worth highlighting the importance of integrating other theories of guidance into this approach and not disregarding the developmental and social theorists in our enthusiasm for a new theory. Luken (2009) looks at personality and brain-development research, and questions whether the levels of self direction and reflection often required of young people and young adults is within their developmental capacity. This is perhaps illustrated in the difficulty Robert had in

articulating what he had learnt about himself from our discussions. While acknowledging the need for self direction in learning, and its increasing importance in the modern world and employment market, Luken argues that the way to facilitate this and the level to which it can be developed is often neglected. In relation to career guidance he mentions the narrative approach (particularly the MSCI[5]) as a possible way of achieving this, alongside working within an awareness of the client's developmental stage.

Counsellors also need to be mindful of the fact that clients may come from a problem saturated background, where past influences may have been negative and success achievements very limited. It can prove difficult, and perhaps disheartening, when 'sparkling moments and highpoints' (Brott 2001, p. 306) don't emerge. This process is a real opportunity for clients to look objectively at the patterns and hindering influences in their lives (Campbell & Ungar, 2007), but they may need to be held in 'a safe, reflective space' while doing this (Reid & West, 2011b, p.8). In addition I feel the Social Learning theories (Mitchell & Krumboltz, in Brown & Brooks, 1996) have a lot to offer in helping clients 'grow into their story' (Campbell & Ungar, 2004b, p.36). Krumboltz (1996) highlights the importance of exposing clients to success experiences to have more to draw on when making career decisions, and research has shown that increasing young people's success experiences enhances the range of occupational interests they express (Jackson, et al , 2006, p333). Exposing Robert to more experiences will add to his career narrative and move him out of the confines of the discourses he is currently operating in, giving him more to draw on to articulate a new future career narrative.

Matching or Emplotment ?

Did I move beyond matching? I am not sure. Yes, I got a thorough insight into the participants' histories, however, they still talk in terms of matching themselves to suitable employment, and I'm not sure I succeeded in bringing more meaning than matching to their career decisions. We never discussed their career in terms of personality or occupational types; in the card sort exercise for example we focused on how they grouped the various jobs and what it meant for them. However, Ciara saw

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[5] My System of Career Influences, McMahon & Watson, 2008

this exercise as a means of categorising and narrowing down, and I am not sure she took away the themes we discussed in relation to this. Gary still saw me as diagnosing him like a doctor would a new patient, steering him in the right direction; and Robert said I was really good at giving advice- really the epitome of more traditional methods. Parker (2006) suggests that card sorts can be seen as a means of classification if not being used within the constructivist framework, so, was I not doing it right? I think that while these participants still saw the exercise in terms of classification, the categories were ones they had made themselves- not an SDS profile. In a way they created their own individualised constructs of what the occupations meant to them and related these to their experiences, memories and latent dreams.

In terms of a constructivist worldview each participant represented very different circumstances and realities in which they were attempting to negotiate their career. An immigrant trying to re negotiate his lost career identity in a new culture amidst economic uncertainty; a graduate undermining her own abilities and smothering dreams of a career; a young man instinctively wanting something more but unable to draw on experience or discourses in his life to articulate what that is. This supports the notion that career development is not a simple linear process of reaching career maturity, but the ongoing renegotiating of identity in relation culture and context. While it is important to be cognisant of a person's developmental stage when working with them; reaching maturity does not always translate to knowing what to do, particularly in the constant flux of economic and social conditions which impact on our lives and decisions and which are perhaps best illustrated in the case of Gary. It is also I feel, worth mentioning that this method facilitated reflection on the current Economic climate, where, no matter how well developed your self concept is, opportunities are limited. This harsh reality had to be considered, and worked with throughout the process.

New Registrations, Progressions and Disenchantment
It wasn't until I completed my research and reflections that I came across Reid and West's recent research: 'Struggling for space: narrative methods and the crisis of professionalism in career guidance in England' (2011b). Reading through it, I was struck by the similarities between the participants in their study and how I felt as a

practitioner, and researcher, struggling to find space in a system which is being driven more and more by progression targets. It seems that in the current crisis the service has lost sight somewhat of the underlying philosophies which were evident when I first joined almost six years ago. Similar to the 'instrumental discourses' evident in the UK (Reid & West 2011b, p.2), our service is being driven by the discourses of registrations and progressions. Throughout this research I consulted with two trusted colleagues who share my values for the work we do, and have been equally as frustrated by the changes to our practice in recent years. It was clear from their interest and enthusiasm for my research that they wanted to learn more and take the time to reflect on their own practice. Throughout our discussions I felt as if this research had finally articulated the sense that our values as professionals were being lost in the pressures of registrations and progressions. On commencing the project I was aware of the role values play in action research (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2009), however, I am not sure I was completely cognisant of how much this research was being driven by my desire to reassert these values into my practice. In a sense, over the last 3 years of my training, first at Postgraduate and now at Masters level, my skills and awareness have been increasing, alongside a feeling of being deskilled within the workplace.

One of the participants in Reid and West's research discussed her frustration in trying to express her professionalism in work. Many of her colleagues 'don't share a language even, anymore'; attempts to be creative and develop professionally are devalued in a system which 'doesn't enable young people to have possibly more than the minimum, but also restricts the individuals working within the organisation to try and achieve something beyond that' (2011b, p12). While our service hasn't drifted this far from its ideological compass yet, I can relate to the divergence amongst staff which she describes; the hasty referral is unlikely to be challenged amidst demands for immediate tangible outcomes, and it is increasingly difficult to maintain space for the client. The result is often a backlog of administration, a crammed diary with people waiting weeks for a follow up appointment and I sometimes feel that a Master's in Administration may have served me better in the current climate.

These feelings of frustration and disillusionment are reminiscent of Ritzer's notion of disenchantment of workers in over rationalised 'mc donaldised' systems (2005). Bunting (2004) highlights that within the British public service, where the audit culture has reached extreme levels, quality is more about how you present your work rather than how it is actually performed, where ' the culure of targets .. is too often an elaborate game in which targets are set, performance is geared to meet them, yet the actual quality of the service doesn't improve' (Bunting, 2004, p.128). The result in the workers is one of low morale and feeling of being lost amidst a 'blizzard of paperwork' (p. 122) and the 'tyranny' (p. 124) of centrally dictated targets. Clients' stories of personal transformation get lost in the number crunching, and the value of space to express their disquiet, their loss of self esteem and confidence is undermined.

Room for Creativity and Being

Amundson and Hansen (2009) suggest that the inherent 'busyness' which characterizes our everyday life can hinder creativity when dealing with complex issues and can result in an automated stereotypical response which is far removed from the notion of the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1995). They talk of approaching tasks with 'a quietness of spirit' (Amunsdon & Hansen, 2009, p. 33), and emphasise the need for counsellors to 'be' with clients, not to rush or force the process; to be patient that things will arrive at their own conclusion so to speak. In the current work environment how is this possible? Where do we find the space to cultivate this mindfulness when supervision is more about day to day practicalities than reflection? Managing the clients need for answers and 'ones own wish for omnipotence' (Hood, 2008, p. 418) becomes more difficult when working within restrictive time constraints. The negative impact of projections and transference can take over the session when you are just operating on a superficial level, and indeed in recent months I have noticed my own bad habits creeping back into my practice as I shift to autopilot to 'get on with the job' (Reid & West, 2011b, p.3, Hood, 2008).

The reality is that we are dealing with large numbers and that is not going to change any time soon. Reid and West (2011b) talk about the pressures in the UK which managers face in dealing with the increasing demands on the services. 'Getting on with the job' to ensure funding streams (Reid & West 2011b, p3), raises concerns over 'quick fix solutions', requiring 'young people described as NEET (not in

education, employment or training) to become EET (IN employment, education and training) ASAP' (Reid & West 2011a, p. 175) While the UK model more resembles the structure of FAS, it seems that despite the shortcomings reported within this model (ESRI, May 2011), our service too is drifting in this direction. The main criticisms young people have in relation to their interactions with Social Welfare and FAS include limited chances to explore opportunities or develop a relationship with the advisor; feelings of being processed, and never meeting the same person twice (NYCI[6], 2010). Similarly, Bell and Blanchflower (2010) highlight the social, economic and personal impacts of unemployment, in particular in the young, causing 'permanent scars rather than temporary blemishes' (Ellwood, 1982, in Bell & Blanchflower, 2009, p.15) and recommends targeted assistance to avoid long term unemployment. In line with the recent ESRI report (2011) the department of Social Protection has committed 'to target resources on those who most need, and can benefit from, activation measures' (ESRI, 2011, xii). However, in contradiction to this sentiment participation in new programmes such as the TUS[7] scheme will be randomly selected from the live register thereby limiting the potential positive impacts such programmes can have. Although we can readily identify on our caseloads clients who would clearly benefit from such a programme, we can have no input in the identification of potential participants. Still in the early days of this new government it remains to be seen what changes will take place and what role our service will play in these changes.

How Feasible is it?

> **Robert**: I think some people would lose interest, if it wasn't a week in week out thing, I think a lot of people would lose interest but I'm willing to learn and get stuck in….yeh a few of them (his friends) would lose interest, but like you don't know until you try really do you

Throughout the research I questioned how feasible using this approach was given our current workloads, and this concern is echoed in the practitioners who participated in Reid and West's research and in Robert's sentiments above; would clients invest enough time in it to be worthwhile? Certainly, not all clients would need this level of exploration, but there is value in integrating it to some degree in all our work- so that

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[6] National Youth Council of Ireland
[7] TUS is a work experience programme for Unemployed persons, in community organisations. http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Schemes/RuralandCommunitySupports/Pages/tusfaq.aspx#2

a CV session becomes more meaningful, or a short session provides more depth for the clients, and less of a feeling of being processed. While I can't impact on the top down policies which are being implemented in the current Economic crisis, I can try to impact on how we navigate these changes within our own service. Already my research has created a heightened awareness of how the fast pace of work is impacting on us, and there is certainly a thirst for knowledge which has been neglected of late. Earlier this year one of the colleagues who assisted me in this research facilitated a training day on mindfulness which was well received by other staff. I have also been asked to provide some training in the narrative methods I have developed in this study which is a positive sign that the service is reawakening to the need to find space for reflection and learning.

> Selectively inattentive to phenomena that do not fit the categories of his knowing in action, then he may suffer from burnout and afflict his clients with the consequences of his narrowness and rigidity.
>
> Schon, 1983 p. 61

Schon highlights the importance of reflective practice for professional development and, as the practitioner engages in this reflection he becomes a researcher, intent on solving dilemmas and anomalies which arise in his work. Studying my practice in this way has been very insightful, and in taking the time to improve things I have been able to express and reassert my values in my work by providing a meaningful transformative experience for clients.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to improve my practice by introducing a narrative approach to my guidance sessions with clients. By describing the methods I used and incorporating both my reflections and those of the clients I also wanted to contribute to the literature on process research within guidance. The underlying motivation driving the research was the desire to reassert my values into my practice. This final chapter will consider whether I succeeded in my objectives and will make some recommendations for further study and new directions in practice.

Improving my Skills

Exploring the literature on narrative approaches has opened up a huge amount of resources and techniques which I hadn't previously been aware of, all of which compliment the client centred counselling approach I had developed from earlier training. However, my knowledge of these approaches was developed through extensive reading of the literature, rather than exposure to the techniques, and therefore any appraisal of the analysis and conclusions derived from this study needs to bear this in mind. In Reid and West's research (2011a;b), the practitioners involved received training in Savickas's career style interviewing, and had the opportunity to discuss and try out the techniques before bringing them to their work place. While my professional training in Adult Guidance and Counselling provided me with a good foundation from which to work, I feel I would have benefitted greatly from discussion and demonstration of the methods outlined. Collaborating with my colleagues in this regard was certainly helpful, however, in terms of guidance training, I feel programmes would benefit greatly from introducing these techniques into the curriculum.

From the perspective of my own practice there is a lot which I will take from this and use again. Likewise, there is keen interest amongst my colleagues to learn more about this approach and how it can be incorporated into their own work. In setting out to improve my own practice, it seems that my motivations and concerns were not unique to me, and this research somehow gave voice to the frustrations some of us have been experiencing in trying to live out our values in our work. This I feel, has been a very

positive outcome and has lent some Educative authenticity to the project (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

Process and Practitioner Research: Limitations

I have provided a detailed account of the process, and have collaborated with the participants in incorporating their views, and, in this way, have added to literature on both process and practitioner research. Adopting an action research methodology has given me the opportunity to reflect on and improve my practice; something which had perhaps been neglected in the recent 'busyness' of everyday work. With less and less time available to develop reflective practice, this research has highlighted the importance of this in ongoing professional development. It has also brought me closer to the clients' experience and, in listening to their insights, I have developed a renewed awareness of the process from their perspective. With these particular clients the approach proved successful in helping them to alter their thinking about current circumstances, and to develop a better understanding of themselves, their experiences and how this could relate to a future career. However, as is illustrated both here and within narrative literature (Mc Mahon & Patton, 2006a), these techniques should build on the knowledge of developmental and social learning theorists, rather than displace them.

One of the major limitations of a study such as this is that it merely represents my experience, and therefore no universal conclusions can be drawn from it. Both the research methodology and guidance methods were constructivist in nature, and therefore, the intention was never to make a universal statement about narrative approaches. Instead, I hope that within the description of my experience there lies some insight for other practitioners interested in learning about narrative methods. In addition, researchers may be interested in seeing how this approach worked in a practical sense, with these particular clients, in the context of my work environment. Reid and West (2011b) question how relevant the findings from their study are in other contexts, however, as I have shown, my own experience resonated a great deal with the sentiment and experiences which their study gave voice to. Similarly I hope that others reading my own research will be able to relate to different aspects of it.

Further Research

I have already discussed in the methodology chapter the limitations of this research in terms of subjectivity; however, it is worth readdressing it here, in relation to recommendations for further research. One of my colleagues has suggested that in developing this, we could each take one approach or tool and try it out in our practice over a period of time. We could then use one of our training days to feedback to the group, and compare our experiences. This, I think, is a great idea, and would extend the notion of reflective practice and practitioner research involving all members of staff. It would also help to eliminate some of these issues of subjectivity in relation to only my voice being heard as practitioner in this project.

In order to gain more depth of insight, it may be interesting to do a similar study with just one client and to elicit their feedback immediately after each session (as in Kirschner et al, 1994), rather than, as I did, wait till the process has been completed. This, I feel, would lend itself to more detailed feedback and an accurate capturing of immediate reactions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to carry out research involving a younger client group, combining this approach with experiential learning opportunities as suggested by social theorists.

In reading the oral histories described in Studs Terkel's book (1974), or in the philosophical musings of de Botton in the Pleasures and Sorrows of Work (2009), it would seem natural to extend further the use of narratives within guidance research. How much more insights could we gain if the style of research which these two writers adopted could be incorporated into a career guidance research context? These rich descriptions display more about motivations, influences, hindrances and career paths than any quantitative outcome study can, and could therefore facilitate insights for practitioners and inspiration for clients. Much as Terkel describes in the introduction to his book, I too 'found myself possessed by the mystique of work' while completing this research (p. xv, 1974), and I feel it is within this type of engagement with stories that we can find more answers, rather than in the administration of tests or the categorising into personality types.

Conclusion

> People need support and guidance to develop coherent narratives of where they have been, what they are doing now; and where they are going.
>
> EACEA, 2010, p. 69

An EACEA[8] report (2010) on learning and career development in Europe showed that amongst low skilled workers, those who had developed a clear future career narrative were more committed to engaging in further training and upskilling. The report went on to highlight the important role which guidance can play in facilitating this. At both National and European levels the importance of guidance for life, is being given great focus, alongside the desire to 'provide guidance that is individual and suitable to the needs of individual in terms of the way it is provided, who provides it and the methods used' (NGF, 2007, p. 34). This sentiment supports the notion of needs based, targeted guidance provision (ELGPN, 2011), however, the volume of non targeted referrals to our service makes it very challenging to offer different levels of support. Hopefully, this research has highlighted the potential benefits of giving clients the space to reflect on their circumstances and to find 'more meaning and hope' in their career choices (Reid & West, 2011b, p. 12).

In echoing the frustrations illustrated in Reid and West's study of wanting to develop professionally 'in worlds that may deeply constrain possibilities to be and become the professionals we would like to' (2011b p. 12), this research has provided some space and new opportunity, within my own service at least, to try a different way of doing things. As one of my colleagues remarked, in times where public funds have to (and should be) justified, we have to produce results- however dubious or temporary they may be. By limiting guidance to time-pressured sessions, followed by hasty referrals, we are merely reinforcing the discourses of inequality (Reid, 2005; Richardson et al, 2005), which suggest that only those with opportunity or privilege can find some sort of meaning, purpose or value in their work. The rest should just settle for jobs 'which are too small for (their) spirit' (Turkel, 1974, p.xxiv), and which provide little more than 'a Monday through Friday sort of dying' (ibid, p. xi). As I explained at the start of this project, the core belief underlying my work is that everyone is entitled to find this meaning, purpose and value in their work. This research has allowed me to

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[8] Education, Audiovisual and Cultural Executive Agency (European Commission)

realign my values to my practice as I attempted to give voice to the 'extraordinary dreams of ordinary people', in my everyday work (ibid, xxiv).

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Fas Website
    http://www.fas.ie/en/Job+Seeker/Local+Employment+Service/default.htm

APPENDIX ONE

LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

Masters in Adult Guidance and Counselling NUI Maynooth 2011
An Investigation into the Narrative Approach to Guidance

Researcher: Orla Hicks   Supervisor Rita Meagher
Tolka Area Partnership   NUI Maynooth
orla.hicks@tap.ie   rita.meagher@nuim.ie

Dear Participant,

Please find attached the consent form for participating in the above research project
along with an overview of the research and how your information will be used.

At this stage I would like to reassure you that should you decide not to participate in
the project, this will in no way effect the service you receive at the Tolka Area
Partnership, and you will continue to receive support in exploring your options for
Education, training and employment as outlined in your first session here.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read the information and should you
have any questions or concerns, I can be contacted at 01-8683806 or
orla.hicks@tap.ie

Yours sincerely,

Orla Hicks

Guidance Worker
Tolka Area Partnership
Tel: 01 8683806

MED in Adult Guidance and Counselling 2011

Orla Hicks

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to:

Improve the way I work with clients and use guidance theory in real life work setting

To understand what clients think about the sessions: what they think works or doesn't work

To use the information to improve my practice and future work with the clients: to improve the overall service and to bring that knowledge back to theory

Much of the theory developed in guidance is from the point of view of researchers, so, in this study I would like to involve client's voices, as I believe this is the key to developing guidance approaches that work

Confidentiality:

The information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and your name or any identifying characteristic will NOT be included at any stage of the report

The information will be used in the project to show how clients experience guidance; so excerpts or quotes from the information you provide may be used. Again, any identifiable characteristics or information will be removed or changed to ensure you can not be identified

In the study I will comment on and summarize activities used during the process, but will not include any personal, biographical information that could identify you

You can have access to the information at any time and can withdraw from the project at any time

This project I hope is an opportunity to collaborate with clients to develop best practice in guidance; I really appreciate and value your participation

I _____(name) agree to participate in this research. I understand the purpose of the project and how my information will be used

Signed_____   Date:_____

APPENDIX 2

TAPESCRIPTS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

'Gary'
RESEARCH PROJECT

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1) What was the particular problem or difficulty you were experiencing before commencing your career guidance sessions?

While there were a few areas of concern, perhaps the most vital of problems was that panic was starting to set in. It was very evident that I was caught up in the grip of the panic of being unemployed. I was fearful of the future and I was applying for any job which would lead me to employment, irrespective of whether I was suited for the position or not.

Further, I was beginning to listen to the advice of so to call them 'outsiders', who perhaps thought that because they were in employment they were qualified to give me advice on what I should be doing to sell myself into the Irish job market.

A further problem was that I was starting to loose a sense of belief in myself, severely affecting my self esteem. This loss of self esteem had further repercussions in its own right insofar as I was concerned about my home life and what negative opinions my friends, (who were employed), would have of me.

Compounding these problems was the fact that I was listening to the opinion of individuals who were employed in personnel placement companies. Obviously they all had there opinion of how my CV should be structured and this was very obvious in the way my CV was composed and constantly revised.

Perhaps, and maybe this should have been mentioned first, I think that I had a major problem in not knowing how to find a job in a recession, or how to structure my CV from indicators of practical work to reflect those skills which are required.

2) What were your expectations of what would happen in the sessions before you commenced with the service?

*I had no idea that the service would be as professional and as valuable to me until the process was explained. I remained sceptical, as I had approached the (*mentions other service here*) offices in the past for assistance and was treated dreadfully*

3) Was your experience different than you expected? If yes, in what way?

It was indeed different! I certainly did not expect to be treated in a dignified and supportive manner. To the extent that the councillor took a direct interest in the difficulties I was experiencing and advised me accordingly. A sense of belief in myself has also been restored. In addition to this, I realized that the councillor had the ability and capacity to anticipate and match the labour market and skills

needed for me to enter that market. I certainly did not expect this level of assistance.

4a) Which discussions or exercises, if any did you find particularly useful?

The first exercise I was given was to do a skills audit. I found this exercise particularly useful as it highlighted my areas of proficiency and those areas of where I would be uncomfortable.

The discussions during the sessions focused on exploring possibilities which, on my own, I would not have considered. Further to this, by exploring the past and understanding what was in my way to finding gainful employment, really opened up areas of possibilities and opportunities. The discussions were in fact similar to a medical consultation that a doctor would have with a new patient, focusing on what actions would be necessary to solve the problem, (in this case, unemployment). The dialogue encouraged analysis of the past and present situation focusing on what is/ might be required for the advancement of personal development and eventual employment.

Of particular substance of any discussion or exercise was the thread of having to remain optimistic and positive during this process. This alone is perhaps one of the most useful elements of any discussion or exercise that was conducted.

4b) What do you think was the purpose of these exercises and what did you find useful about them?

I believe that there is more than one purpose to having these exercises being done:

Perhaps the main area of investigation is to explore areas of possibility. Where or how can the uncovered skills be utilized to the best possible effect for both the employer and the employee?

Another advantage to the exercises I believe is to assist the student in making self determined, yet responsible choices in their employment search, - instead of just plugging away!

The exercises assist with the advancement of personal development.

They help the student find personal satisfaction and perhaps maximum satisfaction in their new employment.

To this I add; as a work experienced person I find that having not been exposed to Irish employment leads to obstacles, as any suitable job skill I have is unrecognized. I am unknown in the corporate employment community! The exercise of networking and contact building contributes greatly to the so to say, 'spreading the word' of my availability.

5) Which, if any, did you NOT find particularly useful? Can you explain why?

To date, I have found all the exercises very beneficial as they are all relevant to the problem. Further, with slight adjustment to the exercise being done, they could also benefit other domains. For instance, if an organization was having difficulty with recruitment of member's to their cause, they could ask these questions of themselves.

6) Were there any other significant events or moments during the sessions, positive or negative that stood out for you?

Perhaps the realization that I was in fact inhibiting my job search by persisting in traditional ways was a great, positive leap forward! The sessions were enlightenment to my accepting that there are factors beyond my control that were inhibiting my job search. I found that the sessions provided insight into skills that I felt I never had, and how these skills can be utilized across a number of enterprises. At the conclusion of every session, I left feeling very optimistic and positive about the future. This transformation of thinking or, method of career guidance, could be used for both an employer and an employee viewpoint with massive benefits to them both.

7) What did you feel was the purpose of giving you homework exercises between sessions? Did you think it was useful to do this?

I think that homework exercises are particularly beneficial in that they allow the momentum of the session to continue. It keeps one focused on the bigger picture and adds a sense of responsibility and two-way action on the mutual problem being worked on. Homework also provides a building base for the next session.

8) Did you learn anything new/surprising about yourself during the sessions?

Perhaps the realization that without this assistance and guidance I would continue to struggle against the tide. While I am particularly tenacious when it comes to problems of this nature and I feel that I am usually bigger than the problem, I now realize that I would not have managed very well on my own. I add that I now find myself thinking in other directions, and that what I thought I wanted to do is perhaps a little premature considering my predicament.

9) To what extent did you feel understood and listened to during the sessions? What do you think helped or hindered this?
I believe that my willingness to accept professional opinion and my determined need to get out of the unemployed mainstream contributed greatly to having my situation understood and heard, and therefore being positively acted upon. I accepted the fact that I had been going about the task of finding suitable employment in a traditional and restricted way and felt that the counsellor picked up on this and diligently re-directed my efforts. This has obviously been a tremendous help in a physical sense and by encouraging awareness and a sense of urgency in a positive and non-threatening manner.

10) What do you feel has been the outcome, (if any), of your guidance sessions?

My outlook has changed; I've experienced a transformation of methodology! While I am still attending sessions, I do feel that the councillor has set about to 'control my panic' and I now feel more confident that I am heading in the right direction. By extrapolating hidden talents and by doing exercises that have explored areas of anonymous ability, whether the intended conclusion steers towards an area of further education, employment or a combination of the two, I have unreserved confidence in an assured future!

11) Was there anything you felt was overlooked that you would have liked to spend more time on?

I am not sure what the content of future sessions hold and therefore am not sufficiently able to answer this question. I can however express my satisfaction on the progress that has been made to date.

12) In terms of the original career problems or difficulty you came to the service with, what progress do you think you have made in addressing it?

Considering some of the original problems which weighed very heavily on my sanity, I can state with certainty that they have been massively diluted to the extent that logical thinking can prevail. Reference can be made to the first question in this exercise where I mentioned five problems which beset me. Without any doubt existing in my mind, any difficulties I had have been addressed accordingly. It now remains to rifle in on areas where my talents and abilities can be utilized. This remains, but all uncertainty with respect to the future does seem to have been removed and my confidence restored!

Have you any other comments or suggestions to make? *(Not applicable)*

1) What was the particular problem or difficulty you were experiencing before commencing your career guidance sessions?

Having the confidence in myself that I had specific skills that would be useful in the workplace. Also, I felt like I didn't know what career path to take or how to go about it.

2) What were your expectations of what would happen in the sessions before you commenced with the service?

That I would receive help with CV and interview prep and guidance re: career path.

3) Was your experience different than you expected?
   If yes, in what way

Yes, in the way that I didn't expect the first few sessions where I had to delve into thinking about things. It really helped me see what skills I had and gave me confidence. I thought I had no real skills.

   Think back over the sessions
4a) Which discussions or exercises, if any, did you find particularly useful?

Careers Portal to give me a basis to work from
The exercise with the cards that I divided into jobs interested in, indifferent and not interested in.

4 b) What do you think was the purpose of these exercises and what did you find useful about them?

To help me start thinking about what I liked and how it could be formed into a career and to help me narrow down the huge amount of career choices I had originally began with

5) Which, if any, did you NOT find particularly useful? Can you explain why?

None that I can think of.

6) Were there any other significant events or moments during the sessions, positive or negative, that stood out for you?

Not that I can think of

7) What did you feel was the purpose of giving you homework exercises between sessions? Did you think it was useful to do this?

Yes, most definitely. It gave me a focus and kept my mind on the task at hand

8) Did you learn anything new/ surprising about yourself during the sessions?

That I have more skills than I originally realised

9) To what extent did you feel understood and listened to in the sessions? What do you think helped or hindered this

Yeah I think I was understood pretty well. Orla has a good understanding of me after a session or two.

10) What do you feel has been the outcome (if any) of your guidance sessions?

That I have the confidence to look for jobs, I have a professional looking CV, I have more resources to search for these jobs and can genuinely for the first time see myself in a 'real' job and have the ability to begin a career.

11) Was there anything you felt was overlooked that you would have liked to spend more time on?

Maybe the possibility of jobs abroad?

12) In terms of the original career problem or difficulty you came to the service with, what progress do you think you have made in addressing it?

I think it's a long process. I'm halfway or three-quarters the way there. I am a lot better prepared than I was before I arrived at TAP.

Have you any other comments or suggestions to make? (please use the other side of the page to comment)

TAPE TWO 'GARY'

Me	Ok, so what I wanted to, the information you had in the questionnaire was really it was great, and very very thorough there was a couple of things I kind of wanted to hone in on a bit. First of all, before you came here had you any experience of guidance beforehand had you ever had career guidance or
Client	probably at school
Me	Ok, and what was that experience like?
Client	It was very immature
Me	Ok
Client	in that it wasn't anything that had been developed upon it was an idea that the education system thought might be a good idea to help students after school
Me	Right
Client	Now the guidance teachers had not been trained in any form of Anything
Me	Ok
Client	So, they could have been taking history classes and when they got a break they were told, alright you will prepare now for a guidance lesson for those grades or for that lot
Me	Right ok
Client	So it was a very off the cuff type of experience
Me	ok yeh yeh
Client	and certainly not in any detail at all
Me	OK yeh
Client	one of the things they might do was show us a form about a particular Career
Me	Right, so very information based
Client	well you see, because they didn't have any idea they had to somehow find a little bit of interest, and hopefully in the next half and hour or 3/4's of an hour showing them a film and will keep them quiet
Me	Right… crowd control !
Client	that's quite right, quite right and it it really didn't serve any purpose It didn't do anything at all
Me	yeh yeh
Client	so with the result fellows were leaving school and just saying well we've got to go into the army and after the army we will decide what we want to do
Me	right yeh, putting off
Client	So it was putting off the major decision although a lot of fellows would go straight from school into university and then to the army afterwards, but then again they were limited to what they could have done because their University studies were now two years in the doldrum

Me	right yeh
Client	So it was very awkward
Me	yeh Ok, So when you came in here first, and in our first sessions
	we spent a lot of time kind of looking at the past, and past stories and
	you know history, like successes in the past; had you expected that
Client	No, I didn't know what to expect- I was very skeptical because I had
	been down to FAS; and my experience with FAS was you can actually
	shove it
Me	OK
Client	I was actually told that I was wasting their time, and I had no business
	Coming here and asking for assistance
Me	OK
	so you'd come from that negative experience
Client	quite right
Me	You were cynical coming in thinking am I going to get the same
	Treatment
Client	basically basically, that was the feeling
Me	Ok
	and so when we were looking at, do you remember we had
	the time line thing, we were looking at, we started quite far back
	from your school experiences and built that picture of your past
	What was that experience like for you; how did it feel
Client	Orla, I immediately felt comfortable
	Ok
Client	immediately I knew that there was a structure to what you were doing
	I knew that from the time we sat down, in fact from the time I came into
	these offices; I could feel a structure … this is an understanding of
	who I am and what I am about to do
Me	OK
Client	So I felt totally comfortable with it
Me	yeh yeh yeh
	and what do you think you learnt about yourself in those discussions
	those earlier discussions of, do you know, looking at your history
	and that
Client	golly, I think to a great extent I was drifting and if I look back at my
	past a lot of my successes were as a result of my own hard work ,
	and not so much as a result of doing what I really wanted to do
	and loving it and that is the difference; it wasn't a scratch of the surface
	it was going below the surface
	Right
	I found a bit of truths about myself in so far as as much as I loved the
	pub industry and to work in it, it would be ridiculous for me to do it now
	because it is the type of industry that if you are not owning the establishment
	you have got to get involved in it at a very young age; and that's from school

	Leaving, because the cultural differences is so vast
Me	OK, so you found some truths about yourself
Client	Absolutely, absolutely
Me	and you mention in the questionnaire, you have, you say 'I got insights into skills I thought I never had '. So in what way; what helped you highlight those skills that you thought you never had, what parts of our discussions
Client	Well the way you questioned ; that was definitely, cos you managed to draw things out of me and it was that drawing out of me that I didn't realise If it had been… you see a lot of the the problem you see that I think, everyone out there thinks they know whats best for you ; and every personnel agency they structure you to what they want. They've got jobs to fill, so even though you might be the square peg, they will find a round hole for you, cos they just want to fill positions
Me	Yeh yeh
Client	and I realise that the older one gets; if I'm pushed into a job now I would feel well I can't afford to move now, I've got to like it or lump it; and going through a personnel Agency that was happening, because everyone of them wanted to change my CV to suit their format, and not necessarily to suit me or to suit a particular job
Me	and is that what you meant when you say in the questionnaire that, em, this format or the kind of stuff that we did together would be useful to do on the other side-employers do it?
Client	I think that would be a really good idea; I think a lot of companies in using employment agencies, or in fact just using their own advertising for staff- what are they looking for? are they looking for someone just to,as a stop gap; or are they looking for someone to have a career with them - and the way most advertisements are structured for job vacancies are really just, hopefully they are going to attract someone; and who they get is the best of a bad bunch who answer to that advertisement So I think this structure is so important
Me	Right - and that kind of deeper
Client	that deeper understanding that, where you pulling out skills that in my opinion I hadn't really thought of; and I didn't think them necessary or important enough. I think oh that's very necessary to pay attention to detail- that's my opinion but a job out there might think well paying attention to detail is nothing; all we want this fellow to do is run around in circles ; so that is a big difference- focusing on where I would be good, and where I would be happy, and where I would be comfortable The same goes with the other side, a company needs to know that the people that they are employing are fitting the companies structure
Me	Right ok, and then you also mentioned that it helped in exploring possibilities which on my own I would not have considered; em is that along the same lines as when we were talking about the skills, so it was that probing that was, the discussion that highlighted that or?
Client	well orla, I wouldn't have considered publishing, I wouldn't have considered the transport sector I wouldn't have considered those
Me	It has really broadened
Client	It has broadened

me	the environment
Client	Its broadened, I've realised that there is a lot out there that I can do
Me	right, ok
Client	I might not be able to do it with that company or company A, company B
Me	Hmmm
Client	but company A or Company B don't need that
Me	Right
Client	but that company, the bigger company out there, they are looking for those type of people and because its been so little attention has been paid to getting the right person for the right job in the past ; they just think well we'll carry on until the right person comes along and I think that has been a major awakening
Me	Yeh great; and then we looked at em the bl… we did the goal setting and the we were looking at the blocks; whats in the way. Do you know and then setting goals
Client	Yes
Me	how was that exercise
Client	well, what was in the way, is really not seen, when you start to panic as I was and which you picked up on really early, you don't seem to see those as being in the way . And I believe I am very … I have tenacity
Me	right
Client	and I think - Oh well if there is a problem I'll work through it ; its not a problem that I see that I shouldn't be even bothered about, because my skills or my talents are not in that area- so why am I worrying about it as a stumbling block; for instance I am not a qualified CA so why am I worrying about balance sheets and all of that- I prefer the sales side so why are you worrying about the financial side. And I think I am looking at jobs and I am seeing the stumbling block of not being lets say a financial, financially literate - but you don't have to be for that particular job
Me	right yeh
Client	and those are areas you seemed to pick up on and steer me in the right course ; and that would have been stumbling blocks had I just carried on plugging away the way that I was
Me	Right yeh, that plugging away kind of just
Client	it just the shot gun approach ; of anything out there instead of rifling in on something
Me	and is that what you mean when you said you had a 'transformation of methodology ' ?
Client	Yes
Me	that's what you mean
Client	My whole mindset has changed
Me	Ok ok
Client	My whole mindset has changed
Me	and is there anything that , do you know anything, not negative, but I suppose anything that you thought ok, that's not so useful or I might- or anything that you would have wanted more of ; I know we are still working together obviously, but we've kind of moved forward to the more job focused stuff
Client	Yes
Me	So within the guidance was there anything
Client	No Orla, I'll tell you my attitude is such that every part of our discussion is absorbed

Me	OK
Client	because I feel there is not something that I could close down and say that is not important everything is important - and I think that goes back to my paying attention to detail Yeh because it wouldn't be in the limited time that we have together if it wasn't focussed on that end goal; so my attitude is - there is nothing that I feel is unimportant everything that is said every exercise done , doesn't matter how silly it might seem; it certainly isn't . There is a need for it and that is why it is there
Me	and if you were to describe this experience to somebody, d you know- to a friend, to your wife you know
Client	which I do regularly
Me	How do you describe it- if somebody was coming in to see us and you know- yeh I've been There
Client	I'd recommend it totally
Me	ok yeh yeh
Client	even I hope to use this when I get employed with members of staff especially when it comes to a one on one personal or when they have their sessions with management - are you in the right area; are you here because you've got to work or are you here because you just feel this is what for me. Cos if its not its better that you pack up and go, because we are wasting each others time I think that's a very necessary thing in self assessment So you are learning A about yourself; but also that these methods and what we are doing together you can use for yourself later, and for in your
Client	Of course- as I mentioned earlier about a company using this same type of system; how many people, and its an known fact that there are so many people in jobs that they don't like doing ; they are just there-oh we are in a recession time we need a job we want to work I hate going to work Oh god its Monday morning; thank god its Friday ; why- thank god for everyday - you know.. But but, because its Friday morning you don't have the office
Me	so you benifitted a lot from it and you got a lot of insight into yourself
Client	Yes and I 've looked back at jobs that I have been in and positions that I have been in and I've thought, my god , had I had this same type of thing would I ever have worked in those type of places
Me	right right thats interesting Ok that's all that's all, unless you have anything else to add or
Client	I don't think so, no em it's a very enlightening system and I just feel it that everybody should be able to have this type thing and if it was taught at schools and if it was from when you if the school children would understand why they need to have good grades why they need to have an education in this world, gosh you are cutting out 80% of the problems the world has at the moment

TAPE 'CIARA'

Me Before you came in here did you have any experience of guidance before

Client Eh, not really when I was eh in sort of 5th or 6th year I went into like the career guidance teacher and said I want to do media studies, and they said no (laughs), and that was kind of sort of where it ended, and then I said right then I want to do law so they told me like different things about it and showed me different courses, and then I said, em, will you show me more about media studies and they just basically showed us, like, what was in the courses, barely, and where they were;

Me Right

Client Really bad career guidance

Me It was very much information based

Client Yeh, they weren' t really… I think the teacher we had wasn't really too bothered with telling us anything or teaching us more so like, when they could go home really!

Me Yeh, yeh, ok yeh

Client You know, at that age I wasn't really kind of too concerned, I was just like kind of go to college and be free as opposed to what I wanted to actually do,

Me yeh yeh

Client I didn't really, I had some experience but not em , kind of more hands on.. It was never really hands on, one on one sort of

Me yeh yeh, it was more group.. School and specifically geared to going to college

Client Yeh yeh, and you'd have a few kind of, one on one interviews, but they were never really in any way helpful; I know that's terrible to say, but it was never really like helpful

me Yeh, Ok, Ok
Now in the questionnaire that you did, you said that you didn't expect em, to have to delve into things, d'you know, as much as we did. How did it feel being asked to delve in more

Client em, It was very odd, it was very unusual, because em, the only experience I said like, I had with career guidance was, kind of more so, like you know, very one dimensional , it was never anything to do with yourself as a person, you know

Me Right

Client and what sort of em values you had, what sort of skills you had you know, what kind of person you were, it never had that kind of sort of thing, kind of ever asked of me

Me Yeh

Client It was kind of, it was a bit difficult at first, cos I never really thought I had any experiences, or like em, skills or anything, so yeh, it was kind of unusual but it was very helpful definitely

Me ok yeh and was it kind of uncomfortable at the start to be asked that kind of stuff?

Client Em, slightly , cos I didn't have clue who you were (laughs) do you know what I mean like

Me Yeh yeh yeh

Client But it definitely did help like cos it was better to be asked at the beginning like you know , cos it kind of put my head kind of in a head space where I knew kind of, what I had to find out about myself really

me yeh yeh yeh
and I also, kind of , in the earlier sessions if you remember, I asked you about role models, people who influenced

me you em, what did you think of that kind of question?

Client em, I don't know, I don't really have that many role models I know some people do, people kind of aspire

	to be
	very like someone or whatever, I kind of sort of aspire to be kind of like myself do you know what I mean
Me	Yeh Yeh
	There's people that I'd admire and stuff, but at the end of the day they're not me and I want, I like different aspects of different people or whatever but, it might be a good question for some people but for me I was
Client	kind of stuck
Me	Right
Client	I was sitting at home going to my boyfriend, role models??
Me	Yeh yeh
Client	I couldn't think of anyone really
Me	and did you think it was, ok, I'd asked a couple of questions as the start that you had difficulty with and I gave them to you for homework as such, was that a good idea to help you think about it ?
	Definitely, cos I was like a rabbit in headlights, I didn't, you know it was kind of, couldn't think of
Client	anything..
Me	Yeh
Client	Complete mental block, so when I'm at home, sitting with my cup of tea of whatever it much easier cos you kind of have more time to think about it and stuff
Me	and you're not put on the spot
Client	Yeh, absolutely
Me	OK , ok em, and with, do you remember we did the success experiences, you had to think of examples of experiences you had that were successful like you had the Debs committee
Client	yeh
Me	Did you think that was a useful exercise?
Client	eh yeh, because I didn't really, I kind of had forgotten about any of that sort of stuff em I didn't actually have any of that on my CV or anything so it kind of, it helped me remember that I had actually done stuff in the past
Me	Yeh yeh ok ok; and the card sort exercise?
Client	Em
me	you know that was the different occupations and that, was that useful?
Client	yeh it was em, cos like, I didn't have a clue what I wanted to do em and, I think it was that I wanted to do too many things
Me	Right
Client	and was afraid to pick one thing in case it didn't work out, or whatever like, so that was kind of, it put me on the spot and visually seeing the cards in front of me, and seeing the names or whatever it was easier to kind of sort it out, you know having it all in front of me and deciding which I like better, and which I didn't
Me	Categorise
Client	Yeh yeh
Me	one other thing that we did, or we had, if you remember we kind of looked at the different external factors I guess that influence your career, so we had kind of you in the middle, and we were talking about your education your family, your friends and that ; was that useful to see that visual or not?
Client	I think that went a bit over my head like; I'm sure it would be useful if I went back and looked at it now and looked at it every so often when I needed to, kind of, but no it did kind of go over my head (laughs)
Me	Yeh yeh Ok, that's good feedback
	em and overall what do you feel you have learnt about your career story to date
Client	em… that I have a lot more skills and stuff, em, than I originally had like, that I originally thought I had you know, I've never really had a proper, you know, real career job like and I thought I couldn't really get

one because I spent the last 3 plus years sending out CVS, generic CVs generic cover letter and not getting any

reply from any real jobs only just from comission based jobs and stuff like that, so its kind of given me a bit more confidence;

Me   yeh

Client   I also know what I need to, kind of ,when I see like whats written down for a job, the requirements and stuff, I know what I need to pick out from that and what needs to be in my CV and cover letter and how to position myself and all that sort of stuff

Me   Yeh yeh

Client   I'm a bit more confident, but I'm still a bit wary though cos everyones talking about the recession

me   Sure

Client   and you know, and all that sort of stuff like so, when I get a job I will be really happy

Me   Yeh yeh , but you're more organised in what you are looking for

Client   absolutely; I didn't have a clue what I was doing before that

me   Ok and if you were describing this experience to a friend and I don't mean this in terms of our service or anything, like that, but just the experience of a client coming in getting guidance - how would you describe it overall to a friend, or your family, or

Client   em, I don't know like, very helpful anyway like, and, welcoming , em , no kind of, how would I put it like, there's no sort of, sort of like a level playing field do you know what I mean ? You don't seem like kind of like authoritarian or whatever

Me   yeh yeh

Client   Its kind of very comfortable and relaxed and that sort of thing like

Me   good good and was it an interesting learning experience for you?

Client   Yeh definitely definitely cos I didn't really have a clue- like this sort of thing should definitely be taught in school like career guidance was like, I don't know in every school, but in my school it was absolutely ridiculous like.
If we had a class like this, a module in school like this I think it would really really help so much more.
Cos even you were saying a lot of graduates my age are in the same position as me, don't have a clue whats going on. So if somethinglike this was in school at least you would have a better idea after college of what you were going on to and how difficult it actually is like

Me   and how everything is related that you're not just looking for a job in a little bubble

Client   Yeh
Listen, thanks a million for taking the time- I really appreciate it

Tapescript Robert

Me: Ok, before we started, what was em your experience of career guidance at school before you came in here.

Client: Em, I had career guidance at school but it wasn't very good like

Me: Right

Client: em, I kinda just didn't know, I had all different mixed ideas, I didn't know where I wanted to go with it, or I don't think even the guidance counsellor wanted to know where I wanted to go with it (laughs)

Me: Did you, you had a career guidance counsellor did you?

Client: Yeh yeh, em I don't know, I just, I never really found it useful really

Me: Yeh yeh, and had you got one to one sessions or anything like that at school

Client: yeh, one to one

Me: You did? ok, and were there many of those?

Client: No, I think I had about two

Me: ok ok, and what did you do in them?

Client: em, I think it was just like kind of trying to work out what work placements to go to like, where I could work, and remember I told you I wanted to be a vet as a kid

Me: Yeh

Client: and she printed me up loads of stuff on how to get into a veterinary clinic and stuff like that

Me: Right yeh, she gave you information

Client: information yeh yeh

Me: Ok, ok, and so, in our first session we started very much with looking at the past with the life line exercise

Client: yeh

Me: and we talked about past experiences, and people in your life and all that up to now. How did it feel being asked to go back that far and think about those things

Client: em, I was a bit confused trying to think back

Me: yeh yeh

Client: but when I did start thinking back, lots more came back. And its kind of good to talk about things like that anyway

Me: yeh yeh

Client: to have someone to open up to aswell

Me: yeh, Ok and em ok, so it was useful to kind of open up and that; what kind of stuff did you learn about yourself do you think?

Client: em……. I don't really know em… what did I learn..

Me: or what did it , what experiences came up that you think that are relevant to your work and that

Client: em … I don't really know…. I can't think.. em

Me: Ok we can come back to that

Client: alright , sorry

Me: no, that's ok ! em one of the questions em when we were talking about, when we were doing the life line, em one of the questions that you had difficulty with was thinking of somebody you admired or looked up to

Client: yeh

Me: what do you think of that kind of question?

Client: em, its just hard cos I don't know who I look up to, the only person I could think of is me ma, but that's, I don't really admire anyone else for anything else

Me: yeh yeh, and so do you think that's a useful question or is it a strange question?

Client: It is a useful question, its just, I don't know , I lack … I don't know I lack something (laughs)

Me: ok so there was nobody that you particularly aspire to or that that you could think of

Client: no

Me: ok and then we, kind of, we tried to create different futures and kind of looked at potential futures for you, and one way we did that was generating ideas using the cards… the card sorting exercise

Client: yeh that was very good

Me: yeh, what did you think of that, what was it like doing that exercise

Client: I thought that was very good, cos, it gives you like a broad, like a broad … opinion ? is that .. a broad opinion yeh

Me: yeh yeh

Client: and em, it just gives you all different ideas… you can put yourself in different things, like, maybe, yes and no, you know what I mean so

Me: yeh yeh,

Client: it was just, it was good like

Me: and we kind of

Client: it narrows it down like to..

Me: yeh, do you remember we looked at the cards and we kind of had, at the end of the session we had four or five of different themes of areas and ideas and that

Client: yeh of jobs

Me: how did you feel leaving that session?

Client: I thought that was very good cos I felt like I had more of an idea of what I wanted to do then; cos I knew I definitely wouldn't do that one, and I'd maybe do that one, and by the end we had a good structure on it like

Me: yeh yeh, ok ok and em, then I asked you to imagine you were that future self

Client: yeh, (laughs)

Me: and to look back on yourself now and give yourself advice from now. What did you think of that?

Client: I thought that was good aswell, cos it kind of sets you a goal, to reach that goal and then to be able to look back and say that's where I was and I'm here now like

Me: Ok yeh yeh and I also asked you to imagine that you were kind of speaking to yourself in the past

Client: yeh

Me: and em you were looking at where you were before and where you are now, and what advice would you give yourself to the past

Client: just to get up and do it, get up and do things, and don't be afraid and get more confidence in yourself

Me: yeh yeh… and was that something that maybe you learnt from the life line thing?

Client: yeh yeh, cos I think, I don't know, I think me confidence kind of went down after school and then like, to look back on things, and see where I was back in school and then where I am now… its like, get yourself together and do things you know what I mean like

Me: you motto was just do it, isn't that right

Client: yeh (laughs)

Me: so after all of our discussions and that right now, what changes have you been making to you life, or how you think about work and that?

Client: I have been looking at more jobs em, I've thought about the voluntary work. I'm actually going to go and do the voluntary work this week

Me: yeh

Client: I don't know I just have a better outlook on things now

Me: yeh yeh

Client: its kind of given me a positive attitude like to go out and do stuff like

Me: yeh great and this is, its quite a long process right, you know, we've been meeting for a while, and do you think the length of time would that put off other people from doing this kind of thing, or engaging, what do you think?

Client: I think some people would lose interest , if it wasn't a week in week out thing I think a lot of people would lost interest but I'm willing to learn and get stuck in

Me: yeh yeh, and…. We've met before.. we worked together before, what do you think was different this time?

Client: em, I think I, me, meself personally, I had me head together a bit more sort of

Me: right

Client: I think I gave you more of an idea what to work with so, I think you knew kind of where I was aswell so

Me: and do you think some of the exercises helped?

Client: yeh, the exercises were a lot better as well this time definitely

Me: and so moving on in our session is there anything you want more of or how do you want the sessions to progress

Client: I don't know, I'm pretty happy with them at the moment. I just want to see can I get something out of it

Me: yeh yeh

Client: well the voluntary work is something out of it I suppose, but I'd like a work placement , job or something you know what I mean

Me: yeh, so you've kind of built momentum, we moved back and now you want to kind of move

Client: I want to move forward

Me: yeh yeh. And … if you knew someone who was coming in here tomorrow, they said they were meeting me and they didn't know what to expect. What would you tell them, what would you tell them to expect

Client: em I'd tell them that you're great at giving advice and that you're a very nice person

Me: I suppose not so much about me but me…. but what we did together, so if they said what can I expect

Client: no about you… oh (laughs) just to get stuck in, the exercises are good, it gives you an idea of what like career you could choose or something

Me: Ok , alright, and do you think this kind of style would suit everybody or

Client: I think, no, I think its kind of for the younger crowd, I don't know I don't think it would suit the older crowd for some reason

Me: why do you say that?

Client: em I don't know some of the tasks like that yous do like I think is a bit I think, I don't know, I think its more for an age group for say under 30 or so

Me: ok, and then within your lets say your friends and that could you see somebody who just wouldn't get this at all would be kind of I'm not into that at all

Client: yeh a few of them would lose interest, but like you don't know until you try really do you ; I think it was great

Me: ok ok, so you've got something out of it

Client: I've got something out of it anyway

Me: and then, is there anything else that you want to mention or anything else that sticks out as memorable or interesting

Client: em, no, not off the top of me head anyway
Me: ok
Client: em, I just think it's a good experience, its good to get stuck into something when you haven't got, when you're not doing anything as it is like, cos you kind of fall into a hole and to get motivated again doing exercises is good, so .. that's basically it
Me: OK well listen , thanks a million for taking the time ….