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Non-participation in guidance – our opportunity for development?

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Abstract

This workshop discusses how new opportunities for guidance can emerge from an analysis of the interplay between the participants’ (non-) participation and the career guidance practitioner’s response. The study presented in the workshop suggests that participants can successfully change the delivery of guidance from individual interventions to more collective forms/modes of delivery.

Qualitative research in career guidance has largely focused on how participants in guidance change as a result of their participation in different guidance or counselling interventions or activities. This workshop, conversely, recognise that participants aim to change and modify the guidance and consequently how this changes the possibilities for participating in guidance, both for themselves and for others. The workshop is based on a presentation of a qualitative and explorative study of guidance in communities.

Three relevant keywords: Individual/collective, guidance in communities, dialectics

Extended summary

The study is fuelled by and fuels a collective turn in Danish guidance. One aim of the study was to investigate whether and how participants in guidance practices seek to change and modify the guidance provided to make it more relevant in their everyday lives, and consequently what could be learned from this. The theoretical basis is critical psychology (Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp, 1983; Thomsen, 2009). The methodology adopted was practice research (Højholt, 2006). Critical psychological perspectives are based on a dialectical understanding of the relationship between the individual and the society: People act in accordance with their conditions and the meaning they ascribe to these conditions. In this study, two cases of career guidance (a factory setting and a folk high school) were studied intensively through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Both interviews and observations were based on a ‘decentred approach’ to the investigation of social phenomena. A decentred approach means to study how participants make sense of participation within their everyday life in: psychological interventions (Dreier, 2008; Mackrill, 2008), guidance and counselling interventions (Thomsen, 2012 forthcoming) or learning interventions (D. Kousholt, 2011; K. Kousholt & Thomsen, 2012 forthcoming). The observations took place from 2006 to 2008. Data consists of field notes and interviews transcribed in full length and altered to protect participant anonymity. The analysis involved both preliminary coding,
theoretically informed analysis on each case separately and a second analysis of the two cases in conjunction. The aim was to identify possible paradoxes and dilemmas related to career guidance in the participants’ everyday life. The full results are reported in Guidance in Communities (Thomsen 2012, forthcoming).

The analyses show how the workers sought to modify the guidance to suit their own needs and reveal a number of changes. 1) A physical movement from an office in one building to the workers’ lunch room; 2) a change from formal to informal communication and from a potentially ‘threatening’ situation to a ‘safe’ situation; and 3) a transformation from an individual approach to a collective approach.

This study supports the view that it is beneficial to frame guidance as part of a community and not as an activity separate from the community. One benefit is that persons who do not see career guidance as relevant can listen in on guidance without appearing to do so, which may inspire to ask questions of their own. In other words, the transition from individual to collective allows members of the community to become resources for each other.

This has implications for career guidance practice and policy. ‘Guidance in communities’ can be considered a social practice theory which advocates changes in perspective from the individual to the collective as the starting point for guidance. One way to involve users could be to practice guidance in communities as a flexible form of delivery, which allows for adaptation to meet the different needs of different communities. As guidance becomes more prominent in European policymaking and in educational and labour market policies all over the world (Zelloth, 2009), discussions on how to invest resources become increasingly important. Danish policymakers have chosen to prioritise and target individuals most in need of an intensified guidance effort (UVM, 2011), i.e. a focus on the individual. The research on guidance in communities suggests that new policy strategies can be developed on the basis of the collective. By engaging existing communities in creating flexible modes of delivery, new resources can be activated. By allowing the participants to influence the guidance process, they, together with the guidance professional, set the stage for new collaborative modes of delivery.


