

TEACHING NOTE

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Amina's Choice

Competence: Develop One's Own Capabilities and Understand Any Limitations

CONTENT

Case Synthesis	2
The Competence	2
Target Group	3
Teaching Objectives	3
Question for Discussion	3
Key Issues - Analysis of the Text and Specific Questions	4
Suggestion for Analysis and Related Theories and Concepts	5
Testing Experience	6

Case Synthesis

Amina is an eighteen year-old Moroccan girl. At the age of thirteen she came to Italy accompanied by her mother. Initially she felt doomed as she had to learn to live in a new country with many challenging cultural and linguistic obstacles. One of the first big challenges that she had to overcome was school enrolment, an indispensable step for social integration.

On finishing junior high school she had to go through her first important transition - deciding her future profession. She decided to get information at a vocational training centre. Now she is in her last year of a 3 year vocational course to become an "Administrative Secretary".

From the beginning of her vocational training she could always count on the support of Laura, the head of the guidance counselling department. Laura guided Amina throughout her time in vocational training and helped her create a personalised career path according to her individual skills and career goals.

The end of the vocational course is getting closer. It's time for Amina to make a decision regarding her individual professional and personal life. Amina feels confused as far as her future is concerned. She even doubts the initial vocational choice she made when she enrolled at the vocational centre. Is this really the right training for her? Should she continue in this area or should she change and specialise in another field? And, what would be the best for her: to continue studying or to start working?

All these doubts are overwhelming Amina and are calling into question the decisions she has made and her chosen career path. These are important questions that she needs to answer shortly, but she must take the time to consider all her options and avoid making hasty decisions. This is the when Laura's role as a guide and support is crucial. Laura needs to reconsider Amina's recommended career path and her own skills and limits.

The Competence

The definitions of the fundamental skills for the professionals that work in the field of guidance counselling are described in the document "Professionalising career guidance – Practitioner competences and qualification routes

in Europe" issued by CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

According to the competence framework for guidance counsellors drawn up by CEDEFOP in 2009, one of the foundational competences is the following “Develop one’s own capabilities and understand any limitations”.

According to CEDEFOP, the competence “Develop one’s own capabilities and understand any limitations” requires:

- › a reflective approach to consideration of own capacity and limitations

- › understanding professional boundaries and appropriate referral

- › making use of management and peer support.

What are the elements, in terms of attitudes, abilities and tasks, which make up this competence? What aspects should guidance counsellor training focus on for this competence? When is this competence needed?

Target Group

Guidance counsellors, in particular those who work in the field of education and training.

Teaching Objectives

To allow practitioners to reflect on their own skills and limitations, and that of the guidance counselling profession and context in which they work. In particular, it allows them to reflect on:

- › Time management as an element of their professional skills

- › The opportunity/the requirement to consult with colleagues and superiors

- › The limitations arising from the organisational context in which they work.

Questions for Discussion

This case study doesn’t provide a solution to a specific situation, but it should be used as starting point for reflection and discussion on the competence in question.

The case study invites learners to put themselves in the role of the guidance practitioner, Laura, and to find answers to the following questions:

- › do you think that career guidance advice offered to Amina at the beginning was efficient? If not, why?
- › if you were in Laura’s position, would you have offered the same career guidance advice to Amina at the beginning?

- › do you think that Laura has neglected or not explored any aspect? If so, why?

- › which kind of difficulties do you think did Laura had on providing career guidance to Amina?

- › which resources and tools could Laura have used to deal with Amina’s situation?

- › what shall Laura consider when re-planning a career for Amina?

Key Issues - Analysis of the Text and Specific Questions

In this section the case study is divided into sections based on the main points. There are related questions (in red) to help support discussion and helps participants to analyse the case.

Section 1:

Transitory or crucial points in clients' lives and careers require them to make choices. This usually generates doubts and uncertainties.

Section 2:

Amina's story starts with confrontation with a new culture. *How much time would you spend on getting the necessary information to understand a client's situation?*

Section 3:

Making friends with those from the same culture- protecting her cultural background

Section 4:

The factors involved in making decisions. *How much time is required to make an informed decision? Is it important to understand which factors are guiding clients' decisions?*

Section 5:

The criteria of her choice: location of the centre

Section 6:

Confrontation with another culture.

Section 7:

Introduction to the centre and the service provided. *What are the characteristics of the service provided by the centre?*

Section 8:

Meeting the guidance counsellor and the field in which the guidance counsellor works. *What was involved in this meeting? What kind of field does the guidance counsellor work in?*

Section 9:

History and structure of the centre.

Section 10:

The professional advisory service provided by Laura, is in line with the values and principles of the educational centre she works for. *How can this be translated into the service mandate? What is the philosophy of the centre regarding guidance counselling and what is counsellors' role regarding clients?*

Section 11:

The description of the working context of the guidance counsellor. *What are the characteristics of the working context?*

Section 12:

The first meeting with the guidance counsellor.

Section 13:

The first guidance meeting: tools, structure, and time. *Which elements characterise the first meeting? Which tools are used? Would the involvement of other colleagues or experts have been useful for the guidance counsellor in order to explore all Amina's options?*

Section 14:

The presentation of the vocational training centre and the profession.

Section 15:

The choice. *Did Amina have the option to consider all factors that determined her choice? Was the time dedicated to this important decision enough?*

Section 16:

The function of the guidance counsellor.

Section 17:

Uncertainty and the necessity to re-orientate herself.

Section 18:

The realisation that the wrong career path had been chosen.

Section 19:

The non-analysed signs. *Why didn't Laura give the necessary attention to the signs that were shown? In which way could she have dealt with them?*

Section 20:

The requirement of the counsellor to reconsider her work. *In the case of Amina: which elements did the counsellor fail to give the necessary attention to? What were the personal limitations and boundaries that led to Amina choosing the wrong career path?*

Suggestion for Analysis and Related Theories and Concepts

According to CEDEFOP, the competence "Develop one's own capabilities and understand any limitations" requires:

- › a reflective approach to consideration of own capacity and limitations
- › understanding professional boundaries and appropriate referral
- › making use of management and peer support.

What are the elements, in terms of attitudes, abilities and tasks that make up this competence? What aspects should guidance counsellor training focus on for this competence? When is this competence needed?

On June 25th 2012, CIOFS-FP, arranged a focus group with 4 tutors with many years of experience in order to pilot the case study and the related questions. Please find the report on this focus group below:

The competence on which the focus group was based can be considered as competence required by guidance counsellors as well as a competence to be transmitted to the client. The focus group discussed the competence in terms of the first meaning of the competence. They discussed the professional attitudes required for it, and shared concrete examples of this competence from their own professional experience.

The participants of the focus group provided examples of the competence, as follows:

"A reflective approach to consideration of own capacity and limitations":

- › giving to oneself the time to reflect on one's own work
- › scheduling a time dedicated to each activity
- › proper time management
- › the ability to question or reflect on one's work (for example: why am I giving this test? How do I meet the objective planned?)
- › constant attention to one's own career
- › constant awareness of what you are doing.

"Understanding professional boundaries and appropriate referral":

- › knowing how to analyse the demand
- › knowing the services in your region and being able to refer clients to appropriate services
- › understanding the limits of your training and knowing when to stop
- › having clarity about the mandate of your service
- › understanding your relationship with your clients in terms of conditions and objectives

"Making use of management and peer support":

- › understanding when it is useful to discuss your cases with colleagues and management
- › having access to and utilising a counselling service especially when dealing with difficult cases

The life story method (mentioned in section 13) is often used in career counselling to help create a client's professional life story.

S.OR.PRENDO is a database about professions which includes detailed data sheets of 438 professional profiles. It's a guidance counselling software that matches characteristic aspects of the single professional profiles with the personal interests of every user. It's a useful tool in order to increase one's knowledge in the world of work and professions. It creates in real-time a list of coherent profiles including their own interests, so that the user can reflect their own expectations regarding their future professions and even create career paths starting from a list of professions. Aside from the private sector, S.OR.PRENDO is also used nationwide by Italian entities and agencies that provide guidance counselling.

In March 2013 the Italian Department of Education began the piloting of the S.OR.PRENDO software for professional guidance at a national level, involving over 100 primary and secondary schools. It is a useful way to test the software's potential and it may also to improve the quality of these interventions.

More information is available on www.sorprendo.it

Testing Experience

The case study “Amina’s Choice” was tested on 18th April 2013 in Berlin. The testing was done in a half day workshop (9.00 am – 1.00 pm).

15 participants were involved in the testing. All participants were guidance practitioners. Most of them work as job coaches; they guide and counsel people who are working in the so called secondary labour market. Some of the participants work with people aged 25 years and older. The participants had different level of work experiences, ranging from 1.5 years up to more than 15 years. The case study was sent to all the participants in advance.

The trainer started the workshop with two questions: what caught the attention of the participants and also what were their expectations of the workshop. Then the trainer used a world café or knowledge café¹ format where the different questions proposed in the teaching note were discussed in three smaller groups of four people. After the world café the most important points of discussion of the different groups were presented. In the next step the trainer did a short presentation about competences in general and the competence that was used in the case study and asked the guidance practitioners to reflect how they recognise these competences within themselves in their daily work and how they use them.

The workshop ended with a feedback from the participants. The participants were very interested in the case study and were highly involved in the workshop. From the workshop it was clear that the competence dealt with in the case study was important to them.

The overall feedback was very positive. The learners had many opportunities to take part actively in the discussion. Some participants asked what the solution was for the case. It was important to make clear beforehand that there is no solution given for the case but that different ways of handling the case is suitable. Furthermore, the trainer should make it clear that the task is not to counsel Amina but to reflect how one would act in that situation.

¹ for a definition see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_Cafe

THE GUIDE

PROJECT

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