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Life design counseling: Evidence based practice for the improvement of human life

Paulo Cardoso

University of Évora, Portugal

Life design counseling (LDC) aims to help clients re-author their narrative identity and to project new career plans. To overcome the gap between research and practice in the field of career counseling, we have been developing, since 2012, a research program on the process and outcome of LDC. In this plenary session I will present the main results of these studies and their practical implications. Results reveal LDC effectiveness in promoting vocational certainty, career decision making self-efficacy and reduction of interpersonal problems. From the clients' point of view LDC is useful to promote sense of direction, self-discovery, career information and sense of connection. In LDC process change is characterized by a progress from narrative elaborations focused on the problem comprehension to clear intentions to solve it and new problem formulations. Finally, a new self-representation emerge which allows the construction of new career plans. This evolution is facilitated by clients' efforts to symbolize self-experience and to reflect on emerging meanings. The empirical evidence from our research allows practical guidelines to facilitate change, such as an extended elaboration of clients' problems and exploration of emotions related to life episodes. Throughout the intervention, expressions of new ways of acting, thinking or feeling- called innovative moments- may work as important markers for counselors to amplify the clients' narrative transformation, always considering their current level of narrative change. Taking into account clients' level of change is fundamental to strength a collaborative relationship. In my prior studies, I also found that nine grade students have difficulties in narrating their experiences. This implies the need to adapt the context in which the intervention takes place. From my experience, group interventions with this age level should consider a maximum of 10 participants per group. This allows counselors a more individualized support for overcoming difficulties.

Biography

Paulo Cardoso is an Associate Professor in Department of Psychology at University of Évora, Portugal. He teaches Vocational and Career Counseling in Educational Psychology Master Program. His main research interests include "Career development of special populations and the process of change in career counseling". In addition to his teaching and research, he maintains a limited practice of career counseling at University of Évora. He is an Editorial Board Member of Journal of Vocational Behavior and advisory board member of International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance. He is the Secretary General of Portuguese Society of Psychology.

pmsc@uevora.pt

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