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Career Construction as a Way to Promote Self-Determined Vocational Choices of People with Disabilities

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Abstract: There is a great need for developing the self-determination of people with disabilities in their career choices. Career construction theory as a way to facilitate this development will be discussed.

Keywords: people with disabilities, self-determination, career choice, career construction theory, transformative learning

Introduction

Work and career are essential in realizing one's self-actualization. We all want to seek meaning and purpose in our life through work, and this is not an exception for people with disabilities. Rather, people with disabilities attach more meaning to their work as it is a means for them to participate and be integrated in society. With the goal of assisting people with disabilities to grow as productive and contributing members of our society, we as adult educators and vocational counselors have provided them with various employment services. However, the extent to which these efforts have been exerted in ways that promote self-determination of people with disabilities is still questionable. Martinis (2015) pointed out the problem of society imposing what is good or bad for people with disabilities and the negativity of undue guardianship that hinders autonomous and independent decision-making in their lives and careers. The purpose of true vocational rehabilitation should be to grow the capacity of people with disabilities to be fully capable of deciding what they want to do in their lives based on their interests and passions, and being responsible for actions taken. It should not be to tell them what others think is beneficial and give an easy path to get there.

Career Construction Theory

Yet, despite extensive research on improving self-determination of people with disabilities in their career choices, one limitation is that most of this research views self-determination as a skill-set that can be trained and acquired. In order for more fundamental and sustainable changes to occur in vocational behaviors of people with disabilities, a deeper approach that goes beyond learning related knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors seems to be required. Career construction theory, in this sense, is a powerful framework that can resolve this problem. Savickas (2005) first proposed career construction theory, stating that an individual's career develops through his or her interpretation of life and career situations. The philosophy underlying this theory is distinguished from previous career development theories in that it is rooted in constructivism. Under the modern positivistic perspective on career development, the career development process was viewed as static and linear, which justified career counselors' treatments of clients and their techniques to fit individuals into right occupations by considering objectively measured individual characteristics and improving job-pertinent skills (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011). However, as society has become more complex than ever before, the need for adapting to the demands for changing work environments has increased, and career development has started to be seen as a dynamic and non-linear process (Savickas, 2005).

Connecting Self-Determination of People with Disabilities with Career Construction

Theory

As people face more dilemmas in career choices, the capacity to reflect on their past career-related experiences and reframe them in ways that best meet their internal desires as well as external demands is increasingly required. Career construction theory asserts that the practice of career counseling should move forward to listening to the inner voices of clients and helping them reconstruct their career stories in light of their life themes (Savickas, 2005; Del Corso & Rehfluss, 2011). In other words, career counselors should help clients differentiate their old mentality and integrate new vocational identity into their newly generated life course. Then, what implications does career construction theory have in developing self-determination of people with disabilities? By critically looking back on how they previously viewed available career options and engaged in career activities, they can now realize the norms and expectations posed by society and themselves that limited their possibility of becoming who they want to be. They let go of their old self-constraining worldview, and internalize and enact a can-do spirit no matter what blocks their way. This is eventually true development of self-determination of people with disabilities as it transforms their fundamental meaning-making structure or mindset of interpreting the world and relationships around them.

Conclusion

Increasing the self-determination of people with disabilities in building their career and life trajectory is crucial given the current social atmosphere that does not allow much room to do so. Overcoming our understanding of self-determination as a skill-set that can be objectified and developed, we as adult educators and vocational counselors must believe in the potential of people with disabilities and help them become the subject of their life and career who possess the full ownership and responsibilities of who they are. By doing so, people with disabilities can transform from those with a socialized mind to a self-authoring mind (Kegan, 1994), which will then significantly change the way they see the concept of career and how it pertains to them. Career construction theory brings opportunities to facilitate this transformative change among people with disabilities. Methodologically, Del Corso and Rehfluss (2011) suggested a narrative as one way to help people verbalize their experiences, face and accept them, and move beyond current dilemmas. Thus, in this round table, I would like to invite participants to discuss ways in which we can apply career construction theory in vocational rehabilitation settings and transform both career development processes and outcomes of people with disabilities as independent and self-determined individuals of our society.

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