

TEACHING CAREER CONSTRUCTION AND THE CAREER STYLE INTERVIEW

by Mark C. Rehfuss

Creating opportunities for counselors in training to experience real world career counseling is crucial for their competency and skill development. Career counseling focused on using the Career Style Interview (CSI) fosters a greater appreciation for the complexity and power of career counseling and allows counselors to gain experiential understanding of the impact which narrative career counseling can have upon client's concerns and lives. This paper addresses an innovative method of developing career counseling competencies in counselors through an experiential learning exercise using the CSI. A brief description of the career content of the course and the activity are provided, as well as, a qualitative evaluation of the student's perspectives. Implications and recommendations for counselor training and practice are suggested.

Introduction

As the world rapidly transitions from old models of a consistent career trajectory to new models where each person must manage their own career across numerous jobs and work settings career counseling too must change or lose its relevance (Collin, 2007). Many individuals are no longer simply looking for career guidance but desire and need career counseling that can validate, clarify, and bring out the unity of their lives as they traverse across work settings. Many career counselors are addressing this shift by embracing newer career counseling interventions and assessments that are more holistic and subjective in nature (Brott, 2004; Bujold, 2004; Chope, 2008; Gysbers, 2006; Rehfuss, 2009). It is crucial; therefore, that the education of career counselors and counselors include newer holistic conceptualizations of career and provide training in tools which help individuals manage career concerns and locate meaning and mattering that unifies their unique career story (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003; Savickas, 2005; Singer, 2004). This article describes how one professor has addressed the need for training in newer models of career by integrating the theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005a) and its application into an advanced counseling theories course with positive results.

The need to develop counselors who are competent and trained in newer models of career counseling is clear but challenging to accomplish in doctoral level counseling programs. In order to accomplish this goal it was decided that a career theory and its application would be covered as one of the core theories of an advanced counseling theories class. The theory chosen for the course was Savickas' (2005) theory of Career Construction as it is a comprehensive theory of career which integrates a holistic career counseling intervention and assessment tool named the Career Style Interview (CSI) (Savickas, 1989). In the course, the students gain a foundational knowledge and understanding of the theory of Career Construction and are trained in applying the model through the use of the CSI. The blending of the theoretical with the practical is one of the strengths of Savickas' model as it facilitates higher order cognitive processes and knowledge (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). As the students use the CSI with individuals who have career counseling concerns they must synthesis and evaluate the information provided by the clients with the model resulting in a co-creation with the client of new knowledge and self understanding (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Savickas' (2005a) theory of Career Construction draws from the developmental, differential and dynamic perspectives of individuals interweaving the three into a comprehensive theory of career and the role of work in people's lives. This blending of perspectives creates a three dimensional portrait of the individual that includes career adaptability, vocational personality, and narrative life themes (Savickas). This self portrait of the individual is co-constructed and refined by the counselor and client as they work through and review the CSI. In the end, the full portrait tells what the client prefers, how they adapt, and why work fits into their lives in specific ways (Savickas).

The framework discussed in this report seeks to challenge students to both learn and apply career counseling theory. The activities seek to highlight their need for training while also demonstrating the usefulness of career counseling to individuals located within a rapidly changing society. The hope is that the challenges the counselor trainees face throughout this experience will raise their levels of self-awareness, career counseling competence and appreciation for the impact of career counseling upon the whole individual.

Methods

This innovative method is part of an advance theories of counseling and career course designed for doctoral level counseling students. The course provides an understanding of several counseling theories and one career theory. The theory of Career Construction and the application of the model through the Career Style Interview was the focus of study

for five weeks of a 16 week course. The students are first responsible for learning and comprehending the foundations of the theory of Career Construction by reading and discussing Savickas' and others work on the topic (Bussaca, 2007; Savickas, 1995, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Hartung & Tabor, 2008). The theory is also overviewed through classroom lectures and students engage in discussion about the model with their peers and the instructor. After the theory overview the students are to review several journal articles which include case examples of conducting the CSI with a client (Rehfuß, 2007; Savickas, 1989, 1995, 2005b, 2009a; Taber, Hartung, Briddick, Briddick & Rehfuß, in press). Students then watch and take notes on a video of an actual CSI conducted by Savickas (2006). Finally, the students participate in an interactive lecture with the instructor which reviews each of the questions in the CSI and provides additional examples of responses and how to conduct and process the interview. Once the training is complete the students are then assigned the following activity.

Activity and Goals

The core course activity on career is the student conducting a Career Style Interview with an individual who has a genuine career concern and writing a case report of the experience. The career concern could include the need for career direction, development, or possible transition. The concern needs to be real but it should not be a career crisis situation as this is designed to be a learning activity for both the participant and the student. The individual interviewed must be someone other than a student taking the course or a spouse or child of the interviewer. The identity of the individual remains anonymous and a pseudonym used to protect his or her identity. Details of the interview are only revealed to the professor in the case report but a signed release included in the syllabus is required from the participant.

The goal of this assignment is to test the student's ability to analyze, evaluate, utilize, and critique Savickas' (2005a, 2005b) theory of Career Construction and its techniques in relation to the real world of clients. The student will have to conduct a Career Style Interview (Savickas, 1989) and assessment of an individual using Savickas' Career Construction model and then produce a narrative case report of the sessions. In preparation for their CSI interview students are required to develop a foundational and functional understanding of the theory and intervention.

Teaching Specifics

The initial requirement of this assignment is to develop a deeper understanding of the theory of career construction and the Career Style Interview. This is achieved initially through overview readings of the theory and of the CSI. The readings that describe the theory and provide a case

example help the student to conceptualize not only the theory but also to see how the model is enacted in practice. Lectures prior to engagement in the interview should cover the theory of Career Construction and the CSI. The theory lectures should cover the development of the theory of Career Construction and how it expands Super's Life-span Life-space model of careers (Savickas, 2005; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). The three components of the model including vocational personality based on the Holland codes, career adaptability, and life themes (Savickas, 2005).

Discussion should also focus on how to develop a success formula based on the Holland codes as developed and described by Savickas (2005). The lectures on the CSI should cover each question including what to ask and how to clarify responses, the purpose of each question and what it is seeking to answer or draw out from the client. In addition, it should discuss how to process the narrative result from the questions including the qualitative analysis of the verbs and themes leading to identification of life themes. It is always important to help students understand that this is a process not an exact science and the person is the expert not the counselor. They are not Sherlock Holmes seeking to uncover the truth but they are more of a bumbling Watson seeking to help the individual tell, explore, and discover their story (M. L. Savickas, personal communication, July 1, 2009). It also is helpful to make sure they clarify that this is a training interview with the goals of helping the client make progress with their career issue while also providing the student with experience in this technique. It is a journey of learning that they are going to work on together.

Lectures should be supplemented with vicarious learning experiences through both indirect and direct observation of the CSI technique and its interpretation. One activity to provide indirect observation of the CSI is to have the students evaluate two or three case studies found in the literature. The students could review the case studies without the expert interpretation and develop their own interpretation of the content. The interpretation should include having them try to identify the individual's vocational personality, career adaptability, life themes and success formula from the narrative responses. They could compile their interpretation in a brief paper and then compare and contrast their findings with the actual expert interpretations. Highlighting what they are doing well and what they may be missing and what they learned from the activity about conducting a CSI. This experience could then be reflected upon and discussed with the class, in small groups, or through an online discussion. This type of activity will develop confidence and comfort in discussing and reflecting upon the content and results of the CSI while also helping them to see the vital role of co-creating the information with the client. Direct observation can be accomplished in several ways.

First, the lecturer can demonstrate parts of the CSI technique with students in the class. While discussing the CSI questions the instructor could ask three different students to share how they would answer one of the CSI questions. After the three individuals have shared the instructor could point out what is learned about each individual from the answer to that one question. This highlights what the CSI is looking for in each question and also helps the students to see that they could do this as well. As the instructor covers each question three different students should be asked to respond to it. That way after reviewing all of the questions, each student has only revealed a small portion of themselves but they gain an understanding of how each question helps to build a complete portrait of an individual. It should be noted that for the early memories or recollections question it is suggested that each student only share one "happy" memory with a title. This will be enough to indentify the key verbs and help students understand the purpose of the question while also respecting student's privacy (Savickas, 2005a, 2005b). Direct observation can also be accomplished by having the students observe a video of an expert conducting the CSI with an individual (Savickas, 2006). As they watch the video have the students note any other questions they would have wanted to ask and what they saw that was different than they may have expected about the interview and interpretive technique. After these experiences and foundational training the students should be ready to conduct their own interviews.

Activity Specifics

A full assessment of the client should be conducted including conducting the CSI following the case examples reviewed and results in the identification, interpretation, and verification of the individual's vocational personality, career adaptability, success formula and life themes. The case report will also include a section where the student will use this interview and interpretation experience to critique/validate the theory of Career Construction and its components.

As students are inexperienced with this approach they are required to conduct the interview and interpretation over two different sessions and make transcriptions of both. The transcriptions will aid the counselor in reflecting the client's story using the client's own words and phrases and will help them complete their case reports. As they progress with the model taking thorough notes of the client's responses can replace the transcription. The first session with the client should include basic rapport building and gathering of demographic information, background information and the answering of each of the 7 questions on the CSI (Savickas, 2005). In addition, although Holland codes can be deduced from conducting a CSI (Hanson, 1995) the students are required to have

their client complete the Self-Directed Search after session one and review the results with the client during session two. This provides a more objective basis for identifying the client's vocational personality and facilitates occupational exploration.

The second session, should happen after the student has reviewed and processed the client responses to the CSI questions in accordance with Savickas' narrative interpretation model (2005a, 2005b). The student uses the second session to discuss with the client the things that have been noted in the interpretation. The discussion usually focuses on co-constructing the life theme, reviewing the SDS results and applying that code in development of a success formula, and discussion of career adaptability and next steps for the client.

After the sessions with the client, each student is required to produce a narrative case report which summarizes the client using the findings of the CSI and includes a critique of the theory and intervention. The case report and critique is usually 7-8 pages in total length. The paper includes a concise narrative summary of each of the following areas delineated by the appropriate heading.

Client Case Report: Gathered information including:

Overview of Client: Key demographic information, relationship to interviewer and career concerns.

Holland Code: Individual's RIASEC code and relationship of code to other information. Information gained from the Self-Direct Search, including career day dreams, code, numeric values and brief interpretation of this information.

Career Style Interview: Responses to the career style interview. Information gathered from the pertinent interview questions and responses from the Savickas article and Professor's lectures.

Early Memories: Complete childhood recollections including a headline title which includes an action verb for each story. Also the emotions that the client felt at the moment.

Career Adaptability: A section on Career Adaptability which includes your discussion of this concept with the client and identification of where the client is in the process.

Life Theme: The process of reviewing your gathered information and identifying life/career themes with the client, including noted phrases and verbs that serve as underlying motivators.

Success Formula: Formulation of a success statement and interaction with client.

Critique: Higher order critique/validation of the theory and its application including:

Assessment of Model for client: This should include an assessment of

the fit or lack of fit of this theory/model with this individual case.

Assessment of Model for counselor: The model should then be assessed for fit or lack of fit with the individual therapist's approach to counseling. This can also include your experiential reaction to the model if you wish.

Application of Model: Finally, the paper should include a section on how the theory/model could be used in the student's current or future practice or setting.

In addition to the paper students participate in an online discussion board where they have to post a 250-350 word critique/validation of the theory and its usefulness or lack of usefulness for both the client and for themselves. They also had to make response posts to two of their peer's critiques facilitating more discussion about the model and its application.

Student Evaluation of Activity

When presenting any type of career activity as an example, some form of evaluation of the effectiveness of the technique should be supplied (Bernes, Bardick, & Orr, 2007). Although, this evaluation is not exhaustive it represents an attempt to highlight the effect of the training and activity from the point of the students who participated. Four classes of doctoral level counseling students participated in this training and activity as part of their advanced coursework in counseling and career theories. Qualitative evaluation data from two of the four classes was randomly selected and analyzed in this review.

This sample consisted of 25 females and 10 males, 22 of which reported their ethnicity as Caucasian, 5 as African American, 5 as International, 1 as Hispanic, 1 as Asian American and 1 as Native American. The average age of the participants was 36.2 years, with an age range of 25 to 59 years. As a part of the course all students were trained in and conducted CSI's as described in this report with a variety of volunteer clients including students, friends, extended family members and work associates. The students provided evaluative feedback on their experiences through three textual sources which included the case report paper, discussion board critiques, and final course evaluations. These three sources formed the qualitative data that was analyzed for themes which the students expressed related to the experience.

The instructor and two outside auditors analyzed the narrative content from the three sources and reached consensus on the themes consistent with the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method (Hill, Williams, & Thompson, 1997). The benefit of this type of analysis is the work required to integrate differing perspectives on themes into a general consensus provides more accurate identification of the themes. The final themes were also reviewed and affirmed by several students who partici-

pated in the course. Themes in the CQR analysis method are reported as General if they apply to all cases, Typical if they apply to more than half of the cases but not to all and Variant if they apply to less than half of the cases but more than two (Hill et al., 1997). Edited summaries of the major themes for each of the sources are provided below and the students own words are provided for further validation of the findings by the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2007). The qualitative results presented below are therefore supported by triangulation of data sources, member checking, and outside auditor review (Creswell, 2007).

Themes

Qualitative data used in indentifying the following themes came from three sources. Source one was the students' completed narrative case reports of their CSI which included a critique and evaluation of the usefulness of the CSI for the client and the counselor. Source two was students' posts to an on-line discussion board where they were asked to share their experiences of the model and its fit or lack of fit for the client. Source three was the students' course evaluations where they were asked to respond to two open ended questions about the course as a whole. A summary of the themes found in the first two sources which included the case reports and the discussion board critiques are presented here followed by one example comment.

A Useful Model

The only general theme found in all of the case report critiques and throughout the discussion board posts was the usefulness of the model to the client and the counselor. This theme is most accurately reflected in the following example: The theory of career construction fit extremely well with my client. At this particular time in her life, she needed to tell her story, specifically because she needed to hear it from herself... I found this model very useful, particularly in my own theoretical framework. In fact, I found it provided useful techniques and added value to my own interest in seeking to encourage clients to tell the complicated stories of their lives. The typical thematic responses which were found in more than half of the student case reports and posts included the following three themes.

Application Facilitates Learning.

Actually applying the model helped students to see the strengths of the model and to develop confidence in their ability to help their clients. They indicated that applying the model helped them to validate different portions of the theory of career construction. That the application helped them to overcome their initial concerns with the model and to see the impact the model could have upon client's careers concerns. The following statement reflects this theme. I was somewhat skeptical about this

model when I began the course. I thought the personal narrative could be fraught with misinformation and be used to abdicate personal responsibility. Using the model helped me understand how the model could actually confront those perceptions, as the client told his/her story and the themes emerged.

Learning More Than Career

As the students evaluated the application of the model they continually spoke about how they enjoyed the interview and the process and how it produced new insights for their clients. Often this took the form of their client's perceived weaknesses becoming strengths that could be used to address their career concern as well as their life situations. It often helped the clients to see what was meaningful for them and how that mattered to the world. This theme is reflected in the following student's statement.

For this client, the Career Style Interview and assessment seemed to be a valid tool. The client was surprised to see how her early recollections and role models had something to do with the frustration she currently feels in her job. In my opinion, the interview is an excellent way to determine what is most important in the life of a client. The early recollections and life themes provide vivid pictures of the client's beliefs and values. This is a tool that I can easily work into my current practice.

Finally, there were several thoughts that fell under the Variant theme category. Variant themes are those that occur at least twice but in less than half of the cases these included the following condensed themes.

Some Considerations

This theme consists of critiques or concerns that students expressed about using the CSI in certain settings or with certain types of clients. As they are somewhat diverse short student quotes are used to convey the essence of the theme. Several counselors applied the model in international settings and expressed that "some of the CSI questions needed modification to work effectively" with clients from their diverse cultural contexts. Similarly, some considered that it had "limited relevance" in their work as "elementary school counselors" or in settings where "the time needed to conduct the interviews is not available." Finally, some students expressed that the model was better situated for "high functioning clients" and "harder to use with more private or closed individuals."

The third source analyzed was the final course evaluations which gave students' the opportunity to respond to two open ended questions about the course as a whole. The responses were very brief but taken together they convey the overall attitudes of students toward the course and assignment. One Typical theme was identified.

Valuable Experience

The first question asked, if the course was redesigned which one element the students would want to keep and which one element would they want to remove? More than half of the student's responses requested to "keep the course just the way it is" with many stating to specifically keep the "the Savickas' career project" and the "career interview." No responses asked for its removal although, two students indicated that the instructor should "shorten the time spent on Career Construction." The second question asked the students to identify the most significant learning experience in the course and also their greatest disappointment about the course. More than half of the student's responded that the most significant part of the course was "the Career Construction project." Many students indicated that they had "learned a lot from doing the interview rather than just reading about it." The career theory and interview was not mentioned at all in the greatest disappointment category. Overall, the student's course evaluations support the value and significance of studying and applying of the theory of Career Construction in this manner.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The themes reflected in the students' comments suggest that the theory of career construction and its application provides a useful model for training counseling students. Engaging in the experience of conducting a CSI with a client is perceived as a valuable experience that facilitates the counselor's learning and is helpful for the client. It is an experience that brings the theoretical to life before their eyes. It forces them to apply the things that have learned and encourages them to gain more understanding and become more effective. The student considerations suggest that counselors who are new to this model should begin with volunteer clients who are higher functioning and open to discussion. The thematic findings also indicated several possible limitations of the model. The model may not be appropriate to use with younger children and in situations where time limits exist that could constrict the needed discussion and exploration. Finally, students must explore the impact that diverse cultural contexts and settings may have upon the model and its usefulness before engaging diverse clients.

The activity as discussed in this report attempts to cover the theoretical content while also providing training in skills needed to successfully manage a CSI session. Both aspects of the assignment are important to its implementation and crucial to ensure the success of counselors who are new to its methods. One aspect of the training that should not be overlooked is the perspective of the counselor engaging in this approach. As Young and Collin (2004) suggest narrative models call for a co-construction of the client's narrative with the counselor. The counselor must remember that the client is the expert on the self and as their narratives

are reflected back and discussed with them they gain a sense of their story and see themselves more clearly. To ensure this posture, it is important for the student to understand that as the counselor should constantly defer to the client about the meanings of any of their assumptions. So the counselor may say, "I see these action verbs in your stories which seem to indicate that you like... Does that sound right? Or how would you say it better?" This allows the client to construct their own story and helps to assure its usefulness for the client.

This course activity could be modified and enhanced in a number of ways. First, students themselves could complete the CSI as a growth activity. They could do this in the form of a narrative paper where they respond to each question and then they attempt to interpret the results following the paper outline provided in this report. This paper could then be turned into the instructor who would review the content. The professor would seek to make helpful suggestions about content and highlight themes that may have been missed or that verify those noted by the student. Since it is a self-growth and reflective activity it could be evaluated on its completion. Second, it might be beneficial for students to practice conducting parts of the interview on different peers within their course. Students could break up into groups of threes with each having the chance to ask question number one of each other and reflecting upon the response. Then moving to a different group and having each student ask question two of each other. This would continue until all the questions had been discussed. Finally, the current interview experience could be enhanced for the student by specifically targeting the development of student self-reflective practice skills (Russell, 2005). This would entail helping the student to return to the experience of conducting the first session, having them connect with a feeling from the first session and then having them reevaluate that experience. This skill building experience could be facilitated through a written journal that could narrate the student reflections for each session or throughout the whole length of the training and activity. This would allow the students to expand and develop their practice of self-reflective counseling.

Counselor educators have been given the privilege of facilitating and fostering the growth of counseling competencies within their students. These competencies include preparing students to provide career counseling to increasingly diverse individuals located in a continually evolving world of work. Assignments and activities must engage students in "real world" learning that pushes them to draw on higher order thinking skills and create useful solutions (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). It is hoped that this activity can serve as a catalyst for further innovative methods that seek to develop competent counselors who are holistically engaged in their counseling and in their world.

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