



Module 4

From Failure to Career Change

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Detecting and Preventing Drop out from Higher Education
or Supporting Students to Switch Successfully to VET



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Emotional difficulties resulting from drop outs

- A drop out from higher education means a substantial break in the education biography and the life situation of a young adult.
- As a consequence, discontent with oneself, low self-esteem and the feeling of failure frequently arise.
- Due to a perceived stigma of failure, many dropouts presume that they no longer have a real chance on the job market.
- Those doubts make it more difficult to deal with the situation in a constructive way and to develop a new perspective that best fits the individual interests and competences.

Emotional difficulties resulting from drop outs

- This self-perception of failure needs to be seen in the context of the prevailing vertical view of a career in most countries:
 - Constant rise in hierarchy means higher income and more responsibility
 - Drop out from higher education stops a rise up the hierarchy and is often viewed as a loss of status
 - By doing so, other career chances beyond academic professions are often neglected
 - A lower status of vocational education compared to academic education often plays a role in perceived loss of status

Change of perspectives

- In order to develop new professional perspectives for a dropout, it is important to take a differentiated look at “failure“.
- "Failure" should rather be seen as an inevitable feature of life.
- Nowadays, many professional biographies are characterised by disruption and patchwork-biographies have become common.
 - Failure also creates chances and development opportunities.
 - For famous dropouts like Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Mick Jagger, Steve Jobs new perspectives have emerged.
 - The chance of an academic graduation at a future date remains.

Change of perspectives

- Once the self-perception of failure has been overcome, it is possible for dropouts to engage in something new and to realise the existing perspectives on the job market.
- Negatively connotated terms like “dropout” for the transition from HE to VET could be replaced by positive terms such as “career change”.
 - This term corresponds to the broader British definition of career by Arthur et al. stating: “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experience over time” (1989, p. 8).
 - Such a horizontal view of career characterised by complexity and lateral movement has become more common within the last fifteen years.

Approaches

Reframing (Bamberger, 2015)

- Advice-seekers tend to focus solely on the problems caused by the dropout, which makes it more difficult to solve the problem.
- A counsellor should invite an advice-seeker to discover new perspectives of the drop out situation (reframing).
 - Through changing the perspective and reevaluation of the situation other forms of behaviour are possible...
 - ...and new experiences become possible.

Approaches

Exchanging experiences in small working groups

- *What kind of questions do you use in order to initiate reframing?*
 - *What are your experiences with reframing when you work with dropouts?*
- We recommend that the participants do this exercise with a partner or as small-group work. Subsequently, they should present the results in the plenum.

Approaches

Strengthening the dropout's individual resources

- A drop out means a substantial, painful break in the life situation of a young adult. Most of the dropouts encounter such a situation for the first time in their lives.
- Therefore, it is important for a counsellor to allow them to express feelings like frustration, fear and sadness.
- Because advice-seekers tend to focus on the problems caused by the dropout, counsellors should make them aware that problems are an integral part of everyone's life.
- Problems can give impulses for development and personal growth.

Approaches

Strengthening the dropout's individual resources

The following questions can be used to identify the individual resources of an advice-seeker (Bamberger, 2015):

- *What elements of your life should remain just the way they are now, because you are really satisfied with them?*
- *Was there any challenging situation in the past during which you successfully developed a coping strategy?*
- *While you have been talking about the challenges in your life, I have recognised strengths in your personality. Can you attempt to visualise these?*

Approaches

The following questions can be used to identify the individual resources of an advice-seeker (Bamberger, 2015):

- *Are there any other people who have given you positive feedback regarding the strengths I just mentioned? Have you received from other people compliments for other strengths?*
- *We already talked about individual strength and I congratulate you upon this strength. I'm just thinking what would happen, if this strength would grow?*

Approaches

Strengthening individual coping strategies (Bamberger, 2015)

- After having identified previously unknown resources, they should now be activated and strengthened.
- The resource activation plays a key role in the counseling process.
 - Only the advice-seeker's resources enable change and development.
 - But they can only become effective when they are present on a cognitive-emotional level for a dropout.

Approaches

Strengthening individual coping strategies (Bamberger, 2015)

- A counsellor should give compliments for the dropout's statements regarding his resources
- A positive connotation of the advice-seeker's behavior during the counselling session initiates a systemic energising action.
 - Sentiments like interest, hope, trust, enthusiasm and optimism can arise.
 - They replace the initially problem-focused perception of the advice-seeker.

Exercise

Resource activation

- Resource activation exercise for counsellors in the counselling process of dropouts switching from higher education into vocational education and training
- Method: Role play in small groups.

Exercise

Scenario

Mr Schmitt is a 25 year old, third semester student in industrial engineering at a German university of applied sciences. For many years, he was a competitive athlete and therefore postponed the start of his study until the age of 24. Mr Schmitt received in Germany a university entrance qualification from a vocational college with a focus on commerce and administration. During the first two semesters, he has experienced major problems in meeting the requirements for industrial engineering and felt over-challenged. He is ashamed of not being able to cope with the requirements. Although still enrolled at the university, he doesn't attend classes anymore. Instead he is employed as a low-skilled factory worker to earn money for his living. Mr. Schmitt realised that he needs a professional qualification and intends to change the situation quickly.

Exercise

Objective

Mr Schmitt seeks support for finding a suitable training position. In his targeted occupation, he would like to apply at least some of the competences learned during his study. Self-doubts arose in consequence of his failure. Considering his age, he is also worried whether any employer will hire him.

Exercise

Objective

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Exercise

Learning outcome

Activation of resources according to a solution-oriented counselling strategy

Procedure

Form small groups with (for example) 4 participants each.

Role play and subsequently a phase of contemplation in small groups (approximately 30 minutes): Please choose a consultant in your group as well as a person seeking advice plus two observers. For the role play you have about 20 minutes. Afterwards you'll have a further 10 minutes for contemplation in your small group.

References

- Arthur, Michael B. et al. (Hg.) (1989): Handbook of Career Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bamberger, Günter G. (2015): Lösungsorientierte Beratung. Praxishandbuch. 5., überarbeitete Auflage. Weinheim, Beltz.

Thank you for your attention!

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