

Vocation, Vocation, Vocation:

placing meaning
in the foreground
of career decision-making

Edited by Hazel Reid

Centre for Career & Personal Development



'Deep in their roots, all flowers keep the light.' - Theodore Roethke



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Introduction

Hazel Reid

This occasional paper is the latest in a series of papers produced by the Centre for Career & Personal Development and the first to be available on-line. It offers a collection of articles from presentations at the Centre's biennial conference which took place in May 2011 at the Salomons campus of the University.

We live in challenging times. Mindful of those challenges and the impact of spending cuts for many colleagues in the career education, development and guidance field in the UK; we wanted the conference, and this collection of papers, to be an opportunity for sharing both current purpose and future possibilities. Our aim is to pay attention to the core values of impartiality and listening to the client and their story – what we view as a return to our professional roots. Beyond this, we want to assert the place of beliefs, values, culture, biography and narrative: to give these concepts space in the foreground (rather than assigned to the background) of career decision-making. Why? Despite (or maybe because of) the haemorrhaging of talent in some sectors, it is essential that we retain, *but also develop* relevant career guidance interventions for the 21st century. It is all too easy for these core values to get lost in the call for 'realism' in an economic recession. Of course, with reduced and restricted opportunities clients, students and practitioners have to be resilient and need to review what they consider to be personally 'meaningful'. But supporting the development of resilience and reflexivity is different from encouraging a person to take *any* opportunity available. Knowing what is important to us; spending time reflecting on our beliefs and values can aid effective decision-making: it is not just 'wishful thinking' or dreaming. As Savickas states, 'Intentionality serves biographical construction in times of uncertainty. During transitions, individuals should engage in autobiographical reasoning to cope with change and risk' (2011:131).¹

All the presentations at the conference and the papers in this collection reflect our desire to understand better and do things differently. But – career education, development and guidance do not take place in a neutral context, economic policies rule the day. The first paper by **Tony Watts** places the value of professional career guidance within the context of other policy developments. In May 2011 Tony referred to the development of a national 'all age' career service, but stated that previous hopes had been replaced by fears that we may be seeing the most serious collapse of service provision in the last half-century. As Tony suggests at the end of his paper, 'finding spaces to work in, to develop the exciting ideas discussed at the May 2011 conference, will not be easy. It will require tenacity and creativity, probably – for the immediate future anyway – in local spaces rather than as part of a serious national strategy'.

The second paper by **Gideon Arulmani** moves us from local concerns to global understandings. Gideon calls for a broadening of paradigms in career counselling which traditionally have their origins in a western

¹ Savickas, M.L. (2011) *Career Counselling*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

epistemology. His paper discusses the necessity of developing a sharper sensitivity to the notion of cultural preparedness in order to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of a career counselling service. In the next paper, **Bill Law** questions what we mean by careers work, who wants it and who gives it? Bill signposts the possibilities for the kinds of professionalism we project, the locations we seek and the research we draw on. He also discusses the outcomes we offer through the materials, methods and partnerships we make.

In the fourth paper, **Liane Hambly** refers to the increasingly complex world within which people try to plan careers. Liane emphasises that practitioners need to incorporate 'new' approaches that help clients to navigate careers. She draws on research into the career decision-making of people who identify as having faith, discussing how prayer and meditation are important aspects with regard to action taken. **Hazel Reid and Jane Westergaard** also promote the need to integrate a range of theory into professional practice. They state that 'people develop their understanding 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.' They discuss multiculturalism and transactional analysis as two counselling approaches that invite a reflexive response in relation to culturally sensitive careers work.

Next, returning to policy concerns and the creation of the National Careers Service in England, **Barbara Bassot and Barbara Shottin** explore the similarities and differences in the values and beliefs of practitioners working with clients of different ages. They ask – do practitioners' definitions of guidance vary depending on the age of the clients they are working with? What are the underpinning values and beliefs of guidance practitioners? And, would these values change in any way if they worked with a different client group? The following paper by **Alison Fielding** considers personal and professional boundaries, and the tensions which can arise for the practitioner when the personal and professional conflict. Alison draws on critical incident case studies to explore issues such as: remaining person-centred in a target-driven context, confidentiality, conflict with personal values, working with cultural difference (the practitioner *and* the client) and the risks and potential benefits of 'boundary crossing'.

In the next paper **Anne Chant** reminds us that the individualised and client-centred approach has served the needs of young people and professionals well, but, she asks, are we in danger of minimising the importance of the influence of parental and family influences? Should we be treating individuals as self sufficient, capable of purely individualised choices and self-efficacy? Anne explores the nature and potential of parental influence with reference to theoretical models and auto/biographical research; suggesting possible ways forward. **Johanna Oliver's** paper documents the initial findings from her auto/biographical study exploring collaborative working within service provision for children and young people. She writes that since the commencement of the coalition government and associated austerity-induced efficiency savings, the study has provided an opportunity to convey the stories of colleagues working in the non-statutory sector. These practitioners work with children and young people in a context where uncertainty is an expected normality.

The final paper by **Ian King** focuses on how to encourage older workers to determine future career direction by reflecting on their past vocational pathway. His research engaged professional practitioners (aged 50+) by asking them to co-construct their occupational story, drawing on their 're-membered' experiences. The paper positions occupational narrative as a vehicle for making meaningful career decisions in later working life.

Our quote on the programme and the 'front cover' of this occasional paper is by Theodore Roethke, 'Deep in their roots, all flowers keep the light'. In the current times that light may feel like a flickering candle in the darkness: but it burns still and the career education, development and guidance story will continue, develop further – and in new and exciting ways.