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## Counselling and guidance for adults: A narrative paradigm

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5

## 6 **COUNSELLING AND GUIDANCE FOR ADULTS: A NARRATIVE PARADIGM**

7 The functions of advising and counselling adults, regarded as emerging functions in the  
8 literature on vocational training in France in the 1990s, became central from the 2000s onwards.  
9 Their recognition by vocational training actors led to the emergence of multiple professions  
10 with the aim of supporting and securing professional careers. Mechanisms were then developed,  
11 involving approaches geared to encouraging reflexive work and reflection processes for self-  
12 orientation and the recognition of prior experience. Since 2010, ethical questions have been  
13 gradually arising about the impact of individual measures on the future of adults. Consequently,  
14 forms of collective support have become topical again, both in adult education and counselling  
15 systems and in research work in education sciences.

16 This article relies on a socio-historical perspective to outline and examine the rise of guidance  
17 and counselling frameworks in adult education. The study is based on the research carried out  
18 in the field of adult guidance in France from the 1990s onwards. The other kind of data  
19 contributing to the argument is derived from the examination of the structure of counselling-  
20 related training courses offered by the Department of Education and Training Sciences of the  
21 University of Tours, whose pioneering work seeks to develop an approach to counselling based  
22 on the exploration of life histories in training.

### 23 **Counselling in adult education: Socio-historical perspectives**

24 The emergence of a paradigm of support in publications on vocational training in France has  
25 followed what researchers, such as Jean-Pierre Boutinet and Pierre Dominicé (2009), have  
26 called a ‘deinstitutionalisation’ of adult life. Boutinet’s study on adult life (1998), published  
27 after a series of his works on the anthropology of the project (1990), reveals that the reference  
28 points that once served to order the course of adult life have been systematically eroding since  
29 the post-war period. What Boutinet also shows in his *Immaturity in Adult Life* (1998) is that  
30 contemporary lives are governed by an almost permanent incertitude. Faced with a lack of  
31 reference points for organising the course of their lives, adults must learn to orient themselves,  
32 evolve professionally and anticipate vocational transitions.

33 Rather than concerning merely people’s work lives, the phenomenon of ‘deinstitutionalisation’  
34 extends onto all spheres of adult life, including marriage, family and work, and affects all ages  
35 of life (Houde, 1999). It characterises our contemporary times, which some authors describe as  
36 hypermodern or liquid (Bauman, 2013). It produces short-circuits in the logic and the dynamics  
37 of the project, which hinges on the possibility to rely on relatively stable and predictable  
38 parameters. How such processes came to be included and addressed in texts on vocational  
39 training in France can be grasped and examined in particular on the basis of successive texts of  
40 the National Interprofessional Agreements (ANI). The study carried out by Mériaux (2009) has  
41 shown the importance attributed to the terms associated with situations of incertitude in the  
42 structure of the agreements. Specifically, the term ‘career’ has been gradually replaced by the  
43 term ‘career paths.’ The latter appeared for the first time in the ANI of 5<sup>th</sup> December 2003. It  
44 was subsequently mobilised in the ANI of 13<sup>th</sup> October 2005, which included a heading that

45 read ‘securing career paths,’ the expression formalising the idea of a non-secure – and therefore  
46 precarious – factors in the working lives of adults. Then, the agreement of 7<sup>th</sup> January 2009  
47 testifies, right down to its title (‘ANI on the development of lifelong learning,  
48 professionalisation and securing career paths’), to the central place that the notion of career  
49 paths now occupies in the reference framework of continuing training policies. The fact that the  
50 term ‘pathway’ appears 48 times (!) in the text of the agreement clearly shows the signatories’  
51 desire to restore meaning and a socially endorsed object to the vocational training system  
52 criticised for its opacity and complexity. (Mériaux, 2009, p. 15)

53 This semantic analysis of ANIs, whose function is to formalise the framework of the legal texts  
54 that regulate the logic and systems of vocational training in France, can be complemented by  
55 the study of the frameworks implemented: training plans, the system for the recognition of  
56 vocational experience, the individual right to training, skill assessment, the system for the  
57 validation of prior learning experience, etc. Among these measures, the skill assessment system,  
58 which was given legal effect in France in 1991, helps adults to reflect on and examine their  
59 prospects for professional development. The counselling function within the framework of skill  
60 assessment was originally entrusted to psychologists, whose expertise based on diagnostic logic  
61 was known from the delivery of school counselling. At the same time, other approaches were  
62 developed, in particular using narrative and biographical instruments. In contrast to the  
63 guidance systems which abide by diagnostic logic, the narrative approaches used in counselling  
64 were designed to support adults in deliberation and decision-making with a view to self-  
65 orientation.

## 66 **The advisory function: From the diagnosis to the narrative**

67 Defining counselling functions involves considering attitudes adopted by counsellors. The  
68 definition of a professional attitude proposed by Chauvet articulates two dimensions: ‘In the  
69 following remarks, we will consider an attitude in its two necessarily interrelated dimensions:  
70 a conception of one’s role, which subsumes the aims of the service and the respective roles of  
71 the professional and the client, and behaviour and professional practices corresponding (or not)  
72 to this conception of work’ (2012, p. 133). The former dimension concerns counsellors’ ideas  
73 of their function, profession and, more operationally, the aims pursued in concrete work  
74 situations. The latter dimension concerns the reality of counsellors’ practice, i.e. the  
75 interventions through which their intentions are executed (or not) in professional situations.

76 This definition makes it possible to differentiate various aspects characteristic of the counselling  
77 function in adult education. One of such aspects concerns the aims of counsellors, that is, the  
78 concrete effects which they seek to generate when intervening and providing guidance to a  
79 person or a group. When examining this aspect of counselling, the focus is on counsellors’  
80 intentions, conceived as their professional conceptions and values. Chauvet’s studies with skill  
81 assessment counsellors have led him to distinguish two types of the targeted effects: diagnosis  
82 and reflexivity. This distinction helps capture both intentions and conceptions of the profession  
83 and associated practices. It includes a practical dimension through the logic of categorization it  
84 generates between practices that favour diagnostic aims and those whose main purpose is to  
85 encourage reflexive and deliberative work. Admittedly, these categories are not ontologically  
86 present in work situations, yet they do make it possible to structure indicators for defining  
87 professional styles in order to conceptualise advisory functions in adult education and training.

88 The definition of diagnosis offered in the *Historical Dictionary of the French Language* (2012)  
89 reads: ‘a prospective condition resulting from an in-depth examination of a critical situation.’

90 In medicine, the practice of diagnosis presupposes knowing how to identify signs and symptoms  
91 in order to proceed with the ‘demarcation of the healthy and the pathological’ (Lemoine, 2017,  
92 p. 21). In medical practice, this capability of identification and distinction is based on  
93 knowledge from experimental sciences, which are themselves developed on the basis of  
94 extensive and systematic protocols designed to determine the processes that organise the  
95 supposed causal relationships among the phenomena observed, to draw conclusions and thus to  
96 formulate prognoses of further evolution. In the field of adult education, these models have  
97 spread particularly in the practice of assessment (Aubret & Blanchard, 2005). They tacitly  
98 organise the practice of counsellors with background in psychology (Guichard & Huteau,  
99 2006). A structural examination of relational dynamics in support situations governed by  
100 diagnostic logic reveals asymmetrical relationships on the basis of which respective positions  
101 are established in these situations. Indeed, as already stated, carrying out a diagnosis  
102 presupposes having the requisite knowledge to identify favourable or unfavourable signs, to  
103 classify the factors and resources deemed necessary for a guidance project, to predict and  
104 estimate the chances of success of a given approach, etc. Based on the rational calculation and  
105 estimation of probabilities, this logic places the counsellor in the position of an expert. If this  
106 situation is partly rooted in the context of medical practice and linked to patients’ relative or  
107 temporary inability to know how to interpret the signs and symptoms they are experiencing in  
108 order to name the issue that affects them, it must be interrogated with regard to counselling for  
109 adults. Indeed, the logic of diagnosis generates various forms of dependency and induces the  
110 sense of a relative incapacity, whether temporary or lasting, in people who, voluntarily or on  
111 recommendation, consult a counsellor in order to transform their situations and anticipations.

112 Parallel to this logic of advice based on an expert scrutiny and engendering asymmetrical  
113 positions in guidance relationships, an alternative movement has developed, promoting  
114 attitudes rooted in a hermeneutic paradigm of thinking and speaking in the first and second  
115 person (Breton, 2019a). From the counsellor’s point of view, the aim is to guide the expression  
116 of counselees’ experiences so as to foster a reflexive examination of their presuppositions. As  
117 such counselling practices are driven by reflexive reciprocity (Denoyel, 2013), dialogical co-  
118 interpretation (Pineau, 1998) and dialogical deliberation (Lhotellier, 2001), they break with the  
119 asymmetrical positions that characterise counselling practices structured by diagnostic logic.  
120 Instead, they mobilise a range of narrative interventions, the effects of which further the work  
121 of the elucidation and clarification of possibilities (Breton, 2015) and of making sense of and  
122 harnessing one’s agentivity (Pineau & Marie-Michelle, 1983). This perspective was formalised  
123 in a pioneering way by the University of Tours’ Department of Education and Training  
124 Sciences, which was then headed by Gaston Pineau, a co-founder of the ‘*révits de vie en*  
125 *formation*’ approach (Pineau and Legrand, 2007), as part of the Diplôme d’études supérieures  
126 spécialisées Fonctions d’accompagnement en formation (DESS FAC).

### 127 **Training counsellors in adult education and training: The example of the Department of** 128 **Education and Training Sciences of the University of Tours**

129 Since its establishment in 1985 by Professor of Educational Sciences Gaston Pineau, the  
130 Department of Education and Training Sciences of the University of Tours has been providing  
131 training for adults with the aim of recognising experiential learning acquired as a result of their  
132 involvement in problematic situations in everyday life. In this context, a paradigm called  
133 experiential training was given formal outlines in a collected volume edited by Gaston Pineau  
134 and Bernadette Courtois in 1991. In his contribution, Pineau defined experiential training on  
135 the basis of its two fundamental phases: ‘we define experiential training as training through

136 direct but reflexive contact. Through direct contact, i.e. without any mediation, whether of a  
137 trainer, a programme, a book, a screen or even of words, and therefore without delay, on the  
138 spot, at least at its genesis' (Pineau, 1991, p. 29). The first stage of transformative learning is,  
139 according to Pineau, the immediate experience of a difficulty. The second results from the  
140 gradual integration of the event into the course of life and from reflection on the event, which  
141 makes it possible to become aware of the nature and formative effects of this difficulty. If the  
142 first stage is that of a trial through which the subject passes, the second is that of reflexive work  
143 and of engaging in dialogue within the community of the event experienced.

144 The progressive inclusion of experiential training, self-study (Moisan & Carré, 2002) and  
145 experiential learning (Balleux, 2001) in adult education systems raises questions about  
146 counselling practices in adult education. As early as in 1984, Pineau posed the problem in an  
147 article entitled 'Sauve qui peut! Life enters into lifelong learning. What a story!' The issue  
148 stated in the article is that adults who enrol in training courses are the bearers of learning and  
149 achievements which must be known and recognised by the instructors in order to avoid formally  
150 teaching the knowledge that has already been acquired through experience. However, the  
151 problem is that the ways in which experiential knowledge is constituted are silent (Breton,  
152 2017). Experiential knowledge is acquired in work situations, in the course of professional life  
153 and during learning moments that occur throughout one's life, without one necessarily being  
154 aware of the process and its outcomes. As aptly put by Jobert (2011), the problem is an enigma:  
155 knowledge gained through experience is only available in practice. It cannot be understood as  
156 an object of reflection by the subject who holds it. Such observations have led Pineau to  
157 structure MA-level training courses in order to train counsellors in methods of consciousness-  
158 raising and socialisation of experiential knowledge.

### 159 **Counselling and guidance for fostering reflection on one's experience and formalisation** 160 **of one's knowledge.**

161 The problems encountered by Pineau in structuring a training programme for vocational  
162 counsellors and the recognition of prior learning were both ethical and methodological. In order  
163 to grasp the ethical dimensions of counselling, it is appropriate at this stage to return to the  
164 definition of the attitude proposed by Chauvet. As already explained, the attitude combines two  
165 components: the conception of the proper practice of the counselling profession and the  
166 concrete interventions implemented in work situations. From this perspective, divergences  
167 between counsellors' conceived aims and the perceived effects of their practices in concrete  
168 support situations are a source of ethical dilemmas and conflicts. Many factors may contribute  
169 to gaps between aims and interventions. One of them is the context, which, for example, can  
170 generate levels of constraints such that certain practices are prevented. This is often the case for  
171 counsellors who have to work within the public systems that compress support times (Massip,  
172 2015). Another factor is the mismatch between the interventions applied and the envisaged  
173 aims. This concerns, for example, counsellors who seek to support adults in transition in  
174 developing agentivity (Bédard, 1983), but who employ interventions which generate  
175 prescriptive phenomena that reduce the agility of their clients. The uncorrelation between aims  
176 and interventions must therefore be collectively observed and consciously examined. This is a  
177 necessary condition for changing practices in the context of training systems for counsellors.

178 It is on the basis of these insights that various training courses have been offered to skill  
179 assessment counsellors, guidance and career development counsellors and in recognition and  
180 validation of prior experience at the University of Tours. The first course to be offered was the

181 Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées Fonctions d'accompagnement en formation (DESS  
182 FAC), which was introduced in 1997 (Breton et al., 2015), following the adoption of the law  
183 on skill assessment in France in 1991 (Liétard, 2012). The course was specifically designed to  
184 offer counsellors a training programme based on narrative approaches and methods to  
185 professionalise adult guidance and counselling practices. This perspective, anchored in the  
186 hermeneutic paradigm, mobilises life stories and the narration of lived experience as a means  
187 of self-training. Two narrative practices have become the pivots of this MA-level training: life  
188 history in training (Pineau & Legrand, 2007) and the explanation interview (Vermersch,  
189 1994/2000).

### 190 **The narration of experiences and functions of the council: Narrative enquiry**

191 If counselling practices structured by the logic of diagnosis presuppose an expertise based on  
192 the knowledge of the labour market and the ability to define behavioural profiles, aptitudes and  
193 predispositions, narrative practices proceed from the logic of 'holding counsel' (Lhotellier,  
194 2001), which calls for an expertise in the conduction of individual and group interviews. The  
195 modes of intervention in counselling practices based on narrative practices are structured  
196 around devices promoting the expression and reception of life stories and the formulation of  
197 questions and instructions that assist the clients' reflexive work. These narrative practices fall  
198 within two major categories: biographical narrative and phenomenological description.

199 Biographical narrative is central among the devices that mobilise narrative as a means of self-  
200 formation. The development of such narratives is structured in seven main stages. The  
201 following outline comes from an article dedicated to the presentation of this approach (Breton,  
202 2019b):

203 **Stage 1:** definition of the framework and the contract with the group: rules of group  
204 work, joint definition of the issues, confidentiality, ownership of written documents,  
205 etc.

206 **Stage 2:** individual, short and thematic narratives, based on the different directions of  
207 exploration proposed by those responsible for the system and its support: lifelines  
208 (Lainé, 2004), genealogical approaches (Lani-Bayle, 2000), etc.

209 **Stage 3:** first socialisation of each of the individual stories in sub-groups or the whole  
210 group (between fifteen and twenty people).

211 **Stage 4:** first thematisation, in the group, based on the elements common to the various  
212 stories: genealogical dimension, ages of adult life, life management, professional  
213 transition, etc. Guidance counsellors provide theoretical and methodological reference  
214 points to support the individual writing work between the sessions.

215 **Stage 5:** in-depth writing of the life story based on the key events in the life course,  
216 from birth or over one or more periods of the life course.

217 **Stage 6:** socialisation of each of the life stories (thirty-minute to an-hour-long speech)  
218 in the group. The socialisation of all the stories can take between a day and a day and  
219 a half.

220 **Stage 7:** second thematisation, in the group, based on the expression of individual  
221 stories and the analysis of the experience lived by the group during the session. Three  
222 plans can then be put to work: themes related to the life course (ages, transitions, family  
223 and social determinants); themes related to work life (values, jobs, transitions,  
224 commitment, etc.); and themes related to experiential learning (transversal knowledge,  
225 professional knowledge, professional styles, time frames for acquisition, etc.).

226 A scheme for training counsellors and adult counsellors through stories and life stories in  
227 training. Owing to this framework, the counsellors forge ethical, theoretical and methodological  
228 benchmarks for living and understanding the effects of the biographical narrative, including the  
229 effects of experience lived during the composition and expression of the narrative; the effects  
230 of understanding resulting from the reception and socialisation of the other people's narratives;  
231 the procedures for co-defining the foundations of the work to be carried out within the  
232 framework of the counselling relationship; the integration of orientation procedures for writing  
233 the narrative of oneself and one's learning moments; the mastery of thematic procedures for  
234 recognising the singularity of the narratives and their social and collective dimension.

235 The effects of the collective narrative contribute to the understanding of the determinants of the  
236 professional path and to the awareness of the knowledge that has been built up in the process.  
237 The application of the other category – micro-phenomenological description – is also studied  
238 and practised in the master's degree programme taught at the University of Tours: 'To describe  
239 is to put out of play the formulation of the causes of phenomena in favour of the account of  
240 what is noticed. Hence, the preference given to the "how" rather than the "why" or the "what,"  
241 i.e. to the ways of being, the modalities of presence, the qualities of the lived experience and  
242 the processes of the emergence of phenomena' (Depraz, 2014, p. 136). This practice of  
243 description makes it possible to initiate guidance processes aimed at the detailed rendering of  
244 action in a situation. It is based on the interview techniques founded by Pierre Vermersch  
245 (2011), one of whose functions is to promote awareness of the implicit factors that organise  
246 self-perception in concrete life situations, reflection on one's possibilities of action and the  
247 structuring of self-orientation approaches.

#### 248 **Counselling and support through narrative enquiry**

249 In opposition to the logic and practice of diagnosis, the purpose of consulting practices is to  
250 support a dynamic that proceeds from the performance of actions and interventions aimed at  
251 initiating first-person explorations (Depraz, 2011). While the practice of diagnosis requires that  
252 counsellors gather information on the situation of their counsees in order to advise them, the  
253 dynamic triggered by the practice of reflexive support is supposed, conversely, to help  
254 counsees inform themselves and deliberate on their situation to understand it more lucidly.  
255 Theorised by Lhotellier (2011) and technically described by Vermersch (1994/2000), this  
256 approach is based on a conversion of the point of view (Depraz, 2014), in which adults examine  
257 and explore all apparently too obvious or previously unnoticed possibilities on their own while  
258 being counselled. According to this logic, the focus of the examination work is shifted. Rather  
259 than the a person's characteristics, behaviours and abilities, what is examined in depth is the  
260 situation experienced and the way it is thought about by the individual experiencing it. From  
261 this perspective, the notion of the lived situation (Pesce, 2019) appears central to the approach.  
262 Indeed, the precedence is given to promoting awareness of the frameworks within which  
263 counsees interpret and understand their situation and identify and name the prior learning,  
264 which they often have without realising it. These interpretive frameworks and articulation  
265 modes determine the relevance of the construction of development scenarios and actions which  
266 can then be undertaken and for which the person will bear responsibility.

267 It is from this nodal point that we believe that counselling practices are pertinent to the sciences  
268 of education and adult education. Indeed, from this perspective, guidance work acquires an  
269 anthropological and metamorphic dimension: anthropological because the future of adults is  
270 shaped by various transitions, e.g. stages of life, professional transitions and changes in

271 employment, which punctuate their evolution; and metamorphic because these transitions  
272 involve less moving across a certain distance and more transformations of lived situations,  
273 which also entail self-transformations for the adults involved. More than simple orientation  
274 work, helping practices are to be conceived from a narrative, reflexive and dialogical  
275 perspective, whose object is to foster the conscientisation of the frameworks for interpreting  
276 situations (Schütz, 1943/1987), deliberation on scenarios of evolution, the capacity to dialogue  
277 and meta-communicate on the constraints encountered and the co-construction of perspectives  
278 of development.

279 To accompany these reflexive dynamics, counsellors must be able to act in conformity with  
280 their wishes and, in particular, intervene by knowing how to define a framework, by creating  
281 conditions for a collective examination of lived situations and by producing language acts  
282 (Searle, 1972) which encourage attention arousal and initiate deliberate and feasible  
283 development scenarios. For counsellors, the skills to be acquired include the know-how  
284 requisite for developing counselees' lucid agentivity, based on the techniques of 'narrative  
285 enquiry' (Breton, 2020), which combines the perspective of professional career in the  
286 framework of biographical interviews with the work of micro-phenomenological description,  
287 channelling the detailed exploration of lived situations in order to identify the potentials to be  
288 actualised.

## 289 **Conclusion**

290 In this article, the counselling functions in adult education, training and professional life  
291 evolution have been discussed in terms of the narrative enquiry paradigm with reference to the  
292 scholarly and disciplinary field of adult education and training. Within this framework,  
293 counselling is not dissociated from the practice of vocational education and training since  
294 counselees cannot take action without generating knowledge about themselves, their lived  
295 situations and their environments. For this reason, we have highlighted the importance of  
296 language acts, implicitly referring to the work of Austin (1991) in order to focus on the  
297 importance of narrative practice in the process of guidance, self-orientation and self-formation.

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368

369 **Abstract:**

370 In this article, advisory functions in adult education, training and career development are  
371 discussed within the narrative enquiry paradigm as applied in the scholarly discipline of adult  
372 education and training. The study distinguishes two logics of the counselling function: as  
373 activity based on the logic of diagnosis and as practice mobilising various forms of narrative  
374 enquiry in order to promote self-awareness and dialogical understanding. The argument is  
375 underpinned by the experience of training delivered at the Department of Education and  
376 Training Sciences of the University of Tours.

377 **Keywords:** adult education, life history, narrative enquiry, micro-phenomenology