

UNESCO-UNITWIN chair of Lifelong guidance and counselling
University of Wroclaw (Poland)
Round Table: Careers in Liquid Modernity
June 3, 2014

Life designing dialogues

Jean Guichard (with Jacques Pouyaud, Marcelline Bangali, Marie-Line Robinet)

jean.guichard@cnam.fr

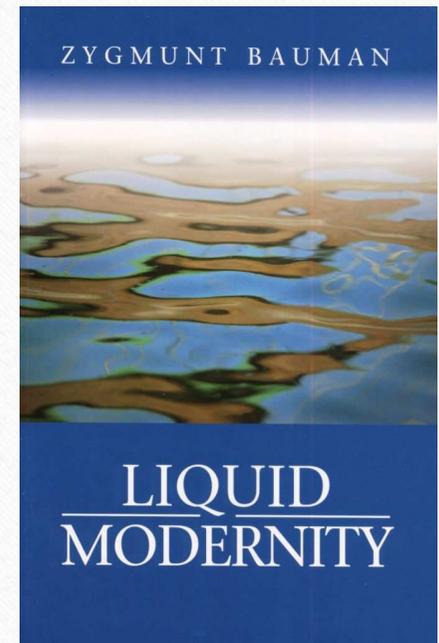
le cnam
Institut national d'étude du travail
et d'orientation professionnelle **inetop**



Introduction

Career interventions result from the conjunction of three categories of factors.

- The first kind of factors refers to those that shape the career issues people must face. These career issues depend on some major society characteristics and on the way work is organized and distributed. As we have noted, we now live in liquid (Bauman, 2000) societies of individuals (Elias, 1991). As a result, each of us must individually cope with the double issue of governing one's uncertain career and of designing one's own life.



Introduction

As these issues are complex ones, we think that people need to be helped when they tackle them. This is why we offer them some career interventions. As we have seen during this chair's opening conference, two kinds of factors impinge on the nature of these career interventions.

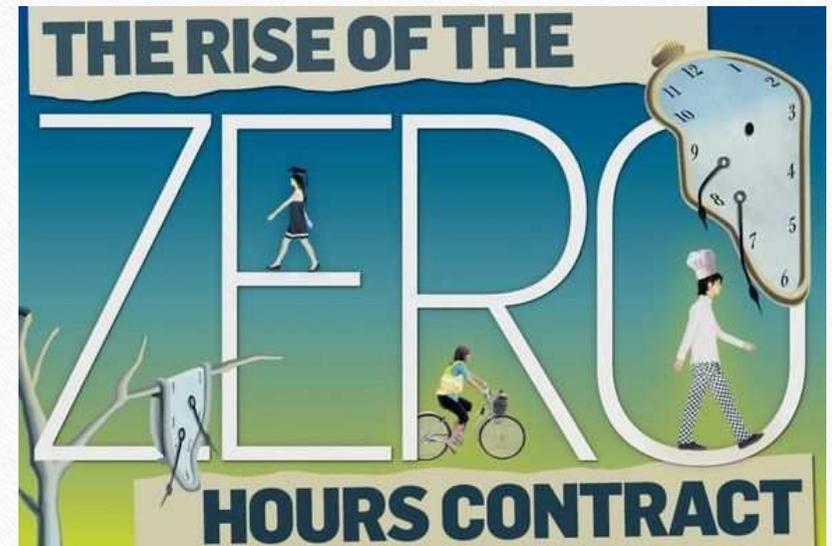
- One of them is a (more or less covert) ideological dispute about their core purpose: Is it only to provide industry with the workforce it needs? Or is these interventions' main purpose also to enable all people to develop their human potentials? In a word, the debate is about the “why” question: Why should people be helped in their transition to work and further career and life developments?



fair
Society

Introduction

A major conclusion of our opening conference was that we needed urgently to overtly develop again this “Why?” question if we want that our interventions effectively prepare people for coping with the major challenges that humanity confronts today (such as decent work deficit, economic and social precarity affecting billions of young people, serious environmental and technological hazards, etc.).



Introduction

The last kind of factors that determines the interventions counselors offer their clients is the scientific view of the human subject given by the researchers in the humanities and social sciences. This view changed greatly during the 20th century. It appears that now:

- Human subjects are seen as less unified than previously. For example, they are described as “plural” (Mick Cooper & John Rowan (eds.), 1999; Lahire, 2011) or as speaking with different voices (Gergen, 2011) or as combining different “I” positions (Hermans, & Kempen, 1993), etc.
- Human subjects are also described as searching to give their lives unity, coherence and meaning notably through the elicitation of certain life themes (Csikszentmihalyi, & Beattie, 1979) and the construction of life stories (Ricoeur, 1992; Delory-Momberger, 2009) around some plots, which give meaning, from a certain future perspective, to a certain selection of their past and present life events.

Introduction

- Individual behaviors are also seen as less immediately determined by the early or past experiences than it was the case before. Differently, scientists insist now on the importance of the meaning constructing processes (Malrieu, 2003), of (re)interpretations & symbolizations (Wiley, 1994), and on the role of the various modes of relating to the self and to one's experiences (Foucault, 2010), etc., in the determining of human self-conceptions and behaviors.
- In sum, human actors are now conceived as endowed with a greater (at least potential) agency than before (Bandura, 2006).

In such a context, clients tell counselors issues that can be differentiated according to the priority they give (although the distinction is generally not so clear-cut):

- Either to the government of their uncertain working lives.
- Or to the reflection about their current life priorities.

Introduction

This leads counselors to offer their clients interventions that can be differentiated into three grand types according to the type of questions they give priority:

- Some interventions intend, first of all, to teach clients how to find exact and relevant information on today's work, employment and training.
- Other interventions aim fundamentally to help clients construct an adaptable vocational self-concept that matches the current social norms of today's employment. Such interventions guide the clients' thinking: they teach them for example how to take stock of the competencies they have developed during their various life experiences or how to make the best possible decisions about their careers.
- The last kind of interventions gives priority to the designing by the clients of their own lives. Differently from the preceding ones, the life designing interventions don't guide the clients' reflection according to the current social norms of employability. Their purpose is more fundamental. It is to help them define the norms, from which they can give their lives meaning, construct them and govern them (Foucault, 2010).

Introduction

- Mark Savickas should introduce - during his today's and tomorrow's presentation - the career construction interview, which is a prototypical example of such a life designing intervention.
- During my today's presentation, I would like only to briefly introduce another form of a life designing intervention: *the dialogues for self-construction*. As, we'll see, these counselling dialogues aim at helping people construct the future perspectives that currently give their lives meaning. During this presentation, I would like to describe the construction's processes of some future perspectives on the occasion of such dialogues.
- In order to explain why I call "dialogues" this form of counselling intervention, I'll first recall the definition of three major concepts, on which these counselling dialogues are grounded. In this presentation's second part, I'll then give some examples – stemming from such an actual dialogue – that show the processes leading to the definition of meaningful future perspectives by the clients and, in some cases, to the resulting transformation of their subjective identity

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- The counseling dialogues for self-construction are conceptually based on a synthesis of recent work – by psychologists, sociologists, experts in social theory or in semiotics, philosophers and psychoanalysts – on the construction of the self. This is the model “To make oneself self” (Guichard, 2004, 2005).

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- In order to connect together the contributions stemming from these different disciplines, some “go-between concepts” were constructed. Three of them are of major importance to introduce the processes of change induced by such dialogues. These are the followings: subjective identity forms, dual reflexivity and ternary (or trinity) reflexivity.

Subjective identity form: The model “to make oneself self” describes what is usually called “subjective or self-identity” as a “*dynamic system of subjective identity forms*”. In other words, subjective identity is conceived altogether as plural (made of subjective identity forms), as unified (a system) and as evolving (dynamic).

A subjective identity form (*SIF*) is defined both:

- *As a set of ways to be, act, interact and dialogue in a certain setting,*
- *And as a certain view of oneself, of others and of the significant objects in this setting.*

For example, when a young man says “My pals are what interest me most in high-school”, he begins to describe his SIF “I, high-school student”.

L'orientation scolaire et professionnelle 2004, 33, n° 4, 499-533

SE FAIRE SOI⁽¹⁾

Jean GUICHARD

Jean Guichard (*) est Professeur de psychologie à l'IN.E.T.O.P.-C.N.A.M. et codirecteur du Laboratoire de Psychologie de l'Orientation (EA 2365).

MOTS CLÉS : Identité, soi, réflexivité, cadre cognitif, rapport à soi.

KEY WORDS : Identity, Self, Reflexivity, Cognitive Frame, Self-Relating Mode.

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- The concept of SIF also includes the idea of certain “expectations for oneself as such”. For example, Szejnok (2012) showed that the high-level athletes he interviewed saw themselves in daydreams on the podium of the Olympic Games or the World Championships. SIFs, which include such expectations of self-achievement, play a central role in the current organization of a person’s dynamic system of subjective identity forms. This system is then organized according to this prospect of self-achieving that gives then this person’s life a meaning.



1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

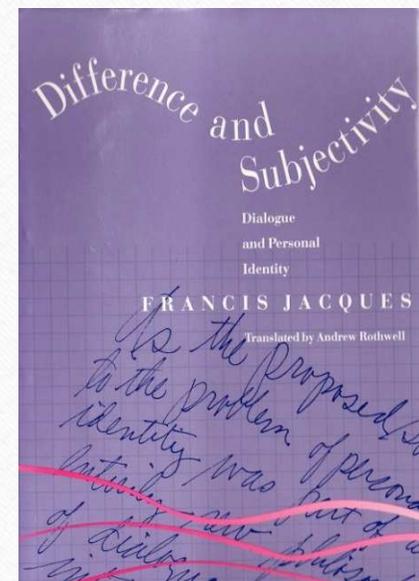
- A person's system of SIF changes as a consequence, on the one hand, of all the events that leave their marks on this person's life course, and, on the other hand, of the tensions, which develop between two forms of reflexivity that this person mobilizes to relate to him/herself and to his/her various experiences. A lifetime is indeed characterized by a whole series of changes (maturation, successes, failures, accidents, encounters, etc.), which play an important role in the transformation of a person's system of SIF. However, these events exert their influences also by the way the person relates to them, perceives them and interprets them, *in relation to the form of reflexivity this person gives priority to*, at this time of his/her life.

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- One of these forms of reflexivity has already been mentioned on the occasion of the young elite athletes' example:
- This “dual reflexivity ” is a mode of relating oneself (self as subject) to oneself (self as object) from the point of view of a certain state of perfection or some ideal that the individual wants to achieve (Cf. Erikson, Lacan, 1949; Foucault, 1982a, 1982b, 1983). As a consequence, the individual *defines and implements some activities or behaviors in order to achieve this state of perfection*. This reflexivity is a stabilizing factor of the individuals' systems of SIF, as individuals direct then their lives from this goal's perspective.

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

A second form of reflexivity was named “ternary” or “trinity” (Peirce, cf. Colapietro, 1989 and *Jacques*, 1991) because the reflection takes then the form of an ongoing dialogue, during which *“I” tells “you” and “you” answers “I” or “I” and “you” refer to he/she*. Such a dialogue may be *intra-individual* (a person, who thinks about an issue, enters into a dialogue with him/herself) and/ *or inter-individual*.



Peirce's Approach to the Self

A Semiotic Perspective on Human Subjectivity



Vincent M. Colapietro

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

In both cases, a dialogue is organized this way:

- *“I” tell “you” (something) (you = another individual or myself).*
- *“You” understand “something” about/from the “something” that “I” uttered.*
- *What “you” understand from what “I” uttered was named an “interpretant” by Peirce.*
- *Relying on this interpretant “You” answer “I” something.*
- *“I” produce then a new intepretant. What “I” understand from what “You” replied.*
- *And so on...*

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- In other words, at every turn of a (intra-individual or inter-individual) speech, a gap occurs between what "I" says and what "you" understands about this saying and responds accordingly: A gap between what "I" say and what "I", from the point of view of the "you", hear 'I' said. What is said is heard from the perspective of the other, and as a consequence, opens up a range of potential interpretations.

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

This form of reflexivity is particularly active when people wonder about the future prospects that could give their lives meaning. They then engage in dialogues with themselves, with some relatives or with a counsellor. These dialogues make them identify some experiences, events, thoughts, etc., in their – past, present or even possibly future – lives and consider them from the “external” perspective of the other and compare them. As a consequence, these experiences, events, thoughts, etc., gain a sense they didn’t have before being told on the occasion of such dialogues. People built this way some potential future prospects, which may give their lives a meaning.

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

Joel's case can illustrate this process. Joel (the client) was 27 years old when he engaged in a series of counseling dialogues for self-construction (Robinet, 2012). He worked as a computer engineer. Although he earned a very good living, he was not happy with his job. During the life designing dialogues, he thought about (notably) his SIF of high-school student and one of his current ones of aikidōka (aikido practitioner). He recollected that, when he was a High-school student, he relied only on his interest in math when he thought about the major he would study in college.

1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

But he also recalled that when he was an adolescent, becoming a physician was also attractive to him. As he became aware of the major characteristics of his aikidōka SIF, he said that he conceived this sport as a way to have a well-balanced and happy life. He then connected this view and the way he saw the profession of “physician” when he was an adolescent.

He conceived it, in the same way, as aiming to help people have a well-balanced and happy life (and not as engineer in repair of the human body). After discussing the possibility of starting long study of medicine, at 27 years of age, he drew up the following future perspective: couldn't he become an aikido coach in a dojo he would run?



1) The conceptual foundations of the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- Nevertheless, there is a major point of difference between the counseling dialogues for self-construction and the dialogues of everyday life. This is the reason why the first ones facilitate more than the second ones the construction of future perspectives, such as the one Joel expressed.

2) Primum relationis: A polyphony of the “yous” resonances as a major factor of change in the counseling dialogues for self-construction

The major purposes of the counseling dialogues for self-construction are to help clients:

- To become aware of – or to clarify – the expectations that currently give their lives a meaning.
- And to determine behaviors that might increase the chances these expectations become true.

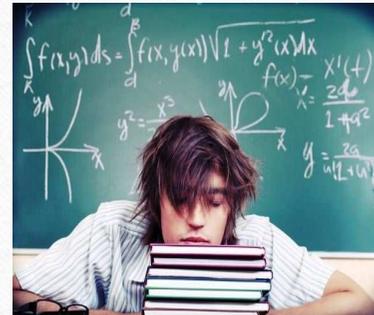
The concrete ways such dialogues are implemented depend on the problems that were constructed during the working alliances and how clients and counselors agreed to tackle them.

2) Primum relationis: A polyphony of the “yous” resonances as a major factor of change in the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- **One way to proceed may consist in asking first clients to identify the domains of activity that are or were important to them in their lives (important, because they are interested in what happens there, because they spend a lot of time doing this, because they dream to excel in this domain, etc.).**

Thus, on the occasion of such dialogues (Gautier, 2012), a young man – named Hamza – explained that his current life consisted of four major spheres of activity:

- “12th grader in a scientific stream”,
- “young soccer *coach*”,
- “educational *assistance provider*” and
- “preparing the *rescue at sea certificate*”.



2) Primum relationis: A polyphony of the “yous” resonances as a major factor of change in the counseling dialogues for self-construction

- **When these major life domains are identified, the clients' work consists in becoming aware of the SIF that corresponds to each of them, that is to say, of the way they act, how they act, interact, relate to themselves, to others, etc., in each of these life domains and their expectations in each of them. This reflection and awareness are the key elements that enable them to draw up some future perspectives, which give their current lives meaning.**

- For example, at the beginning of such dialogues, Hamza said that what gave meaning to his life in high school were the pals he was very popular with, but that he was bored by most courses, that he saw little interest in most school subjects, that he was not working efficiently and that, because of this situation, he could only hope to succeed in basic higher education in an applied field, without knowing which applied field could attract him. He added that this attitude was the subject of conflicts with his parents. In summary, at the beginning of the dialogues, Hamza's high-school SIF corresponded to very limited expectations.



- The situation was different in the other three domains that Hamza had identified as important in his current life. When he analyzed them in order to become aware of the SIF corresponding to each of them, Hamza connected the various activities he was committing oneself to and produced an encompassing interpretive concept: “physician”, an interpretant, which moreover corresponded to what his father kept on saying for many years: “I see you becoming a physician”.

- The analysis of the ternary reflexivity processes, which are then activated, shows that the situation of counseling dialogues leads the person – Hamza in this example – to produce what could be called *different “narrative Is”* (“I do tutoring”, “I train young soccer players”, “I prepare ..., etc.) and *to consider these various “narrative I” from the point of view of a set of “yous”* (“you”: myself who heard I said this and this; “you”: what “I” imagine the counselor has heard and may have understood; “you”: other relatives who could hear me saying this , etc.).

- *This polyphony of the “yous” resonances echoing the various “narrative I” allows the client to compare them both synchronically and diachronically, and to produce a (provisionally) final interpretant about what these “narrative I” have in common.* This (provisionally) “*final interpretant I*” is both a *more inclusive “I*” (the “I” who does this and the “I” who does that, and the “I” who..., etc., show that “*I want to be useful to others*”) and a *more asserted I* (“No doubt: I’m actually this “*I*”).

- This phenomenon occurs in a specific way during life designing dialogues because of one of their major characteristics that the Francis Jacques thesis of *Primum relationis* emphasizes (Jacques, 1982). This thesis states that the relationship comes first. This means that the dialogical relationship creates the positions "I", "you" and, correlatively, "he-she". In practical terms, it is this particular dialogical relationship that creates these "Is" and these "yous" and these "hes/shes". "Is", "yous" and "hes/shes" mean an individual's different "I", different "you" and different "he/she".

- In other words, during the dialogical relationships of everyday life, we always dialogue in a relatively determined way. For example, this dialogue is between spouses, or between a student and a teacher. And the "Is", "yous" and "hes/shes" produced by this dialogue bear the imprint of this first determination: they are the "Is, yous, hes/shes" of dialogues between these spouses, or between these..., etc.

- In a counseling dialogue, the working alliance produces “Is, yous, hes/shes”; which are somehow free from predetermination referring to the history of the persons’ relationships. It creates a “client” who speaks to a “counselor”, whose only determination is to be here and help the client to become aware of his/her life’s expectations. Such a relationship establishes a possibility of creating new “I-you” relationships in the clients, and consequently give them an opportunity to depart of the beaten tracks of everyday dialogues and to produce new “Is”, which are first tentative “Is”.

- However, the counselor's function in a counseling dialogue is not only that of an undetermined you, to whom the clients speak. Counselors are actually present and are not silent. They even give priority to some particular forms of statements that stimulate the clients to develop their thinking: they underline, summarize, rephrase, ask for clarification, etc. And these reviving statements are playing an important role in the development of the clients' dialogues, as Blanchet (1991) points out. When interviewers revive the dialogues, they seem to say nothing more than what has already been said. Yet, they make some sorts of choices among several possible solutions which the interviewees will necessarily respond in order to obey the principle of relevance.

- Nevertheless to make this more “*inclusive and asserted I*” becomes an “*acting I*” (to make the narrator becomes an actor, to give rise to a person’s involvement so as to become this “I”, or to excel as such an “I”) this “I” needs to be emotionally invested. This “*I has to become the object of an identification*”. The person has to dream to be this “I”, to see him/her/self as this “I”, to desire to be this “I”.

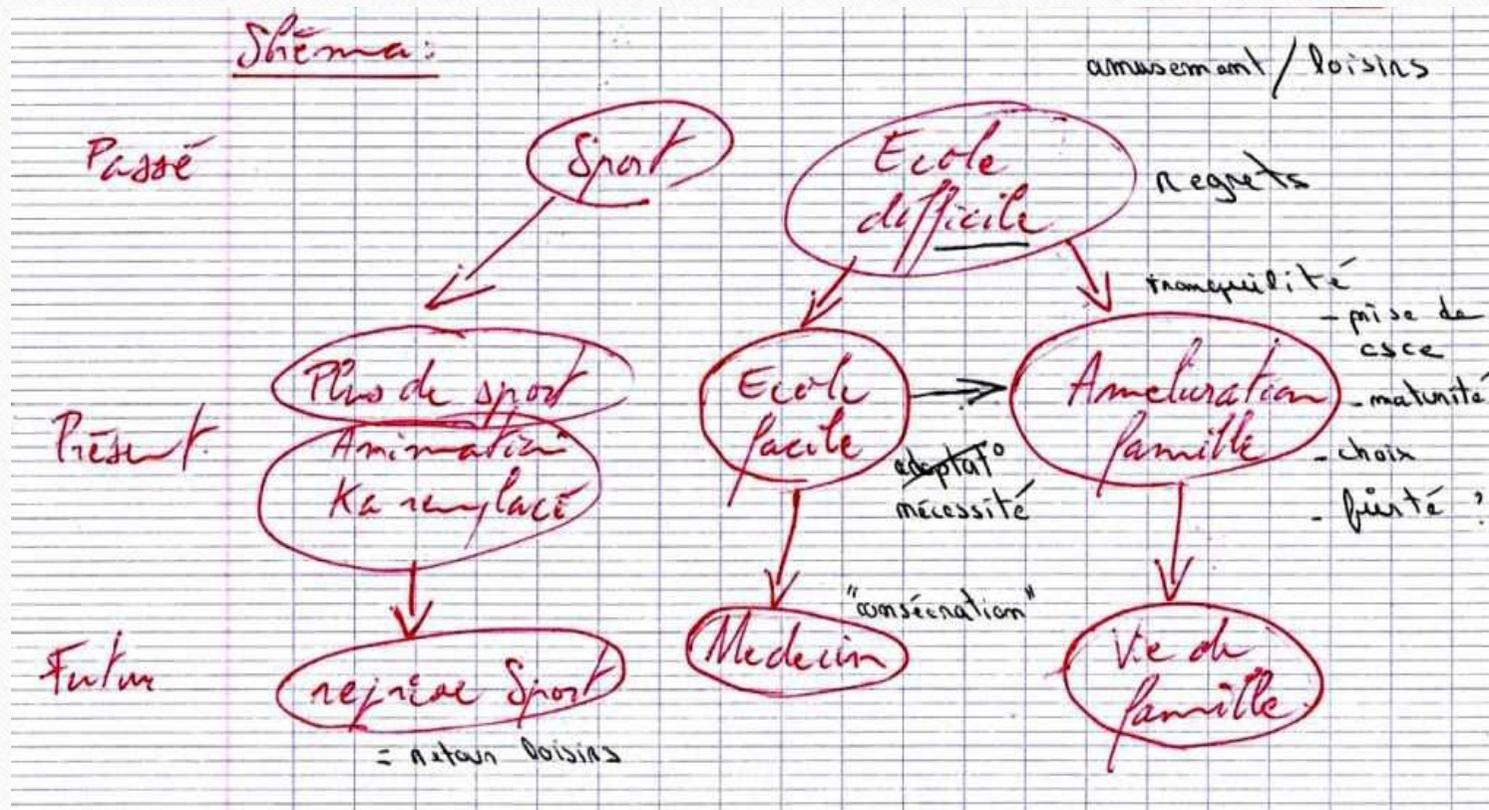
- This is precisely where the dual processes of reflexivity take place. As we have seen, *during such dual reflexivity processes, individuals constitute themselves as objects to themselves, from the point of view of certain ideals they want to achieve.* In adolescents and emerging adults, this ideal corresponds generally to an expected SIF linked to the image of a certain character, with whom they identify. This anticipated and desired SIF plays then a decisive role in the organization of their systems of subjective identity forms.

This swing was explicit in Hamza's dialogues. He indeed said (at speech turn 404): *“Now I don't really think about what I'm going to write [as a choice in the application I must fill out to apply for higher education]. I'm already thinking about how I'm going to do [for successful medical school]”*.



Correspondingly, he concluded that the only way to achieve this goal was to transform his way of being a high school student (his high school SIF) and, by extension, the other SIF (notably the sportsman one) that prevented him from getting the academic achievement required to succeed in medical school.

Hamza indeed came to a counseling meeting with a diagram (see below) he has designed (without being asked to do so): my life “before” (top), as “it’ll be now” (middle) and as “I expect it to be in the future” (bottom). In the language I use, Hamza drew three diagrams of his SIF’s system: The first one as it was at the beginning of the series of life designing dialogues and the two others at their ends.



As a consequence, Hamza significantly transformed his high school SIF. For example, he began to write cards to summarize and structure the lessons, he went every Saturday morning to the public library without his cell phone to do his homework, etc. Moreover, it temporarily suppressed his other activities. In other words, after Hamza had defined the life perspective of “becoming a physician to be useful to others”, he significantly changed his system of SIF, and more particularly, his high school one. At the end of the academic year, he got a merit in his high school leaving certificate and entered medical school the following year



These two types of reflexivity don't necessarily combine in such a harmonious way during a series of counseling dialogues for self-construction. Some clients have great difficulties to define future perspectives that are sufficiently meaningful to them to trigger off their commitment to achieving them.

However, experiments of these counseling interventions showed that these “dialogues for self construction” seems to foster a development of the reflexive processes they imply.

UNESCO-UNITWIN chair of Lifelong guidance and counselling
University of Wroclaw (Poland)
Round Table: Careers in Liquid Modernity
June 2, 2014

Life designing dialogues

Thank you for your attention

Jean Guichard
jean.guichard@cnam.fr
41, rue Gay Lussac 75005
Paris – FRANCE

le cnam
Institut national d'étude du travail
et d'orientation professionnelle
inetop

