

Hazel Reid and Jane Westergaard, 'Knowledgeable practice requires more than practical knowledge: drawing on two counselling approaches for guidance work with young people', pp 40-50

Reid, H.L. (ed) *Vocation, Vocation, Vocation: placing meaning in the foreground of career decision-making*, Centre for Career & Personal Development, Occasional Paper: Canterbury Christ Church University.

© 2011 Canterbury Christ Church University  
ISBN 978-1-899253-91-3

---

# Knowledgeable practice requires more than practical knowledge: drawing on two counselling approaches for guidance work with young people

**Hazel Reid and Jane Westergaard**

## Introduction

Guidance work with young people draws on counselling theories and approaches. When working with young people keeping their goals in the forefront is paramount, but such demands can place a strain on our desire to remain person-centred. People develop their understandings of the social world in relationships with others. The meanings they take from those experiences shape their values, identity and the way they act within the world and are evident in the way they speak about themselves and others. In a broad sense, these are culturally bound.

An unthinking 'same for all' and singular approach to practice can lead to the recommendation of interventions based on assumptions about shared goals and values. This chapter will draw on two approaches from counselling and consider how they can be adapted and applied to guidance work with young people (our focus is on work with young people, but the approaches can of course be used with adult clients too). The aim is not to suggest that we 'throw the baby out with the bath water', but consider how we can integrate insights from different counselling theories and approaches into guidance practice. Of course, that comes with a health warning; but rather than view the integration of separate approaches as risky, we view knowledgeable integration as an opportunity to extend and enhance practice. The two approaches we focus on are 'multiculturalism' and 'transactional analysis'. Both approaches invite the practitioner to reflect on their own position in relation to the clients with whom they work, ensuring a commitment to culturally sensitive, thoughtful and effective practice.

## Knowledgeable practice requires more than practical knowledge

'Knowledgeable practice requires more than practical knowledge' is a quote from the work of Richard Edwards (1998: 24). It is used here to indicate that we can learn how to interview clients, we can draw on existing aptitudes and develop new skills and we can be assessed as 'competent' against a number of standards and codes relevant to our working practice and context. We can demonstrate our practical knowledge by reference to information, through the use of web resources and 'helping' networks: all of which are important for guidance work. But we need more – a list of competencies met and possession of a bulky folder full of policies and ethical codes for practice, does not lead to knowledgeable practice. The relationship between theory, policy and practice should be an interrelationship – an equilateral triangle. Even so that is a 'flat' picture of what happens in practice as guidance occurs in a rich, socio-cultural, historical and political context. So beyond initial training and consolidated experience, what can we do to increase knowledgeable practice in a complex world full of challenges and uncertainties – for both clients and practitioners?

We espouse a person-centred or client-centred approach in guidance, but can find it difficult to articulate the theories that underpin practice. Yes, the Rogerian (1961) person-centred concept remains central in terms of our approach to interviewing and we may recall other theories and theorists explored in training (e.g. trait/factor – Holland, 1997; developmental – Super, 1990 and opportunity structures – Roberts, 2005). Depending on when, where and how we were trained, we may also be able to make reference to a wide range of theories and 'newer' constructivist theories (see, McMahon and Patton, 2006; McMahon and Watson, 2011). However, the time required to revisit theory and/or explore new approaches can be severely restrained in practice that is target lead, policy constrained and resource poor: best get on with the job and not worry about theory! But does the 'job' conflict with our values and ethics, and our desire to be person-centred (Reid and West, 2011)? A knowledgeable practitioner will want to extend their understanding of approaches that can benefit their clients and enhance their own professional identity – albeit this can be immensely challenging in current times.

## What is meant by multiculturalism in counselling?

The term can be viewed negatively in a world which is, understandably, anxious about terrorism and 'difference'. In the multicultural counselling literature, the term refers to any social variable that restricts an individual's access to goods and services, rights and abilities to act with agency (freedom) and responsibility. Whilst race and ethnicity are central, particularly where visual 'difference' within the dominant culture is evident, other aspects are important. These include social class, gender, religion, age, ability or disability, sexuality and so on. Parker (2007:36), a critical psychologist, states, 'What we think we know about ourselves is bound up with culture, and it is always from a position in culture that we reflect on what makes us different from others.' Thus our (Western) attempts to understand 'difference' leads to categorisation and can cause further marginalisation. In terms of guidance and counselling we need to acknowledge that most of our established approaches are ethnocentric, built on 'Western', Anglo-Saxon, white, largely protestant and male views of 'what works'. A person-centred approach, for example, assumes the individual makes a decision, whereas in many collective cultures, it is the family and community that decide: context is all.

## Essentialist thinking

The philosophy that underpins the multicultural approach can be summarised by Michael White's statement,

'The person is not the problem: the problem is the problem' (1989:7). We need shorthand terms to focus our work and bid for funding, but categorising people separates, segregates and leads to essentialist thinking. In other words, this is thinking that certain behaviours are natural and given, rather than ascribed by others. It can assume, for example, that being NEET (not in education, employment or training), a school truant or an immigrant – is essential to who the person is, whereas it is an acquired label that does not describe the whole person. The label is a construction, given by others who have the power to apply the label. Consider the following story and the part that language plays in the labelling of young people. The person's language was shaped by the professional context and the economic discourses within which she worked, but it speaks volumes about her view of young unemployed people.

When working as a career counsellor with young people under the age of 18 who were unemployed and unable to access full benefits, I visited the local unemployment office to see how we could improve the process of referring young people for the limited financial support that was available. The person I met welcomed me to her office, pointed to the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet (one in a bank of several) and said "That's where I keep all the files on the youngsters you send, you can see it is a small part of my work." The drawer was labelled 'Kiddies Drawer' (Reid, 2011a: 149).

It is difficult not to 'jump to conclusions' in a desire to be useful and help young people, especially in a context where time is constrained. But that help can be misguided, if the practitioner is rushing to action before hearing the client's story, or finding out about the person behind the problem or presenting issue. The action in the case study below is appropriate and is likely to be helpful, but is instigated too soon in the relationship. The practitioner engages in essentialist thinking and the action demonstrates practical knowledge, but not much knowledgeable practice.

David is an experienced practitioner who works one day a week in a drop-in centre. Leroy (the client) is newly arrived in the UK and has been referred to him to talk about the impact his drug taking (marijuana) is having on his ability to attend training interviews. This is the first time they have met. Having listened to Leroy's account of why he has been sent to see him; David draws on his extensive networks to plan a programme of referrals and interventions that will help to reduce the use of marijuana and get Leroy into a work-related training programme – this includes group sessions with other young people with the same problem. Leroy leaves with David's action plan, picking up his guitar and a box of CDs that he left with the receptionist. "Is that you Leroy, on the front of those CDs?" she asks. "Yeah," says Leroy, smiling.

## Multicultural principles for practice

If we accept that culture is a social construction, which changes over time and is not a fixed 'truth', a starting place for a multicultural approach is to explore how we construct our individual view of the world; before we attempt to understand a client's values and culture. This requires us to be reflexive – thinking about our self and the impact we have on our practice, *recognising that there is difference on both sides of the interaction*. So, how can we develop what Arulmani (2009) refers to as a 'cultural preparedness' approach to interventions? To move from an abstract discussion to practical suggestions, the following can be adapted for the work of guidance practitioners. It is an extract from a chapter which suggests ways of embedding multicultural principles and skills into counselling work with young people (Reid, 2011b: 72/73):

Sue, Arrendondon and McDavis (1995) have developed a detailed matrix for what they view as cross-cultural skills for those working in counselling. Their classification focuses on aspects of

beliefs and attitudes, knowledge and skills and is organised under three headings:

1. Awareness of own assumptions, values and beliefs
2. Understanding the worldview of the 'culturally different' client
3. Developing appropriate intervention techniques and strategies.

... activities that can be useful [to help with the examination of beliefs and attitudes and aid the development of knowledge and skills] include: reading; visits to extend knowledge of diverse groups; collaborating with clients to hear their stories; small scale qualitative research with clients on particular issues; presentations to share experiences with colleagues; discussions in supervision; reflective and reflexive journal writing; observations of the use of different models, methods and techniques; finding creative ways of hearing and understanding the 'voices' of diverse young people: for example through art, craft, music, theatre and poetry.

Mindful that meaning is culturally-based, if we take 'principles' to mean principled action informed by praiseworthy behaviour based on a moral code (in other words a concept that is stronger than 'guidelines' to be followed, or not); then principles that are informed by the matrix offered by Sue et al, could include the following:

- Awareness of own biases and limitations and their outcomes
- Recognition of the range of social variables that lead to cultural difference
- Knowledge about the causes and effects of oppression, racism, discrimination and stereotyping
- Openness about processes of counselling young people with a view to a collaborative approach that works alongside the young person
- Commitment to enriching understanding through continuous professional and reflexive development
- Searching for appropriate and culturally sensitive models of intervention, rather than reliance on established or 'singular' methods
- Awareness and understanding of the impact of negative treatment experienced by marginalised groups
- Commitment to outreach work
- Respect for young people's beliefs, values and views about themselves and the stories they choose to tell the counsellor
- Value for the language, style and manner of speech, whilst acknowledging there will be times when the counsellor's linguistic skills will be inadequate
- Questioning of the appropriateness and helpfulness of organisational assessment methods
- Awareness of institutional practices that lead to discrimination
- Congruence when advocating with, or lobbying on behalf of, young people to overcome relevant discrimination

- Understanding of the differences in communication styles and their impact, plus extension of own communication skills and methods
- Open-mindedness to alternative ways of supporting, including using the resources of the young person's community.

Where an understanding of multiculturalism in counselling provides the guidance practitioner with a means to ensure their practice is sensitive to working with diversity, the second approach to be examined in this chapter addresses a related, but different aspect of knowledgeable practice. The concept of transactional analysis (TA) (Berne, 1964), offers guidance practitioners a means to reflect on the nature of their transactions (communications) with clients. By analysing the ways in which clients communicate, a greater understanding of the young person and their world can be gained. In addition, the guidance practitioner can encourage the client to consider the impact of their patterns of transactions and to explore changes that could be made to ensure that their needs are communicated effectively. So what is TA and how can knowledge of this theory underpin effective guidance practice?

## The principles of transactional analysis

Eric Berne, the driving force behind TA, set out to make some complex psychodynamic concepts more accessible for counsellors and others involved in helping relationships. At the heart of TA lie three key principles:

- Everyone has worth, value, rights and dignity
- Everyone has the capacity and capability to think
- Everyone makes decisions about their lives and these decisions can be changed.

Guidance practitioners will be familiar with this positive standpoint, which acknowledges the strengths and rights of individuals. There are echoes here of the person-centred philosophy in which most guidance practice is grounded. But where Berne's work deviates from a purely humanistic approach, is in the emphasis on the significance of the 'unconscious'. Central to his research, Berne observed 'transactions' taking place between individuals. As a result of these observations he suggested that communication happens in two ways; at a social level and a psychological level. Westergaard explains this difference clearly,

...we use words which are selected consciously to convey thoughts and feelings (social level) and we communicate on a deeper (often unconscious) level through tone of voice, facial expressions and demeanour (psychological level). Sometimes though, the social and psychological are in conflict and communication is incongruent (2011:77).

Guidance practitioners may, at times, perceive a tension between *what* clients are saying (social level) and the *way* in which they are saying it (psychological level). For example, the guidance practitioner's response to a young person who sits slumped in their seat, avoiding eye contact, speaking in a monotone and saying with no enthusiasm whatsoever that they 'can't wait to apply for a course at the local college', might be to challenge this incongruence. Where responses are incongruent, there is rich material for the guidance practitioner and client to work with.

## The ego states

Berne suggested that our psychological level of communication stems from one of three separate 'ego states',

which he described as Parent, Adult and Child. Much has been written about the ego states and about other aspects of TA (Clarkson, 2005; Cornell and Hargaden, 2005; and Widdowson, 2009), and there is not the opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the concept here. But, in brief, Berne explained that we have access to all three ego states from around the age of 12 (we are able to transact in our Parent and Child from a much earlier age; Adult is the last to develop).

## Parent

Transactions in the Parent ego state are learned from birth and are a manifestation of our observations of a parental or authority figure's behaviour and responses. Steiner (1990) describes transactions from the Parent ego state as replaying tape recordings of messages we received from parental figures when we were young. The Parent ego state is divided in two:

- Critical Parent (CP), exemplified by a stern facial expression, a harsh or abrupt response, a sharp tone of voice. For example: 'how dare you speak to me like that,' or 'stop that right now! Don't you ever do that again.'
- Nurturing Parent (NP), characterised by a soft expression, a warm and sympathetic response, a gentle, encouraging tone of voice. For example, 'oh you poor thing, let me make this better,' or 'don't worry, I won't let this happen again. I'll sort it all out for you.'

There are times when each of us unconsciously (or consciously) responds from our Parent ego state. For example, we might call out 'Don't you dare do that!' from our Critical Parent to a person who is about to harm someone we love. Likewise we might hold a distressed friend in our arms and tell them that 'everything will be OK,' responding to their plight in our Nurturing Parent. In guidance practice though, responses from our Parent (either Critical Parent or Nurturing Parent) can be unhelpful. They are likely to come either from a wish to chastise, or to rescue. Neither chastising nor rescuing are effective strategies when the aim is to enable young people to reflect on their situation and make their own decisions about options that are available to them.

## Child

The Child ego state, like the Parent, also presents from two contrasting perspectives:

- Free Child (FC) is a creative, spontaneous or rebellious response which will often sound excited, naughty, instinctive or 'spur of the moment'. For example, 'let's forget work today and go to the beach,' or 'I'm fed up with this college course I'm going to leave today and not come back.'
- Adapted Child (AC) is the opposite of the Free Child. The Adapted Child seeks to please, to agree, to 'be good', to 'get it right'. Responses from this ego state might include, 'I can't do that, I'll get into trouble,' or 'I don't want to be a plumber but it's the family business so what choice do I have?'

Most guidance practitioners are likely to be faced with young people interacting from their Child ego state. This is often because it is the way in which the young person has learned to be noticed (or not be noticed) and to have their needs met. And there are times when we all access our Child ego state in a positive way; our Free Child at play with friends and family for example and our Adapted Child, perhaps, when we are placed in situations where we are required to conform or 'do the right thing'.

## Adult

Finally, Berne identifies the Adult ego state as the last to develop. Unlike the other two ego states, there is only one element to the Adult. Communication from our Adult is rational, thoughtful, reflexive, assertive and unambiguous. Responding from our Adult ego state should not suggest adopting an unemotional, automaton-like tone; rather it requires an open, honest, self-aware level of communication. It means taking ownership for what we feel and taking responsibility for what we say. Harris explains:

When the Adult is in charge of the transaction, the outcome is not always predictable. There is the possibility of failure, but there is also the possibility of success. Most importantly, there is the possibility of change (1995:58).

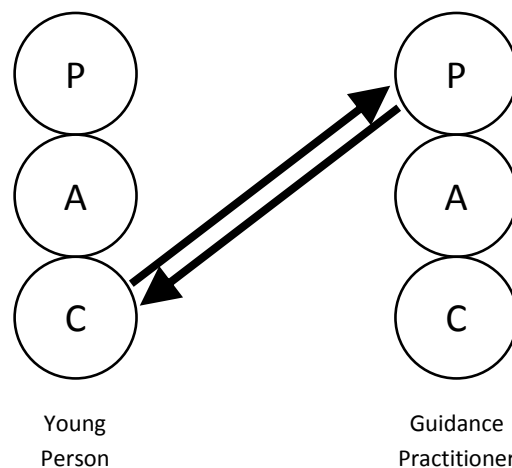
So, in a professional helping relationship, a practitioner will adopt the preferred Adult ego state. As Harris points out, it is from this ego state that change can take place; and it is at times of transition and change that most clients seek help. It is also from this ego state that options can be examined objectively, consequences considered and informed decisions taken.

## Theoretical knowledge in professional practice

How then, do we transform this theoretical knowledge into professional practice? It is all well and good to suggest that guidance interventions are likely to be most productive if both participants (practitioner and client) are transacting from their Adult ego state. However, in many cases the client will present from their Parent or Child ego state. When this happens, TA suggests that there will be a strong impetus for the guidance practitioner to respond with a 'complementary' transaction. For example, where a client transacts from their Child ego state, the guidance practitioner may be 'hooked' into responding in their Parent. The examples below, demonstrate these complementary transactions in practice, the first example shows a complementary Adapted Child > Nurturing Parent transaction:

Young Person: "I think my mum wants me to stay on at school to get my A Levels, so I suppose that's what I'll have to do..." (AC)

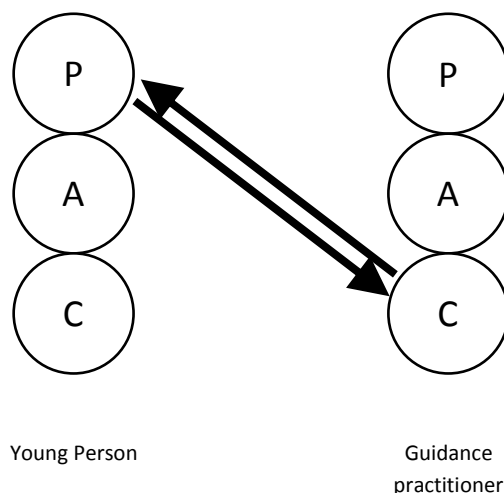
Guidance Practitioner: "Well, your mum has got a good point, hasn't she? It's important to do your best as qualifications are important, aren't they?" (NP)



Likewise, in the second example, an inexperienced guidance practitioner who is feeling unsettled or anxious with a client, may, on reflection, acknowledge that they are working with a young person who is communicating from their Critical Parent ego state and this has provoked their own Adapted Child response.

YP: "I've come to see you loads of times and still you don't get it sorted. What's the point in coming here to try to find a job? It's a waste of time!" (CP)

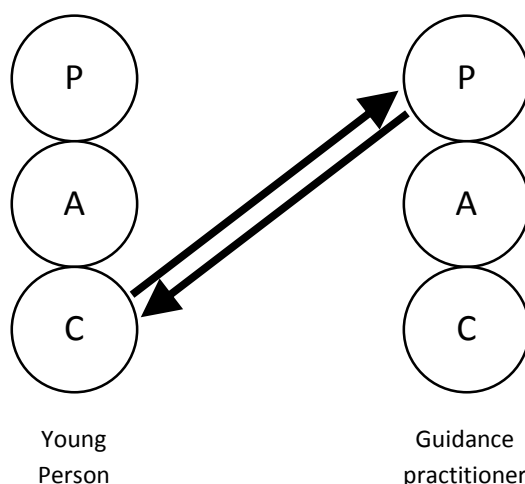
Guidance Practitioner: "Oh dear. I'm sorry about that. You know it's not easy to find jobs at the moment. What else might we do to help?" (AC)



Alternatively, in the third example, below, the young person may be transacting in their Free Child which may provoke a Critical Parent response from the guidance practitioner:

YP: "I don't care whether I get caught nicking cars. I'm having a great laugh with my mates." (FC)

Guidance Practitioner: "OK, but you could get into trouble and then where will you be?" (CP)



If any of the above transactions were to develop, it is likely that the pattern established here would continue. Thus the client would remain entrenched in their Critical Parent, Adapted Child or Free Child and so on. Given that it is from the Adult ego state where change is most likely to occur, the transactions outlined above

are unlikely to be positive and fruitful. In order to break these patterns of communication, the guidance practitioner should focus on remaining in their Adult. Over time, a consistently Adult response from the guidance practitioner will encourage the young person to respond with a complementary transaction (Adult). Thus, movement towards rational, objective exploration and decision making can take place. For example, below are some alternative Adult responses to the scenarios posed above.

Young Person: "I think my mum wants me to stay on at school to get my A Levels, so I suppose that's what I'll have to do..." (AC)

Guidance Practitioner: "There's something about the way you are saying that, which makes me wonder if this is what *you* really want to do?" (Adult)

The Adult response addresses the perceived tension in what the young person *should* do in order to please their parent and what they might *want* to do.

Young Person: "I've come to see you loads of times and still you don't get it sorted. What's the point in coming here to try to find a job? It's a waste of time!" (CP)

Guidance Practitioner: "I can see how frustrated you feel. It's difficult when jobs are few and far between. What can we do to make sure that you have the best chance of getting the jobs that you do apply for?" (Adult)

Here, the guidance practitioner does not get 'hooked' into the criticism, but instead focuses on the issue which is all about finding work.

Young Person: "I don't care whether I get caught nicking cars. I'm having a great laugh with my mates." (FC)

Guidance Practitioner: "There's a part of me that wants to say 'STOP!' but I know that's not going to help. Maybe what we could do is think about the consequences of these actions. What might happen if you get caught stealing cars, for example?" (Adult)

There are probably a number of people telling this young person that they must change their behaviour and it is tempting for the guidance practitioner to join the queue. However, a non-judgemental but nevertheless challenging response is likely to be more effective and keep the dialogue moving forward.

Not only does knowledge of the ego state model inform ways in which guidance practitioners interact with clients, it can also be helpful to encourage young people to recognise and acknowledge their patterns of communications. By so doing they become aware of how they might 'trigger' unhelpful responses in others or get locked into negative patterns of communication with key individuals like parents, teachers or friends.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined two complementary approaches for working with young people; multicultural and

transactional analysis. Where the first focuses on a 'way of being', a heightened awareness of the wider socio-cultural factors that impact on practice, the second offers a means of analysing communication to ensure its efficacy. And of course, what has been discussed in this chapter is not the only professional knowledge that underpins our interactions with clients. We are likely to draw from and integrate a range of concepts in our one-to-one work.

But both concepts discussed here suggest that there is more to knowledgeable practice than simply adopting a 'common-sense' approach to the work. Guidance practitioners who continue to reflect on the theory underpinning their practice, gained both from initial training and subsequently in the role, will ensure that their practice remains knowledgeable. Every client, young person or adult, deserves the best guidance service possible. Guidance practitioners who recognise the importance of continuing to develop expand and integrate their professional knowledge, are well placed to make certain that this is the case.

---

## References

- Arulmani, G. (2009) 'A matter of culture', in *Career Guidance Today*, Institute of Career Guidance, Vol. 17.1 March, p10-12.
- Berne, E. (1964) *Games People Play*, Middlesex: Penguin.
- Clarkson, P. (2005) *On Psychotherapy: vol 4*, London: John Wiley and Sons.
- Cornell, W. F. and Hargarden, H. (eds.) (2005) *The Emergence of a Relational Tradition in Transactional Analysis*, Oxford: Haddon Press Limited.
- Edwards, R. (1998) 'Mapping, locating and translating: A discursive approach to professional development', in *Studies in Continuing Education*, 20 (1), p23-38.
- Harris, T. (1995) *I'm OK – You're OK*, Reading: Arrow Books.
- Holland, J. L. (1997) *Making vocational choices; a theory of vocational personalities and work environments* (3rd ed), Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.
- McMahon, M., and Patton, W. (2006) (eds) *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches*, Oxon: Routledge.
- McMahon, M. and Watson, W. (2011) (eds) *Career counselling and constructivism: elaboration of constructs*, New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Parker, I. (2007) *Revolution in Psychology: Alienation to Emancipation*, London: Pluto Press.
- Reid, H. (2011a) 'Engaging young people through a use of a narrative approach to counseling', in Reid, H. and Westergaard, J. *Effective Counselling with Young People*, Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Reid, H. (2011b) 'Embedding multicultural principles and skills into counselling work with young people', in Reid, H. and Westergaard, J. *Effective Counselling with Young People*, Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Reid, H. and West, L. (2011) "'Telling tales": Using narrative in career guidance', in *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78, p174-183.
- Roberts, K. (2005) 'Social class, opportunity structures and career guidance', in B. A. Irving and B. Malik (eds), *Critical reflections on careers education and guidance: promoting social justice within a global economy*, Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Rogers, C. (1961) *On becoming a person*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Steiner, C. (1990) *Scripts People Live: Transactional Analysis of Life Scripts*, (2nd ed), New York: Grove Press.

Sue, D. W., Arrendondon, P. and McDavis, R. J. (1995) 'Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards: a call to the profession', in Ponterotto, J. G., Casas, J. M., Suzuki, L. A. and Alexander, C. M. (eds), *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, California: Sage.

Super, D. E. (1990) 'A life-span, life-space approach to career development', in D. Brown, L. Brooks and Associates (eds), *Career choice and development* (2nd ed), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Westergaard, J. (2011) 'Using transactional analysis

to develop effective communication in counselling young people', in Reid, H.L. and Westergaard, J. *Effective Counselling with Young People*, Exeter: Learning Matters.

White, M. (1989) 'The externalisation of the problem and the re-authoring of relationships', in White, M. *Selected papers*, Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre.

Widdowson, M. (2009) *Transactional Analysis: 100 Key Points and Techniques*, London: Routledge.

Dr Hazel Reid is Reader in Career Guidance and Counselling and Director of the Centre for Career and Personal Development at CCCU. She teaches in the areas of career and guidance theory and supervises students undertaking Doctoral research. Hazel is a Fellow of the Institute of Career Guidance, a NICEC Fellow and co-edits the NICEC journal. She is involved in European projects related to the work of career guidance practitioners. Hazel's current research is exploring the development of constructivist approaches for career guidance and counselling.

Jane Westergaard is a senior lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University. She teaches on a range of programmes specifically designed for students who plan to work with young people in a range of settings. She has a particular interest in counselling young people and she has recently published a book on *Effective Counselling with Young People* with colleague, Hazel Reid. Jane is a qualified and practising UKRC registered counsellor, working with young people and adult clients.