

**SLIDE 1** Tsukuba **conference poster**

**SLIDE 2** For those who have just joined us I would like to start with an apology: **Andreas Frey**, the rector of the University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency, in Mannheim, Germany can unfortunately not be here with us today due to another commitment he could not change. He has asked me to present his sincere apologies to you.

**SLIDE 3** My name is still **Jean-Jacques Ruppert** and I am the Head of the Luxembourg-based Applied Vocational Psychology and Policy research unit.

**SLIDE 4** « **“I’ve looked at clouds from both sides now” or Are Older Counsellors Better Counsellors?** » is the third contribution that Andreas and I had accepted for presentation to this conference so if you were at the previous presentation, please believe that I feel very sympathetic if you are **fed up** to see me again

**SLIDE 5 with seeing my face.**

This contribution was and is meant to be a light-hearted one, though the issue we are addressing is very serious indeed. The reviewer of our abstract also thought that our proposal concerned - and I quote “an interesting and original problem: that of experience and seniority of advisors”. The reviewer was however not so happy that we had not come up with a theoretical framework or presented any conclusions. Furthermore, the reference - and I quote once more “to a Canadian folk singer is too long and not very informative.” Well, we do not know who the lady or gentleman reviewer was, but we beg to differ on that last point. We were of course pleased that the issue was considered ‘original’ because when you try to review the literature on the subject, you draw a blank. But when I introduced the subject to a group of European counsellors from Public Employment Services who took part in the University of Applied Labour Studies Summer course in Schwerin in July this year, the reference to Joni Mitchell’s ‘Both Sides, Now’ resonated above all with an Irish counsellor who - I must confess - was not that much

younger than I am. So age or should I say experience of life may very well play a certain part in how you feel about this song. But even if you are younger than Andreas or myself, you may very well remember the song from **SLIDE 6** the romantic comedy 'Love Actually' in which is also featured.

I have brought along some copies of the lyrics of 'Both Sides, Now' which I will hand out now :

(Rows and flows of angel hair  
And ice cream castles in the air  
And feather canyons everywhere,  
I've looked at clouds that way.

But now they only block the sun,  
They rain and they snow on everyone  
So many things I would have done,  
But clouds got in my way.)

I've looked at clouds from both sides now  
From up and down and still somehow  
It's cloud illusions I recall  
I really don't know clouds at all

(Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels,  
The dizzy dancing way that you feel  
As every fairy tale comes real,  
I've looked at love that way.

But now it's just another show,  
You leave 'em laughing when you go  
And if you care, don't let them know,  
Don't give yourself away.)

I've looked at love from both sides now  
From give and take and still somehow  
It's love's illusions I recall  
I really don't know love at all

(Tears and fears and feeling proud,  
To say "I love you" right out loud  
Dreams and schemes and circus crowds,  
I've looked at life that way.

Oh but now old friends they're acting strange,  
They shake their heads, they say I've changed  
Well something's lost, but something's gained  
In living every day.)

I've looked at life from both sides now  
From win and lose and still somehow  
(It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all)

I've looked at life from both sides now  
From up and down, and still somehow  
It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all

(It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life  
I really don't know life at all)

**SLIDE 7** In April 1969, Joni Mitchell released her second album, 'Clouds', for which she won a Grammy award for Best Folk Performance. The song 'Both Sides, Now' was arranged simply, with her clear voice accompanied only by her acoustic guitar.

Here a brief extract from that song:

*(play from 0:00 to 1:20) and (from 3:40 to 4:10)*

**SLIDE 8** Over 30 years later, in 2000, Joni Mitchell released an album whose title track was a revisited version of 'Both Sides, Now'. In this version, the artist's voice had lowered in register to a husky alto with a full orchestra providing a thick and dreamy accompaniment.

Let us now listen to a brief extract of the revisited version of 'Both Sides, Now':

*(play from 0:00 to 1:32) and (from 3:54 to END)*

Right, I think we can have a vote now:

Who prefers the original song ? That is ... .

and who is in favour of the revisited orchestral version? That is ... .

So we have got ... for version 1 and ... for version 2.

Well, I must confess that I am hardly surprised (*or very surprised*) by your vote and to me the reason for your preference is obvious (*or a mystery*): to

me the older Joni Mitchell comes across as genuine, it all sounds 'true', we actually can believe her when she says that she has

**SLIDE 9** 'looked at clouds, at love, at life from both sides now', - and that after so many years she still doesn't 'really know clouds, love, life at all.'

We all know that credibility is a key quality for a counsellor and Andreas and I think that you are more likely to find that quality in an older rather than in a younger counsellor even though there is no guarantee that this is always the case.

The 25-year-old Joni Mitchell's 'Both Sides, Now' was, like her, understandably anchored in the present. In contrast, the version performed by the 57-year-old singer, who by that time had had plenty of opportunity to "look at clouds from both sides", was very much richer and more reflective. Even ignoring the more syrupy elements of the song we think it describes the path of life: just when you think that you have figured it all out, you realise that you have not. We furthermore see the song as the recognition of our own limits of knowledge, as an acknowledgment of our difficulty of understanding, and as an acceptance of our lack of control over reality. This is very helpful as career guidance and counselling is NOT an exact science and it reminds us that our visions and perceptions are a matter of perspective, and that perspective changes with age ... and experience.

Experience matters - it even matters a lot. But experience is not just measured in years. If you have been counselling for a long time, you should have greater counselling credibility not because of your age, but because of your experience. We must however acknowledge that just to have spent a certain number of years in counselling does not per se give you competence, never mind credibility.

Ability and credibility are in fact not determined by age itself but by experience measured not so much in hours spent counselling but in the

commitment of the counsellors to his or her work, and above all in the way he or she engages with counselees.

**SLIDE 10** So what are the potential **advantages** you should have if you are an **older** aka a more experienced **counsellor** ?

You should have not just professional experience but **life experience**. You will have spent more time not just on the job but also with yourself, you should by now know yourself better than when you started off. But again,

**SLIDE 11** **age itself does** however **not equal maturity**.

**SLIDE 12** You should **be on top of your game** and not be fazed by difficult situations.

**SLIDE 13** You should be able to **answer questions clearly**.

**SLIDE 14** You should **have greater understanding** of a client's situation and ideally also **be more patient**.

**SLIDE 15** You should indeed be **very professional**, you should have **'insider' knowledge** and you should also have a good **network of professional contacts**.

**SLIDE 16** Obviously there are also some possible **disadvantages**:

**SLIDE 17** You might be not be aware of new tools and possibly no longer be willing to learn new approaches.

**SLIDE 18** You might be out of touch with the «cultural» contexts of younger clients and/or experience difficulties adapting to an environment that has changed. This is a situation that counsellors in above all educational settings risk finding themselves in.

You might no longer have the passion you once had.

And finally, you might very simply no longer care.

**SLIDE 19** If however you are a **younger** aka a less experienced **counsellor** you are likely to have **advantages** of a different type:

**SLIDE 20** You might find it easier to connect better with younger people.

You might still be fired up with enthusiasm and be more open to new ideas.

You might still be bubbling over with all the knowledge you acquired not all that long ago.

You might therefore be in the know about the latest developments in the field and be acquainted with new approaches and tools.

And, you might be working very hard - possibly even harder than an older counsellor.

**SLIDE 21** Again, as with being an older career counsellor, there are some **disadvantages** with being a **younger counsellor** too:

**SLIDE 22** You might have a **narrower field of knowledge**.

**SLIDE 23** You might **not** be **as professional** as a more experienced counsellor and you might run the risk of **confusing being 'nice'** to counselees **with being professional**.

**SLIDE 24** And, obviously, you will have **less life experience**.

Finally, we would like to say a few words about the preferences that counselees may themselves have for a certain type of career counsellor. In the real world, counselees actually do not have much choice about which career counsellor they see, regarding their gender, race, political or religious convictions, and obviously also regarding the age of a counsellor. All too often, there simply is no alternative to seeing a given counsellor because he or she is the only one present or available and, on the whole, Andreas and I believe that to be a good thing. In state schools and in Public Employment Services in Germany and Luxembourg,

**SLIDE 25** the career counsellor "**à la carte**" is simply not possible due to limited resources at both financial and human levels. A set-up where e.g. a female counselee will be able to see a female counsellor, or where a

counselee of a certain ethnic background will be able to see a counsellor with the same background is simply not realistic. Of course, we acknowledge that there will occasionally arise a situation e.g. in a Public Employment Service, when an older counselee and a younger career counsellor may both find facing each other somewhat awkward or even uncomfortable, and indeed vice versa with a younger counselee facing a much older counsellor. We would however also like to think that the training that a young career counsellor will have received, as well as the experience of an older counsellor, will allow each to rise to the challenge in a professional manner, and if need be (and feasible), also not hesitate to pass on a client who they think might better connect with a younger, an older, a male, a female et caetera colleague.

I would like to conclude with a reference to the American educator and author **Lyman Bryson** who said that

**SLIDE 26** « The error of youth is to believe that intelligence is a substitute for experience, while the error of age is to believe experience is a substitute for intelligence. » In career guidance and counselling we need, and thankfully we mostly also have, both.

**SLIDE 26 Thank you** once more for your attention.