

Interactive multimedia web in developing career counselling methods

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1 ABSTRACT

Career Counselling Web is an EU Leonardo project¹, built on a guidance and counselling web-site developed by Careers Wales with thousands of registered users. Careers Wales in Gwent is acting as advisor and is taking part in the project's development of new counselling methods. Partners from Slovenia and Sweden act as providers of design and target groups needs.

The goal is to develop the portal and the interactive counselling methodology and to make the final product readily transferred to different languages and regions. The project will adapt the Welsh innovation to Slovenian and Swedish systems. The technical development is made by one partner with the Slovenian and Swedish partners organising pilot studies and testing. The Swedish public Employment service will support the project by providing feedback and by supporting dissemination. Careers Europe, UK will disseminate results within the EU.

The resulting web portal will be ready to export to other interested bodies. Downloadable handbooks and tutorials will be available. The international networks of counsellors will benefit from the experiences that Careers Wales Online (CWO) has added, and the project may contribute to developing the professional counselling methods by using the interaction and dynamics in the project's resulting new portal.

2 INTRODUCTION

In the project countries (Slovenia, UK and Sweden) there is a problem for everyone, but probably most for young adults, that the labour market needs for competence is dynamic and not always known to everyone in the educational systems, not even the career counselling staff and naturally not to the students. Neither are the expectations from the labour market on required competence sufficiently communicated to young adults, and many young adults lacks own experience from working. In many EU countries the unemployment among young people is high; in Sweden about 20%, in Wales about the same (figures from spring 2008).

The Swedish government has therefore, as one example, stressed the importance of 'employability', of avoiding the exclusion of young adults from labour market and the need for counselling in their directives to authorities, both in the educational and labour market domains. The same focus on improved guidance and counselling directs the new organisation of the Swedish Public Employment Service with a special focus on young people www.avstamp.nu.

Many EU member countries having the same or a similar situation emphasizes the need for sharing experience and work with development in the area of guidance and counselling. Due to

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rapid changes in society, young adults require counselling more than ever before to enable them make proper education and career choices and to acquire the right skills for a successful adjustment to their environment. However the increasing use of ICT in learning and entertainment makes it a matter of quality to make a counselling portal interactive as well as playful as well as instructive.

Our project is a TOI project; i.e. a transfer of innovation project. An important indicator of the high quality of our 'transfer of innovation object'; Careers Wales Online (CWO) is the report on its progress and effectiveness, made 2006 by an officially appointed inspector, Estyn; Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and training in Wales (Estyn, 2006). The site had had more than 49 000 registered users already by 2004, which may be regarded as an indicator of the relevance of the counselling method of the site; among other things an e-portfolio.

It was an interesting transfer to make because, to quote the counsellors in the Swedish partner Helsing Education "It will be necessary for the presumptive scholar to take a more active part in her/his career planning. A tool like "e-progress file" will certainly be excellent to trigger that process. It is important for the individual to have considered her/his situation before the first counselling session. That is necessary in order to be prepared and to feel that she or he is in charge of the process and takes an active part in it."

The initiator of the project Careers Council Web (CCW) is Creative Media Lab at the University of Gävle in Sweden. Creative media lab is a R&D-lab that has developed methods for innovative use of new digital media, such as interactive design for cell phones and digital television as well as computer based educational test and assessment of vocational skills and informal competence. The goal here is to use the dynamics of interactive multimedia to develop counselling methods.

In the project we will localise the CWO system to the different societal organisation, different languages and standards and improve quality and information in the countries we transfer CWO to. And we will also bring together institutions and organisations in labour market, education, web communities, job agencies and enterprises to support ICT-based content by providing information and interaction into our Career Counselling Web, the CCW. We want to contribute to developing the quality and attractiveness of the VET systems and practises.

We anticipate that the impact for the users will be an improved knowledge of professions, the educational system and labour market and a positive attitude to vocational education and training. We also anticipate social and personal growth, i.e. improved knowledge of personal potential, of capacity and methods to improve skills and knowledge, of expectations and matching procedures, as well as improved communicative skills including ICT (Offer, 2004).

3 IMPLEMENTATION; PRESENT STATUS

Careers Wales Online is structured on age; from young teenagers up to adults. The experience of counsellors at Careers Wales is that young adults and adults are the groups that have responded least to the concept of the web portal. What the reasons are; whether it is because of the interactivity and multimedia content or it is the ways the user is addressed; first person and too personal or not serious enough; Careers Wales staff don't know, but of course have hypothesises about this.

The partners in Slovenia and in Sweden are both of them much targeted to young adults/adults, and yet they participate in the project CCW because they believe that the portal will fit into the counselling methods they use or would like to develop. These are the issues for the

first evaluation of our prototype CCW, and an important area for improvement is if it turns out to be the content, design or some other aspects that need to be changed to address adults efficiently.

As CWO has been on the web since 2004, Careers Wales has lots of empirical data and experiences collected by now, so they will be much involved in testing hypothesis on the methodological aspects of both CWO and CCW. There are theories emerging about what the effects of multimedia, interactivity and first person experience will have on learning and on attitudes, which can be guiding the interpretation of the data we will get during the development process, including evaluations of target group's satisfaction and other measures of quality and success. (Chen et al. 2005)

Design decisions and frames for the transfer of innovation from CWO to CCW has recently been discussed and decided on in our project, meaning that the target group is young adults, meaning that out of all the functions developed for the CWO, we will focus CCW on the following parts;

- *Interactive Quizzes and Games
- *E-progress file & E-portfolio
- *CV wizard.

The overall rationale for using interactive multimedia in career guidance could be said to be its potential for playfulness and an easygoing tone, which seems to relax people and to encourage the creativeness of the individual, regardless of age. This is what we hypothesise and what we will test in the initial user's satisfaction studies of CCW.

The Quizzes allow self-reflection and are alerting persons to things like career (matched by qualification level, interests, skills, work environment), working styles and personal profiles. The Games can be used for learning and to prepare for situations like interviews, and for producing visual and interactive documents representing interests, skills, abilities etc.

Assessment and APEL are areas that are potential candidates for so called 'serious games' or simulations; a rapidly growing market is now emerging for 'authentic tests' and assessment procedures, of great importance for career counsellors. However, these applications are not in reach for CCW:s development budget (Chen et al. 2005).

The E-progress file is beneficial as it can be used as a tool for the persons asking for guidance in an ongoing consulting relation; something to actively work on in between the counselling sessions. It will be a dynamic document that makes explicit the learning process. The E-progress file is an interactive tool that will make sense to today's young adults. That seems to be thanks to the combination of visual, auditive and written information, which supports learning, also for people with learning problems. After having been expanded with an 'e' (like in e-portfolio), the concept of portofolio has been a qualitatively developed term. Compared to earlier, the digitalisation has opened possibilities of using one's items stored in the portfolio to be presented in endlessly creative ways, different versions or interpretations, various media ('multimedially'), as well as presented dynamically and/or interactively. Decisions will be made according to intention, goals, target group etcetera, and one can predict that the counsellor in the future will have a mission in discussing and reflect upon the decisions to be made here.

The CV-wizard should, by the same reasons as those concerning the e-portfolio, be interpreted more widely than creating a traditional CV; as it I also based on the data in the e-portfolio.

For the reasons indicated by this potential with interactive multimedia mentioned above, we will not build these applications within the CCW portal, but instead benefit from the development of standard programs, available at ordinary software, delivered with a new laptop nowadays

(which was not the case when CWO was designed). We also believe – which has to be tested in our evaluation scheme – that being familiar with these possibilities of using and creating multimedia at a computer – is no longer only a teenagers competence, but will be present also in our target group; the young adults, looking for career advice.

If not, we will have to consider whether to develop new methods for encouraging the creativity in the young adults we meet, or if we will stay with the working methods of today, until today's teenagers grow up. What we also will have to consider is whether the digital divide is still wide open and if so, discuss how that shall be handled by our professional methodological toolkit.

4 DISCUSSION

The concept disruptive technology (Christensen 2008) was coined from the example with 'good enough' technology being offered to the mass market after having been out of reach to ordinary people just a few years ago. Christensen continues to draw on his thesis of the liberating effect on ordinary people's (young adults) creativity and self image while discussing the impact of this on education, including life long learning. (Carling, 2009, submitted). Hopefully the development of counselling methods also can benefit from disruptive technology development, letting the counselling relation be dynamic and maybe even liberating to the individual.

Today's financial crisis has made counselling a hot topic, though the situation for young adults was hard even during 2008 when we planned our project. Maybe the counsellor's have too much of the present work piling up to consider improvements of methods. However, having been coached by a counsellor; maybe mixed with using the CCW portal and disruptive technology, in order to take command over one's future career, may become an advantage when the economic cycle turns up again.

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