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A tool for assessing interdisciplinary career guidance

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Abstract

This research deals with career guidance as interdisciplinary collaboration offered at the Finnish Guidance Centers. In One-Stop Guidance Centers, career guidance is offered by experts representing different fields of expertise as well as different administrative sectors involved in guidance service provision. Career guidance plays an important role in the service and it seems to have an interdisciplinary base but while lacking previous studies, there is no guarantee that it in fact is truly interdisciplinary. We define interdisciplinary career guidance broadly as a shared understanding of the objectives, methods and ways of working in career guidance.

In this study, we consider how to systematically assess interdisciplinary career guidance in an interdisciplinary service. We present a semi structured observational form that was created during the ESF funded project CAREER! (2019–2021). The ultimate purpose of the form is to help evaluate how the guidance professionals act both as a part of interdisciplinary working community and with the client. It is designed to assess the activities of interdisciplinary career guidance service and can be used in contexts other than One-Stop Guidance Centers as well.

Keywords: career guidance; youth; interdisciplinary collaboration; observation method

Introduction and objectives

This research deals with career guidance as interdisciplinary collaboration offered at the Finnish One-Stop Guidance Centers. Finland has established a network of locally operating One-Stop Guidance Centers, called Ohjaamo in Finnish, to provide young people with information, advice and guidance on a walk-in and easy-access basis. The objective is to promote active citizenship, inclusion and transition to employment. The services are tailored according to the needs of clients and the aim is to assist and support the young person until a more long-lasting or permanent solution has been found in terms of a job, study place or other type of activity. Often the support young people seek is career guidance.

In One Stop Guidance Centers, career guidance is offered by experts representing different fields of expertise as well as different administrative sectors involved in guidance service provision. In the project CAREER! – Developing career guidance skills at One-Stop Guidance Center we have been studying the question whether career guidance offered in One-Stop Guidance Centers is in fact truly interdisciplinary. In this article we focus on how to assess interdisciplinary career guidance in a service that is transitioning from the culture of working alone towards interactive, interdisciplinary collaboration. We approach the question methodologically and present an observational tool for evaluating career guidance in an interdisciplinary work environment. The observational tool will be used to collect data in One-Stop Guidance Centers during CAREER! - project in 2019–2020.

Theoretical basis

In 2019 there are over 70 One-Stop Guidance Centers in Finland and the number is growing. Originally, in 2014, several services were brought together under integrated support centres to raise the employment rate and the educational attainment of young people as a part of Finland's agreement for the Europe 2020 strategy and Youth Guarantee. Now many stakeholders such as The Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centre), the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), the public employment and business services (TE Centre), local authorities, NGOs and businesses have joined in to develop the multi-agency concept. Three Finnish ministries, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health are also strongly involved (Savolainen et al., 2018, p. 3).

The concrete work community in One-Stop Guidance Centers is usually composed of experts in education and training, labour administration or social work and healthcare who represent either public, private or third sector bodies. With many service providers and different organizations integrated, One-Stop Guidance Centers can be described as multi-, inter- or transdisciplinary service. In Finnish, there is only one word for these concepts, *monialainen*, which according to Nykänen (2010, p. 59), covers the collaboration of private service providers, businesses and employers in the provision of guidance services. Collaboration of the service providers can take place both within organisations and between organisations.

In Stember's (1991) overview of different levels of disciplinary, she defines multidisciplinary as a form of collaboration where people from different disciplines are working together, each drawing on their disciplinary knowledge. Interdisciplinarity according to her is integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a real synthesis of approaches. Transdisciplinary on the other hand is creating a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspectives. Because in Finnish, the word *monialainen* doesn't separate these meanings, it's important to evaluate which level of collaboration is talked about when it comes to One-Stop Guidance Centers.

Above all, it's important to notice that the mere gathering of several service providers under the same roof in One-Stop Guidance Centers doesn't automatically make people work in an inter- or transdisciplinary manner.

Previous studies have revealed that integrating knowledge and methods from different fields and creating a unity of the perspective in the service requires both changes in attitude and in the ways of working together (Hall, 2005; Koskela, 2013; Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011.). The development process can take place at different levels and in different stages, and these can be examined from both the individual and the community perspective (Pukkila et al., 2018).

Previous study suggests that the most common ways of working together in One-Stop Guidance Centers are working alone (33 %), working together (32 %) and working side by side (28%). Working side by side means that people may share the same working area without interacting much (Pukkila et al., 2018). This would suggest that the ways of working in One-Stop Guidance Centers are more multidisciplinary than inter- or transdisciplinary. However, in the literature and public communication concerning One-Stop Guidance Centers, the aspects of inter- and transdisciplinary, such as integrating knowledge and methods from different fields and forming a uniform service, is emphasized (see e.g. Määttä, 2018). In conclusion, One-Stop Guidance Centers aspire to be inter- or transdisciplinary service but in fact people in One-Stop Guidance Centers are working alone or side by side – that is in a multidisciplinary manner.

Considering this background, career guidance offered in One-Stop Guidance Centers is been said to have interdisciplinary touch but while lacking previous studies, there is no guarantee that it in fact has. With interdisciplinary career guidance we refer to the situation where the personnel in One-Stop Guidance Centers share an understanding of the objectives, methods and ways of working in career guidance. People in the work community know what career guidance is and have defined together the ways of working in career guidance. In more detail, we define interdisciplinary career guidance at this point of our study as a goal-oriented process in which the career development skills of a young person are developing. The young person strengthens his / her self-knowledge, learns to collect and process information about his / her educational and career opportunities and to make the related decisions in changing life situations. It also covers strengthening young people's agency and supporting young people to plan and build their own future.

Interdisciplinary career guidance needs to be considered as a skill to be developed and learnt. Strengthening the factors that promote interdisciplinary collaboration, such as understanding and crossing the boundaries of expertise, fosters the employees' competence of interdisciplinary career guidance as well. To gain a real synthesis of approaches of different fields and to develop a unity beyond the disciplinary perspectives, the current situation of the career guidance in One-Stop Guidance Centers needs to be studied. In the project CAREER! we study One-Stop Guidance Centers' personnels' understanding of career guidance as a concept, the everyday activities of the career guidance in One-Stop Guidance Centers, and finally, create recommendations and criteria for conducting career guidance in an interdisciplinary manner. In this study, we consider how to assess methodologically the question whether career guidance in an interdisciplinary guidance service is truly interdisciplinary.

Methodology

Interdisciplinary career guidance is a relatively new research subject in the field of guidance in Finland. One-Stop Guidance Centers as a multidisciplinary guidance service are under examination in many studies and they offer a suitable platform for studying the practices of interdisciplinary career guidance as well. In this study, we consider how to assess methodologically the observation of the practices of interdisciplinary career guidance in an interdisciplinary service. Ultimately the purpose of the observations is to answer to the question how career guidance plays itself out in an interdisciplinary service. However, in this article we focus on the observation method and the creation of an observational tool.

Since we study the reality of a phenomenon, we chose observation method as approach. Especially a naturalistic observation method is well suited for studying relatively new ideas and concepts since it gives the researcher the opportunity to study the total situation and notice features possibly not associated to the phenomenon before. Also, by being able to observe the flow of behavior in its own setting, study has a great ecological validity compared to controlled settings. (McLeod, 2015).

To have reliability, observation method needs a systematic way of recording the observed situations. To collect the observational data in this manner, we created a semi structured observation form. It is designed to be used in observation of the spontaneous behavior of guidance professional and their clients in their natural activities in guidance service and it is currently being used in observations conducted by CAREER! -project in One-Stop Guidance Centers.

The observations are carried out by using time sampling method which means that the observations will take place during specified time periods, during the opening hours of the guidance service. Study setting is overt because participants are asked for permission to observe them for ethical reasons. The goal is that every client in One-Stop Guidance Center is observed regardless their reason for attending the service. Clients are also asked to evaluate their experience of the guidance session to get a more complete understanding of the phenomenon and include experiences of the participants in the study. In the next section, we present the observation form and the observation criteria in more detail.

Results

We approach the question of how to assess interdisciplinary career guidance in an interdisciplinary service by presenting a semi structured observation form we created (See Figure 1). The form is created specially to assess interdisciplinary career guidance and it's based on our previous study on observations of interdisciplinary collaboration in Finnish One-Stop Guidance Centers (Lilja et al., in preparation).

Observation Form of interdisciplinary career guidance in One-Stop Guidance Centers



One-Stop Guidance Center	date	time (duration):
Client's reason for attending:		
Guidance professional's job title / background organisation:		

<p>Social forms of interdisciplinary work:</p> <p>What kind of situation is it?</p> <p>Description of the process (start, different stages, end).</p> <p>How is the guidance professional's own background visible in the situation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Working without client <input type="checkbox"/> Individual guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Paired work in work with client <input type="checkbox"/> Making use of another employee's skills: consultation - transfer - accompanying client to another employee <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork / knotworking with client <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance in small groups (< 10) - guidance in large groups (> 10)
<p>Guidance situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Information <input type="checkbox"/> Advice <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance <p>(Note: More than one can be selected)</p>	<p>How does the guidance professional act in the situation? How do the guidance professional's actions affect the client? Guidance methods used and questions asked.</p>
<p>Supporting career planning skills and agency</p> <p>What was supported? How was it supported?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-knowledge – character strengths – skills – competence - capabilities – identity – personality • Future – hope – dreams – interests – goals • Life space – health – finances – hobbies – work – education – family – close friends – values • Decision-making skills – options and opportunities – seizing the opportunity • Information search skills – networking skills – social skills • Self-assessment – self-regulation – self-efficacy – resilience – motivation – SOMETHING ELSE?
<p>Goal-orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Next step <input type="checkbox"/> Life design <input type="checkbox"/> Both 	<p>How is the goal visible and how does it affect the situation?</p>

Figure 1: Observation Form of interdisciplinary career guidance in One-Stop Guidance Centers

The observational data collected with this form answers both to structured and unstructured questions and it can be analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods (Adler & Adler, 1994). Demographic data that is collected is the name of the One-Stop Guidance Center, date, duration of the guidance situation, client's reason for attending the service and the professional field the guidance professional represents.

In the structured part, the observed situations are systematically classified into distinct categories. Afterwards, the categories on the form can be coded numerically so that the data collected can be easily counted and turned into statistics. The unstructured part of the form provides template for taking further notes of the situation and produces qualitative data.

The structured categories are social forms of interdisciplinary work, type of the guidance, support of the career planning skills of the client and goal-directedness of the guidance. The observer chooses the subcategory or subcategories that best describe the situation. Social forms of interdisciplinary work refer to the ways of working in the interdisciplinary community: 1) how people work without clients: for example, do they discuss as a team about their clients or spend time alone, 2) individual guidance: one worker with a client, 3) partner work with clients, 4) utilisation of the skills of another worker: this can mean for example consultation, transfer or accompanying exchange of the worker where client is transferred to another worker. Finally, one form of interdisciplinary work is called "negotiated knotwork" which refers to a type of team work where the interdisciplinary team is gathered to work with the client based on the need of the client (see Pukkila et al., 2019 for similar categorization).

The subcategories supporting the career planning skills and agency of the client and goal-directedness of the guidance are influenced by variety of career guidance theories, e.g. Cognitive counselling (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz & Reardon, 2002), Sociodynamic counselling (Peavy, 2010), Life design approach (Savickas et al., 2009) and Career management skills by Sultana (2013) but are not restricted to any specific theory. The idea is that the categories only support the observations – not guide them too much.

The unstructured part of the form provides template for taking further notes of the situation. The observer can freely describe the situation. The goal is to evaluate how the guidance professional acts both as a part of interdisciplinary working community and with the client. Further questions to assess are anything related to the guidance situation, for example supporting agency of the client and goal-orientedness of the career guidance. Are there particular guidance methods the guidance professional is using? Which career planning skills are supported by the guidance professional and which are not? How is this done? In general, the unstructured part of the form documents anything the observer finds meaningful in the guidance session.

Conclusions

The interdisciplinary guidance offered by the One-Stop Guidance Centers is introducing a completely new operative culture into the field of career guidance in Finland. The changing culture from traditional, siloed client service to a transdisciplinary, low-threshold guidance environment will require the adoption

of new methods and skills. In order to succeed in offering good quality and truly interdisciplinary career guidance One-Stop Guidance Centers need to start paying attention to the ways of working together and ensure, to the least, that the employees share an understanding on what interdisciplinary career guidance is.

Lacking previous studies, there is a need to explore how career guidance is representing itself in One-Stop Guidance Centers currently. Only after this it is possible to ensure that a shared understanding of the objectives, methods and ways of working of career guidance – interdisciplinary career guidance – is guaranteed in One-Stop Guidance Centers. The observational tool we presented in this article is designed to assess the activities of interdisciplinary career guidance service and can be used in contexts other than One-Stop Guidance Centers as well.

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