Developing a Scholar-Practitioner Model for Career Practice and Research

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The National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC) has sponsored two

conferences (October, 1998; April 2000) to examine how developing a research culture amongst

practitioners could enhance career counsellors' ability to help their clients respond effectively to

the rapidly changing world of work. These conferences have sensitized practitioners and

researchers to the causes and consequences of the rift between the science of vocational

psychology and the practice of career counseling. Participants at these conferences have

encouraged practitioners to conduct more research and apply this research in their practices.

Lack of research by practitioners is only half of "research culture" problem; the other half is what

scientists choose to research. As Lucas (1996) once commented, "Research in our journals tends

to answer many questions, but few that are asked by practitioners in their offices." Thus, the

participants at the NICEC conferences also encouraged researchers to investigate career problems

that are encountered in practice and to communicate their findings to practitioners in meaningful

ways.

Traditional Model for Research and Its Diffusion

The recommendation to develop a research culture seems necessary because many career

counsellors do not value traditional research. As Killeen and Watts (1983) indicated long ago,

practitioners' attitude toward research is at best "ambivalent." More recently, Williams and Irving

(1999, p. 367) concluded that "counsellors and psychotherapists are largely indifferent to, or

suspicious about, research findings." Practitioners have good reasons for their ambivalence about

theory and research, chief among them being the lack of utility that research has in addressing the

needs of a large segment of the population. Fitzgerald and Betz (1994) accounted for this

shortcoming in concluding that research on career theories examines the smallest segment of the population and does not systematically attend to the role of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and context in conditioning individual vocational behavior.

The inattention to bridging the gulf between practice and research seems to be due, at least in part, to differences in the personalities and interests of counsellors and researchers. Three studies have shown that counsellors resemble Social types whereas researchers resemble Investigative types (Kahn, & Scott, 1997; Roe, & Siegelman, 1964; Thorndike, 1955). These two types are not adjacent on Holland's hexagon, meaning they are moderately inconsistent. Thus personality differences may explain researchers greater interest in epistemology and quantitative methods in contrast to practitioners greater interest in ontology and qualitatively research methods. Given this difference in personality, we should expect practitioners and researchers to pursue different goals and prefer different activities, and they do. Scientific research and professional practice differ so much that one could claim that counsellors and researchers constitute two independent professions with distinct career paths (Peterson, 1991; Williams & Irving, 1999).

Alternative Models for Career Research

In considering how to bridge the gulf between career practitioners and scientists, a few colleagues have recommended that we strengthen counsellors' commitment to the *scientist-practitioner* model (Beutler, Williams, Wakefield, & Entwistle, 1995; Howard, 1986). However, more colleagues have suggested the use of alternative models for conducting research. For example, Lucas (1996) called for a *practitioner-scientist* model in which counsellors produce practice knowledge by systematically collecting case studies that could be used to develop counselling models that specify treatment protocols for distinct career problems in particular

populations. Her call for practice knowledge harkens back to Williamson and Bordin's (1941, p. 8) enjoinment that counsellors answer the following question: "What counseling techniques (and conditions) will produce what types of results with what types of students?" Rather than strengthening commitment to or revising the scientist-practitioner model, Stricker and Trierweiler (1995) concluded that the scientist-practitioner model tries to blend two antagonistic activities. As an alternative, they proposed that counsellors not pursue generalized knowledge but instead act as *local clinical scientists* in constructing local knowledge that is specific to particular groups of clients in unique contexts. Also emphasizing the importance of local knowledge, Elden and Levin (1991) proposed a *cogenerative learning* model in which practitioners engage scientists in collaborative dialogue that constructs new local theories focused on practical problems facing their clients.

The *practice research network* (PRN) model seems to have generated the most interest to date (cf., Brown & Bimrose, 2000). To form a PRN, a group of practitioners agree to use uniform research protocols to collect data from their clients. This research model has the advantage of analyzing common career problems and studying interventions in their natural settings. To sustain the interest and participation of counsellors, the research issues selected must be practical as well as fit the time and resources available to practitioners. In the long-term, PRN research seeks to construct websites where counsellors can identify which interventions worked with clients similar to those with whom they are now working. The networks also can foster outcome research and the development of clinical guidelines and manuals such as those generated by the empirical practice movement (Reid, 1994).

To implement these practice research networks in a way that narrows the gulf between traditional researchers and practitioners requires a resolution to the epistemological wars

embodied in debates about the advantages of quantitative versus qualitative research methods. If we are to develop a research culture and improve communications between practitioners and researchers, then we must move beyond the positivist-constructivist debate that engulfs much of the social sciences. The way forward may be foreshadowed by the recovered interest in pragmatism as a research epistemology that focuses on contextualized knowledge about particular individuals and community groups in specific situations (Fishman, 1999).

Knowledge Production

To move forward with practice research networks constructing rigorous databases of solution-focused case studies, we must first change our view of research and how we talk about it. To develop a research culture, I propose that we start to talk about knowledge production rather than research. Career counselors have produced extensive knowledge through their experience, scholarship, and reflection. This important practice knowledge gets transmitted more often at conventions and case conferences than in professional journals. Counsellors produce practice knowledge by disciplined inquiry, which may or may not include the scientific method. It is time that we articulate the fact that the scientific method is A method of disciplined inquiry, not THE method. From the perspective of knowledge production, counsellors are not scientist-practitioners, practitioner-scientists, nor even local clinical scientists. Instead they are *scholar-practitioners* who produce practice knowledge.

Given this perspective, one can ask what knowledge should counsellors produce. My answer is not new. Scholar-practitioners should study which interventions with which clients produce what outcomes. Although Williamson and Bordin posed this question over 50 years ago, career counselors still cannot answer it confidently. To finally address this question in a systematic and meaningful way, we can adopt the case study as our chief method for knowledge production.

After all, counsellors do case studies everyday.

The next step is to build knowledge production networks composed of colleagues who agree to contribute case studies. To begin, these *career knowledge networks* must decide how to systematize the case study format. For comparison purposes, the cases must be reported similarly. Although it might be difficult to reach consensus, we also should select a few core assessment and outcome measures to use in each case. Counselors could still use their favourite inventories and tests, but would add the core measures at least to the cases they plan to contribute to the database. This agreement would avoid, right from the start, the problems currently faced in counselling outcome research which tries to compare outcomes on different measures. Having collected cases, we could cluster them around career problems (Cochran, 1994) as Osipow and his colleagues did in constructing the *Career Decision Scale* (CDS) from client files. Each of the 16 CDS items describes a distinct career choice problem. The plan was to use the CDS as a type indicator to determine which type of problem a client faced and then apply the relevant intervention. Maybe this innovative idea was too far ahead of its time because researchers and counsellors immediately began using the CDS, not as a type indicator, but as a traditional psychometric inventory in which the total score indicated degree of indecision (Winer, 1992).

Adopting a typological or person-approach strategy for knowledge production would allow practitioners to contribute their case reports to databases that, in due course, could produce new practice knowledge. Furthermore, we could use the databases to construct problem-based learning cases for continuing professional education and as a basis for annual conferences. We could also invite positivist researchers to use the databases to test their hypotheses and develop generalized knowledge. In the end, we would have a new knowledge production culture with which to meet the challenges of career counselling in the information age.

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