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Overview of this issue

Welcome to the Journal of the National Institute of Career Education and Counselling. In this edition established academics, new writers and practitioner researchers bring us useful insights into career learning and the interplay between theory, practice and research. The UK government's recent career strategy placed renewed emphasis on career learning in schools in England making it a highly topical subject for consideration. However, career covers all stages of life and needs to be supported by a life-long engagement with learning, hence the articles extend beyond the school setting. Our authors reflect on programme design, review the development and implementation of career learning frameworks and tools, and explore external and internal contextual factors that influence the career learning process. Whilst different in focus and context, at the core of all the articles is the theme of client and participant career learning leading to progression in career development.

A particular landmark for NICEC is the publication of an article by **Laura Walker** which was awarded the Bill Law Student Memorial Award 2019. In this opening piece, Laura explores the implications for career guidance practice of late career decision making, where she characterises the learning as a process of discovering more of themselves – 'more of me'. The findings are set out using a visual which is unique to the author and very helpful for use by practitioners. The image of 'dancing with fear' is powerful, and reminiscent of Bill Law's use of imagery in his concern to help practitioners to apply the lessons learned through research to practice.

In the two articles that follow, **Lis McGuire** and **John Gough** write from different perspectives about the process of designing learning experiences. Liz explores adopting a collaborative approach between the provider and the user of services. Although the article focuses on addressing the needs of persons with mental health problems, her findings and reflections are equally relevant to programme design for other user groups. Similarly, John's reflections on a collaborative process in training careers leaders in England highlights

the importance of engaging the voice of the learner in enabling them to develop this role effectively in complex and demanding educational environments.

The next three articles focus on specific aspects of working directly with clients, and present new career learning tools and a career framework. These developments, rooted in practice, include a mix of 'what works' along with reflection on what was less successful, and insights into why that might be. First, **Katie Dallison** describes the development and implementation of Plan: Me. Piloted within higher education, this tool takes a holistic approach to career decision making, integrating goal setting, and allowing clients to map out a process of how they can move themselves forward independently. Second, we have an article by **Keren Coney and Ben Simkins** in which they consider the potential of using 'screencasting' technology to support students' C.V. writing. Third, **Lewis Clark and Carolyn Parry** review their creation of the INSPIRED teenager framework designed to support collaborative career-based learning between parents/carers and their teenage child.

The final two articles are concerned with the wider context within which career learning takes place. **Szilvia Schmitsek** explores the educational experiences of young people in England, Denmark and Hungary who had been at risk of dropping out, but later gained a qualification at a second chance provision. In contrast, **Nikki Storey** is concerned with the influences on the career beliefs of students in an ethnically diverse state school in London. Using an adapted short version of the 'Careers Beliefs Patterns Scale', Nikki examines the interlinked impacts of ethnicity and socio-economic status, and draws out recommendations for practitioners.

Lyn Barham & Michelle Stewart, Editors

'A helping hand': The role of career guidance in finding the right career pathway for at-risk students in three European contexts

Szilvia Schmitsek

This paper explores the educational experiences of young people who had been at risk of dropping out and gained a qualification at a second chance provision. It is based on comparative fieldwork in England, Denmark and Hungary with empirical data collected from observations; and 28 interviews with former students. By listening to the voices of students, the analysis focused on the relevance of different sources of support. The findings revealed that individual study pathways and intensified guidance effort led students to pursue their career in higher education and/or in the labour market.



Introduction

My research investigated the positive experiences of former students in second chance provision in England, Denmark and Hungary. Evidence was derived from the narratives of former students who participated in the research and were at risk of dropping out or who had dropped out of secondary education. The reasons for being at risk of or having dropped out varied from disadvantaged backgrounds to exceptional talent.

I chose to research this topic to give a voice to students at risk. A total of 28 semi-structured, retrospective interviews were conducted with former students (aged 23-30) in the countries under consideration. Research participants were selected with the help of supportive professionals from each second chance school. In order to perceive a subjective dimension, I applied qualitative research methods. The fieldwork was carried out over the course of 14 months.

For the data analysis grounded theory was applied, which has three main stages: the continuing discovery of emerging themes which guides further data collection; the coding of data and creation of categories; and finally, the contextualisation of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this qualitative analysis Nvivo software was used.

According to my findings, the relevance and importance of personal support with special regard to the creation of positive relationships (such as those between the teacher and the student, and the careers adviser/guidance counsellor/mentor and the student) emerged strongly from the analysis as motivating factors for attending education. Moreover, this personal support helped students prepare for future challenges with their career transitions and development. Not only were these themes common across the country contexts, but the availability of supportive professionals depended, in part, on the given country context. In addition, the research participants pointed out the important influence of the length of time spent in second chance provision (Denmark: 1-2 years, Hungary: 2-5 years, England: 1-2 years), which led them to continue their careers in further education and/or in the labour market.

Before Second Chance: Transition to secondary education

According to the interviews with research participants, the transition from initial education to secondary education was a significant milestone. The transition process from primary education to secondary was

significantly different in the three countries, which was an important factor because the literature (Borbely-Pecze, 2010; Cedefop, 2015; RESL.eu, 2015) strikingly suggests that schools' provision of information, advice and guidance is influential in the career progression of at-risk students. In England and Hungary, although career services were based within the institution, impartial guidance was not easily accessible to students in the phase of transition. For instance, in England some students, like Jessica (27, female, Eng) explained that they felt lost during the transition phase:

'I didn't like the transition from primary school to high school because of the unstable environment, I wasn't old enough to know what we are going through and things like that. I didn't like it and that caused a lot of problems for me in my early years of high school.'

On the other hand, in Denmark, students' transition from comprehensive (primary and lower secondary education) school to upper secondary education was generally supported by impartial guidance counsellors assigned by the Youth Guidance Centres. Danish participants also highlighted the positive role of guidance counselling. For instance, Sebastian (27, male, DK) pointed out the importance of guidance counsellors in the transition from primary to secondary education:

'...you have to make like 3 wishes about wherever you want to go to school after elementary, and then if you have no clue at all, a vejleder [guidance counsellor] will come and help you decide.'

In contrast, research participants in England and Hungary reported that they identified the most suitable study pathway by consulting with friends and/or family members, and only a handful of participants reported to have chosen a second chance provision because of the suggestion of a teacher and/or other professional. In the three countries under consideration, all participants claimed that it was their choice to attend second chance provision.

My data analysis showed that research participants in England and Hungary were more vulnerable to dropping out of either initial or secondary education than in Denmark. In practice, Danish research

participants reported that guidance counsellors were easily accessible in various institutional settings, which meant that they could rely on a professional when uncertainty occurred in their careers. As a Danish participant (27, male, DK) stated: 'There is always a helping hand you can cling on to'.

In the English and Hungarian cohorts, some research participants reported a lack of psychological support, mentoring and/or career guidance before the second chance provision they attended. They claimed the former could have been helpful with making their everyday lives easier, and helping them map out milestones related to the future career. In contrast, Danish students really appreciated the work of guidance counsellors at school: 'Our vejleder [guidance counsellor] has been so helpful. He found Support School for me 'cos I told him I was not ready for the gymnasium [traditional academic pathway].'

A European cross-country study also emphasised that the existence of different sources of support (e.g. psychologist, mentor and/or career counsellor) was essential for stopping at-risk students who have social and emotional issues dropping out (European Parliament, 2010).

The main characteristics of second chance provision

The three sites – namely (pseudonyms) Landing College (England), Helping School (Hungary) and Support School (Denmark) – chosen for this research represented different forms of second chance provision that were influenced by the given country's policy context. Hence, they played different roles in the education system. Details about the key features of the three types of provision follow.

In Denmark, the operation of the huge variety of youth schools is traditionally the local government's responsibility, specifically that of the Education and Childcare Department. The department has a duty to care for young people aged 14 to 25 who are deemed not ready for the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education, or who have dropped out. The youth schools always adapt to students' and to local needs by providing versatile full-time or part-time study programmes. Thus,

second chance provisions are part of the package of preventative and compensatory measures in the Danish policy context that support young people's return to learning, and help them take the exams and obtain the qualifications relevant to further studies or finding a job.

In contrast, in the Hungarian system for students who do not fit into mainstream education for many different reasons, there are only a few dedicated schools that provide support, with limited targeted funding from the government. One of these schools is the Helping School, which supports those who have left school early, aged 16 to 25. Unfortunately, the uncertainty surrounding its funding mechanisms have placed the sustainability of the institution in jeopardy. Helping School's main professional mission is person-centred teaching that helps youngsters obtain the skills and the secondary school leaving certificate (matriculation: equivalent to GCSE) necessary for getting the right career.

Finally, in England, Landing College is a further education college that offers different courses, second chance and bridging programmes, such as the Prince's Trust, Volunteering and Life Skills Programmes, as well as apprenticeship schemes. On these programmes, students aged 16 to 25 can improve their confidence and ability to decide on a career path. As part of their individual learning programme, students go on work placements to experience the world of work.

In summary, according to the findings, more structured professional support was available to Danish students that is specifically designed to prevent students dropping out of secondary education compared to the other two participating countries. However, it should be noted that both the Hungarian and the English second chance programmes provided alternatives to students who were mostly older than the majority of the Danish at-risk cohort, and typically have experienced more failures, including dropping out of the education system several times. One reason for the younger students in Denmark experiencing lower levels of failure that emerged from the interview analysis was the existence of a supported transition from initial to secondary education that was supported by guidance counsellors.

Students' experiences in second chance provision

Research participants were asked to describe the characteristics of second chance provision that were the most important for ensuring their educational success in re-entering education. Their responses can be grouped into three clusters: the role of teachers, guidance counselors/careers advisers/mentors, and the importance of career education; flexible pedagogical methods; and the role of peers. In this paper, the first cluster will now be discussed.

The role of teachers, career professionals and career education

According to a Cedefop survey, career guidance as a form of prevention and intervention is a measure explicitly specified in policy documents to combat early school leaving (ESL) in Denmark and England. In contrast, guidance is not considered a specific measure for addressing ESL in Hungary (Cedefop, 2015). The differences in the three countries' policy contexts in this regard are reflected in the research participants' interviews. For instance, Hungarian research participants did not specifically mention career guidance. In practice, the three educational institutions under consideration provided career guidance and created a learning environment that encouraged students to develop their aspirations, choose a pathway, and make decisions about their future careers. It should be acknowledged this is a shared aim although they have very different systems, policies, resources and structures in place.

The research participants from Denmark praised the work of career counsellors, calling them people 'to whom they can always turn to for advice'. They reported how the career counsellor monitors students' career choices during the school year by following all students' individual projects, which were associated with specific milestones and tasks. For instance, if a student's desired career was dentistry, they had to map every single stage of the route which led to obtaining the qualification as a dentist, including the first step, such as visiting a secondary

school and talking to people, then seeing the university, interviewing a dentist, and finally, presenting their findings to peers and making a final decision about the choice. This process enabled students to make an informed decision about their careers. In addition, the career counsellor met students both on an individual and group basis, sometimes also visiting group lessons and providing guidance lessons. For instance, one research participant from the Danish cohort, Karl-Georg (male, 28, DK), highlighted the essential role of career counselling in finding the right pathway in education after second chance provision. He also mentioned the importance of engaging with work-experience, in addition to his studies, which was also recommended by his career counsellor. Due to his success as a student teacher, teaching appeared to be his desired profession:

‘I think that it’s a very important position [career counselling] to have some kind of person who guides you with big decisions in your life, they offer you a vision, like, you won’t be able to see that yourself.’

(Karl-Georg, male, 28, DK)

The English cohort thought highly of their tutors, career advisers, counsellors and social workers, emphasising the complexity of support services provided at Landing College that helped them find the right pathway. In practice, the multi-faceted support system consisted of different teams. In addition to careers and a well-being clinic, these included counselling; financial; pastoral; nursery; and welfare. According to research participants, the student-friendly college staff, atmosphere and environment kept them on a positive track and helped move them into employment or higher education. Research participants greatly appreciated the value of the professionals’ patience and their on-site availability. Additionally, they talked about the quality time they had received from these professionals. Finally, they appreciated the career counsellors’ efforts to help students find the right pathway if they felt lost about a particular course, or the help they provided newcomers who did not know which course to start at college, or students who wanted to continue their studies at a different level, even if they wanted to enter employment. For instance, Christian (male, 28, Eng) mentioned in the interview that his volunteering

placement on the careers team supported his idea of studying shipping at university, which was completely unimaginable for him before joining the volunteering programme, even though it had been his biggest desire since childhood:

‘Talking to careers people kind of made me think of uni, I didn’t know anything about funding degree courses or stuff like that before, and that kind of put me onto thinking maybe this is something that I could do, and really from there it sort of helped me start my degree, and I recently graduated.’

(Christian, male, 28, Eng.)

The interviews with the Hungarian cohort highlighted the limited access to Hungarian career services and lifelong guidance, as the research participants had never had a chance to turn to a professionally trained career counsellor. Thus, finding the right pathway after Helping School was an outcome of a complex process supported by the helper-pair system, and all the staff, peers and career education classes. Basically, the last year before the final exam involved preparing for the next step. Research participants greatly appreciated conversations with their pair-teachers, which were recorded in the individual learning programme, and as part of the process they could also search for different opportunities on career-related websites. Additionally, the social worker who was responsible for the career education and guidance helped ‘finalists’ to get to know and interpret different admission procedures and fill in application forms. Research participants emphasised the important role of the helping-pair system in finding the right pathway after the leaving exam, as the pair-teacher knew the student’s personality, achievements, changes and future plans. All students had the chance to choose their pair-teacher from the first year of their studies. For instance, Sarolta (female, 35, Hun) recalled the context of how she became an art historian, and how her pair-teacher facilitated this career choice:

I could not have become an art historian without the inspiration and support I gained in Helping School. In the first year I chose Kata as my pair-teacher, and I must admit it was such a great decision. My first intention was to take a GCSE in French, but talking to Kata passionately about

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art made me realise that a GCSE in Art History would be a bit more relevant. This decision could not have been taken without their support, which put me on the right track.

(Sarolta, female, 35, Hun)

The examples above underpin the significance and effectiveness of individualised career guidance and career education for at-risk students and early school leavers. It should be noted that career guidance in second chance provision included psychological counselling. Thus, it included advice and support, developing individual skills and competences, as well as information about career choices to prepare students for the challenges of adult life (Cedefop, 2015). Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) have underlined the extended role of career practitioners, arguing that career and personal counselling should be integrated in order to support clients to deal with various issues that influence career development.

A Cedefop survey illustrates how education and career guidance are fundamental to helping motivate disadvantaged youth to stay in school and obtain qualifications for the labour market (Cedefop, 2015). Sultana (2012) similarly argues that career education has a positive impact on preventing ESL. For instance, in this research the case of the Danish Support School's everyday practice demonstrates how the career-related activities facilitate students to organise self, educational, and occupational information to help them make and implement career-related decisions. In Savickas's words, these activities support students to become 'agents', and later 'authors' of their own lives and careers (Savickas, 2005).

Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) argue that many career-related decisions can be delayed or influenced, for instance, by family habitus. A number of research participants (n=5) who have demanding, high-achieving parents highlighted the importance of career counselling in convincing parents to let their child follow her/his career choice. As Eszter (35, female, Hun) recalled:

'I just recovered from anorexia, and the time had come to think about where to go after the leaving exam/baccalaureate. Mum really wanted me to study law, even though I was really into the

arts. Luckily, my pair-teacher was on my side and helped mum understand that it would be a grave mistake for me to study law.'

The quotes from the research participants' narratives above highlight the importance of career education and career guidance in motivating students to face their strengths and weaknesses and to gather occupational information that helps them make career-related decisions. The extended role (range of service, frequency of meeting) of career counselling in second chance provision appears to be significant in terms of dealing with at-risk students' everyday problems and career-related issues.

The support staff's personalities and characteristics were also emphasised by research participants as making a positive impact on students' everyday lives. In the Danish cohort, Support School's 'helpful' guidance counsellors were praised, especially by those with disadvantaged backgrounds.

In the Hungarian cohort, students talked about 'kind and helpful' social workers. This supporting role was introduced in the Helping School nine years ago. The younger participants highlighted that the role of the social worker was essential, since she acted as an intermediary for careers advice, and for information about higher education, the labour market and the social security system. One of the participants, Zoltán (26, male, Hun) disclosed:

'I could not live with my alcoholic dad anymore, so I moved to a small flat, and I was only 18. Bea [social worker], who was kind and easy to trust, told me how to get registered with the new GP and stuff, and at the end of my studies she helped me find an IT course in adult education.'

However, the English cohort put greater emphasis on the importance of the multi-disciplinary team operating at Landing College rather than one particular role. The supportive professionals' generous, youth-friendly tolerant nature and helpfulness were evident from the participants' narratives, illustrating how these aptitudes helped build trust.

Conclusion

Overall, building a trusting and friendly relationship between participants, second chance teachers and career professionals helped participants acquire knowledge and create a more positive attitude towards education and the adult world. This supports other findings in the relevant literature. For example, research into vocational education and training also emphasised the important role of tutor-student relationships in knowledge acquisition, together with the social and affective dimension to learning for at-risk students (Nash, 2008).

To sum up, students' narratives provide an account of career pathways experienced by young people in their country's policy context, and reflected the positive effects of second chance provision. These effects contributed to managing research participants' lives and careers. The most influential factor that helped research participants define their future goals and careers was institutional support including career education and career guidance. Following their statements about second chance provision, it could be argued that the second chance years have positively influenced the research participants' careers and personal lives.



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