
Reader

Summary of:
**The self in career
learning: an evolving
dialogue**

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“The self in career learning: an evolving dialogue”

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Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory (2011) [Hubert J.M. Hermans](#), [Thorsten Gieser](#)

In a boundary crossing and globalizing world, the personal and social positions in self and identity become increasingly dense, heterogeneous and even conflicting. In this Handbook scholars of different disciplines, nations and cultures (East and West) bring together their views and applications of Dialogical Self Theory in such a way that deeper commonalities are brought to the surface. As a 'bridging theory', Dialogical Self Theory reveals unexpected links between a broad variety of phenomena, such as self and identity problems in education and psychotherapy, multicultural identities, child-rearing practices, adult development, consumer behavior, the use of internet and the value of silence. Researchers and practitioners present different methods of investigation, both qualitative and quantitative, and also highlight applications of Dialogical Self Theory.

In this book:

Winters A., Meijers F. & Langelle R. (2011). The self in career learning: an evolving dialogue. In Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory, Chapter 26

Summary

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In modern society the challenge of an individual's career development results from the complexities of the modern labour market and the requirements of individuals to consciously and creatively navigate it. Career cannot furthermore be chosen by matching an individual's skills and aptitudes to particular work. The Dialogical Self Theory provides a holistic perspective accepting the multi-dimensionality and multi-voiced nature of individuals. In order to succeed career wise individuals must be able to construct a flexible and workable narrative resulting from an engaged dialogue based on the featuring of "I", "meta" and "promoter" positions.

Career paths have become unpredictable so that is increasingly impossible to make career choices in a rational and information-based way. Research shows that career development has become the result of learning processes in which - besides cognitions - emotions and intuition play an important role. Youth must develop career competencies in order to make use of the opportunities they encounter:

- **Career reflection** (reflective behaviour based on experiences that reveal personal qualities and awareness of motives that are important for future career development)
- **Career shaping** (proactive behaviour: researching jobs, making deliberate decisions, taking action to ensure study and career choices match with one's personal qualities and motives)
- **Networking** (interactive behaviour to build contacts on the internal and external job-market)

These competences correlate with a learning environment that is characterized by a practice-based and inquiry-based curriculum and which offers students opportunities to engage in career dialogue. Career dialogue means: real-life problems as the starting point for professional development, experiential learning, reflective conversation between student, teachers and work-place mentors. The Theory of Career Construction (Savickas, 2005), the most developed constructivist approach, advanced the idea of life themes (individuals generate their own career life themes) and career-related stories (career construction can be fostered by conversations).



Career construction and Dialogical Self Theory

Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) offers a framework for understanding how conversations foster career construction. The Self is a kind of “polyphonic novel” or combination of various voices embodied in one person. The dialogical Self is not static and is transformed by the exchanges amongst I-positions (internal dialogue) and with other people (external dialogue).

Dialogical Self Theory offers more room for exploring one’s life history, acknowledging emotions and fostering the ability to make intuitive decisions. Dialogical Self Theory points up that an individual is much more capable of acting adequately towards his/ her career, once (s)he recognizes the existing complexities. The trajectory from real-life experiences to an appropriate career choice starts with the formulation of an I-position, the subsequent broadening of this I-position by means of a dialogue to other relevant I-positions, and runs from these I-positions to a meta-position (view one’s I-positions from a distance) and from this meta-position to the formulation of the promoter-position (the position that is capable of taking action). The student is asked to discuss the experiences from practice in a multi-voiced way, to develop and express various perspectives, to explore options as well as to remain aware of complexity and changeability of himself / herself and the work environment in order to become capable of taking action.

Three Types of Training Conversations

Embarked on a longitudinal study three types of training conversations were analysed based on formal characteristics, content, form and relational components:

- The *Teacher-dominant Conversation* aims at checking the student’s progress in learning goals with no link to careers. The student is required to listen what teacher and mentor advise. The student formulates an I-position following the teacher’s inquiry about the student’s feelings. The student doesn’t elaborate other perspectives to contrast experiences (meta) or networking as a possible action (promoter).
- In *Student-directed Conversation* the student determines what is talked about and the teacher invites the student to talk about what was important to him / her. The teacher tries to find a balance between what the student was actually saying and the mentor from practice talked what was important. The student articulates different I-positions but is not prepared to construct a meta-position nor a promoter-position.
- In *Dialogical Training Conversation* the teacher takes time for the student to understand and become conscious of each step in his / her reflection. The student talks about his / her experiences and it is the teacher who structures the conversation and puts words to what’s relevant. The teacher formulates the student’s ability to go from I-positions to meta-position and then to promoter-position.

Conclusion

Successful career development is increasingly the result of the ability to develop a career-story, which is constructed via conversations. Conversations only contribute to the construction of career stories when they allow the development of I-, meta- and promoter-position. Of all categories studied the formal characteristics seem to have most impact: attention for reflection stimulates students to formulate I-positions, the teacher plays an important role in guiding this process. The (theoretically) ideal sequence of I-position to I-positions to a meta-position to a promoter-position could not be found in any of the described cases / selected case studies. Accordingly it is not yet possible to formulate a hypothesis on the crucial factor in the organization of guidance conversations



to stimulate career learning. Students do not seem to participate in a career dialogue willingly. They are hardly motivated to participate in reflective activities about their careers when these are prescribed as part of the curriculum. They do not see the connection between these reflective activities and “real-life” (Law, Meyers & Wijers, 2002).

An analysis of career conversations from the perspective of Dialogical Self Theory shows, that conversations in which students are invited to develop I-, meta- and promoter-positions ask more of the teacher than conversational “techniques” do. Teachers and mentors need specific competences regarding the cognitive modelling of thinking to engage students in reflective career dialogues. They must be genuinely interested in the student and keep in mind that each student is a developing polyphonic self. A teacher can only invite the student to bring this out within an atmosphere that offers the students both structure and space.

Dialogical Self Theory offers concrete ideas on how career conversations might be developed and carried out in the future.

Keywords: Dialogical Self, Career construction, Student, Conversation, I position