

## Practical Techniques for Constructivist Career Counseling

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A career can be viewed as the life course of a person encountering a series of social expectations and attempting to handle them in such a way as to attune her or his inner world to the outer world. The overriding goal toward which career construction moves is a situation in which the occupational role validates the individual's self-concept, or as stated by Super (1963, p. 1), "the occupation thus makes possible the playing of a role appropriate to the self-concept." Ideally, an occupational role enables an individual to cooperate with and contribute to the community in ways that both substantiate and confirm that individual's self-concept. In this manner, an occupational role enables the individual to become the person they want to be, and one that they themselves like.

The goal of career construction is to help clients use work roles to align their personal needs with social opportunities. From the perspective of career construction theory, the counselor's role is not the identification of vocational interests using inventories, it is assisting clients to create interests that transform their tensions to intentions and their preoccupations to occupations. In this way, counselors help clients to use the work role to be more complete and deal with issues that haunt them. Because the issues will visit them frequently, it is usually better to actively master the issues by actively repeating them in the work role. In this way, work provides opportunities to move from symptom to strength and then to social contribution.

The ideas that preoccupy a person usually originate in the home as children learn to view themselves and the world through their parents' eyes. Children look to their parents as guides when they begin to explore how they will prioritize social roles and rewards. For example, the dramatic play of dressing in parents' clothes and imitating them is particularly influential as an architect of the self. The prototypical concepts learned from observing and imitating parents are elaborated as children extend their interaction into the wider environment of the neighborhood and school. When children engage in play, hobbies, chores, and schoolwork, they form self-perceptions and make social comparisons that build the attributes and characteristics which will constitute their vocational self-concepts as well as conceptions of the work role. Childhood play is particularly important in learning about and forming preferences for the roles and rewards that can be pursued in the community theaters of work, love, friendship, leisure, and spirituality. The imagination and initiative shown in behaviors such as dressing in costumes, imitating characters in books and movies, and participating in games enables children to learn about both themselves and their society. Unfortunately, the guiding lines drawn by parents and by cultural scripts also produce preoccupations and tensions. Career construction theory asserts that the themes that will eventually structure a career emerge as an individual turns these tensions into intentions.

The process of transforming a preoccupation into an occupation relies greatly on identifying role models who show a path forward from the family to the community. In what may be considered a very important career choice, children choose role models who portray solutions to their problems in growing up. As children imitate desirable qualities of their models for self-construction, they rehearse relevant coping attitudes and actions, form values about and interests in certain activities, and exercise abilities and skills as they engage in these activities. Playing selective roles, with increasing attention to the results, enables a reality testing that strengthens or modifies vocational self-concepts. Furthermore, choosing and pursuing hobbies accelerates reality testing, because hobbies lay halfway between play and work (Freud, 1965). Of course schoolwork also contributes mightily to the growth of vocational self-concepts, particularly through the influence of one's student-role self-concept.

In the structured interview that I use to help clients construct their careers, we begin by discussing their role models, then talk about their play and hobbies, and finally their school work. Each of these is explained as an activity that addresses their preoccupation and designs the self. The structured interview questions appear on the next page, followed by a case example that we will discuss.

- I. Who do you admire? Who would you like to pattern your life after?  
-who did you admire when you were growing up? Why?  
-How are you like \_\_\_\_\_?  
-How are you different from \_\_\_\_\_?

- II. Do you read any magazines regularly? Which ones?  
-Why do you like these magazines  
-How about TV. Do you have any shows you really enjoy?

- III. What do you like to do with your free time?  
-What are your hobbies ?  
-What do you enjoy about these hobbies?

- IV. Do you have a favorite saying or motto?  
-Tell me a saying you remember hearing.

- V. What are your favorite subjects in school (or were while you were in school)?  
Why?  
What subjects do you hate?  
Why?



SUCCESS FORMULA COMPONENTS

R

WORK WITH TOOLS  
THINK WITH MY HANDS  
MAKE OR REPAIR THINGS  
USE MECHANICAL ABILITY  
APPLY PHYSICAL SKILL  
WORK OUTDOORS  
WORK WITH ANIMALS  
WORK WITH NATURE

I

SOLVE PROBLEMS  
WORK WITH SCIENCE  
WORK WITH MATH  
USE LOGIC  
RESEARCH IDEAS  
FIGURE OUT HOW THINGS WORK  
READ

A

BE INDEPENDENT  
SHARE FEELINGS  
BE SENSITIVE  
PAINT  
PLAY AN INSTRUMENT  
WRITE  
APPLY ARTISTIC FLAIR  
DECORATE  
DESIGN

S

HELP OTHERS  
WORK WITH PEOPLE  
PROVIDE A SERVICE  
BE OUTGOING AND PLEASANT  
HELP CHILDREN  
HELP THE ELDERLY  
TEACH  
COUNSEL  
ADVISE

E

MAKE DECISIONS  
CONVINCE OTHERS I AM RIGHT  
LEAD A GROUP  
USE POWER  
ACT WITH ENTHUSIASM OR DRIVE  
SELL THINGS  
BE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION  
BE DYNAMIC  
HAVE A LOT OF VARIETY

C

BE PRECISE  
BE A PART OF A TEAM  
RECORD DATA  
TYPE  
ORGANIZE FILE MATERIAL  
HAVE A SET ROUTINE  
KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED  
ABLE TO CARRY OUT ORDERS