DVD Review

A GUIDE TO REFLECTIVE CAREER COUNSELLING BY KOBUS MAREE

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Abstract
The global competitiveness of the modern labour force has obliterated the antiquated ‘environment fit’ model of career selection. In its stead, we encounter transient individuals with complex needs and roles that transcend static career determinism. Central to the new autonomy enjoyed by professionals are the concepts of narration and ‘autobiographicity’. And it is precisely these concepts that propel Kobus Maree’s career construction counselling instrument, the Career Interest Profile (CIP), into the realm of assisting intentional human agents to become reflexive and agentive in self- and career construction.

Keywords: self- and career construction, Career Interest Profile, career counselling, narration, autobiographicity

In the DVD, A guide to reflective career counselling, Maree sets out to defend a career counselling intervention called Career Interest Profile (CIP) which is centred in a self-concept career construction theoretical framework evolved from Super (1969, 1980, 1990) and more recently Savickas (2002).

The narrative technique followed throughout the programme is of significant interest as it becomes the salient feature in self-conceptualisation and reflection. As such, client self-narratives stand front and centre in the introduction, the administration of the instrument (CIP), during the two case study interviews, as well as during the debriefing at the end of the DVD. Maree’s reliance on narratives, shares consistency with Wink’s (2005) critical paradigm wherein she valorises the potency of narration as many people in the world carry their knowledge and narratives in their heads and not in books or papers as testament to their orate and literate traditions.

In this analysis, I shall build on the agentic dynamism that narratives provide guided by Maree’s narrative instrument (CIP) as it is conceptualised in a reflective career counselling programme and align it to the agentic vitality of narratives as seen through critical pedagogy. To begin with, Maree breaks with the tradition of career counselling that had a trademark ‘trait factor’ approach and progresses to embrace career counselling as a more mature discipline with a strong theoretical
and empirical base (Leung 2008). In so doing, he builds on the self-concept theory of career development in the tradition of Super (1969, 1980, 1990) and Savickas (2002), adhering much more closely to the latter than the former. What follows is a brief exposition of the theorising of Super and Savickas on self-concept as it is viewed from a vocational guidance perspective.

Super (1969, 1980, 1990) argues that self-concept comprises the complex interactions of factors, such as physical and mental growth, personal experiences, environmental characteristics and stimulation. While he leans his analysis more toward a notion that there is a natural mechanism that leads to development and maturation (Leung 2008, 120), Savickas (2008) proposes a more constructivist perspective and suggests that social context has a considerable role to play in self-conceptualisation. Thus, considering Savickas’ perspective from a career counselling stance, it could be assumed that self-conceptualisation allows human agents to ‘actively shape themselves and their life careers rather than passively perform work roles’ (Harting in Maree 2013). While I have given the theoretical origins of the self-concept theory of career development, I shall now shift to a sequential account of Maree’s reflective career counselling concept which is situated within the self-concept career construction model.

To begin with, Maree emphasises the importance of reflecting on reflection or meta-reflection as a means to identify major life themes and sub-themes in a client’s life. As he explains it, this is a departure from the dated method of the person-environment fit that characterised career counselling previously. By this he means that people were wedded to the careers they chose in early career-making decisions for life, and that the workers remained religiously loyal to that environment with no deviation. Furthermore, Maree contrasts person-environment fit to the individual development model which intimates that as complex individuals, the workers will evolve through many roles and stages in their lifetime and as such will demand a greater degree of meaning-making in their work and life, in order to contribute to society meaningfully. Lastly, Maree advocates for the narrative approach to elicit major themes from people’s lives as a way to empowering them to construct and design their future lives by way of career choices made in the present. Now that I have made a summary of Maree’s particular theoretical understanding of career counselling, I shall begin to address the methodological justification that led him to the development of a narrative instrument intended to assist in self- and career construction.

Maree argues against the positivist, quantitative methodologies that were the trademark virtues of career counselling previously, in favour of the modern adoption of qualitative, narrative approaches that accommodate client subjectivity. In so doing, clients’ life stories conscript the clients as the authors of their own ‘drama’ and in which they are the main character. This self-creating narrative is what Maree calls ‘autobiographicity’, which simply stated means that in times of change, people draw on their own autobiographies, and advise themselves for meaning making and direction. Further to autobiographicity, Maree incorporates ‘narratability’
as a method to elicit life stories from clients, and it is within these self-produced ‘scripts’ that the clients express their deepest needs (which will inevitably help to clarify their growth needs: personal, professional and societal). Consequently, the reflective career counselling approach which embraces autobiographicity and narratability is markedly dissimilar to the person-environment fit approach, as the former allows for greater career adaptability. This flexibility and fluidity enables people to move from one career to another in a boundary-less career cycle giving them the ‘active mastery of what has been suffered passively’ (Savickas 2011). Put differently, the unfinished stories of people’s lives empower them to master past challenges with a view to resolving issues; and this mastery has a positive correlation with finding personal meaning in their work, and designing a successful life while making social contributions (Savickas 2010). It is within the methods of narratability and autobiographicity that Maree developed the CIP as a narrative tool in career construction counselling. As such, the CIP is designed to help clients find advice from within as it creates a platform for clients to express themselves in a reflective career counselling approach that is non-hierarchical, non-threatening and non-prescriptive; and is instead self-constructing and empowering to clients. In sum, Maree distinguishes the rationale of the CIP as striving to empower people to advise themselves; as well as to design successful lives where they will be able to take care of themselves and make time for love, family and society.

Now that I have provided an analysis of reflective career counselling via the CIP, I shall progress to attempt synergy between the concepts elucidated thus far, to the empowering potentials of the narrative genre within critical pedagogy that mirrors the agency, reflexivity, transformation and emancipation that the CIP promotes.

From within the critical paradigm, Wink (2005) argues that critical pedagogy calls people to action by firstly naming, then reflecting critically, and finally by acting. In this reflexive cycle, critical agents become empowered through self-scripted narratives by engaging, interacting, problem-solving, problem-posing and risk taking. Furthermore, Wink juxtaposes Western traditions of cultural currency – that valorise a very direct, concise manner of speaking to guarantee success – with the rest of the world – where preference is given to telling stories to make a point. In the latter instance, many perspectives and variables provide listeners with the options to generate their own meanings based on lived experiences. Thus, Wink describes this collaborative, yet personal method of meaning making as ‘talking to’ rather than ‘talking at’ which implies interaction and incorporation rather than exclusion and hierarchy. With the collaboration alluded to above, I shall in the next section attempt to align the dialogical potentials of constructive and critical literacies to intentional human agency, reflexivity, individual emancipation and societal transformation.

Wink’s (2005) understanding of dialogue as generating knowledge and coming to understand together, resonates with a constructivist mode of pedagogy which is illustrated in the critical pedagogic encounter which she intimates in the following episode: In a problem-posing literacy engagement, students were instructed to read a particular text and write a narrative in their journals about the text. The teacher’s
response to the students’ work was not to correct the errors but rather to relate meaningfully to the students’ work with short, descriptive narratives of the teacher’s own. In this way, the students were given an opportunity to enjoy the freedom of self-expression rather than to feigning learning from the teacher’s corrections (Wink 2005). Notably on display in this vignette is student and teacher agency, critical literacy, reflexivity, and emancipatory learning that stands in stark contrast to the traditional hierarchical structure in functional literacy (read as technicist literacy) that strives to silence and marginalise student agency. Consequently, the generative model of pedagogy represented above allows the teacher to structure and guide the pedagogic practice (Wink 2005). This, in turn, provides an opportunity for transformational practice as students come to generate knowledge on their own terms which could potentially extend beyond the pedagogical encounter in the classroom, all the way into the world.

Adhering to a critical paradigm, I have attempted to seek cohesion by aligning the merits of a reflective career counselling instrument, the CIP with the key concepts nestled within critical pedagogy. By employing narratability and autobiographicity as seen in the CIP, I have tried to investigate the possible matrimony between the narrative genre and oral narration in critical literacy in an effort to establish whether these interventions do indeed have the capacity for: self-empowerment, personal and societal problem solving, self-reflexivity, engaging in risk taking, and inviting complexity. In conclusion, both the CIP and critical pedagogy are convincingly progressive in their embrace of a constructivist approach to agentic dynamism and vitality that is context sensitive as much as it is reliant on the agent in self-conceptualisation by people making meaning for themselves which cleaves to a notion of emancipatory and transformative practice.

REFERENCES
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