Career guidance *for* social justice

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This editorial sets the context for issue 36 of the NICEC journal which is focused on social justice and career guidance. The editorial explores the key themes of the issue highlighting the social justice tradition within the career guidance field and making the case for a strong focus on social justice. However the editorial also highlights the tensions that exist between career guidance's orientation to the individual and understandings of social justice which are more socially orientated. The editorial concludes by arguing that if career guidance is to formulate a meaningful response to social injustice it needs to draw on diverse theoretical traditions and stimulate new forms of practice.

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Introduction

> Social injustices and divisions have increased exponentially in recent years, widening the economic and social gap between, and within, countries. Current economic forces are compounding this situation, and many policies aimed at social inclusion and cohesion have proven to be ineffective in the creation of a democratic, participative and inclusive society in which all voices are heard… IAEVG, as the largest worldwide guidance association, appeals to providers, practitioners, academics and policy makers, to increase their efforts by embracing social justice as a core value that guides their practices.
>
> IAEVG (2013)

The recent call by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance to situate 'social justice' as a core value of the career guidance field offered some recognition to a strand that has been within the field from its inception (Furbish, 2015). Many of the authors in this issue locate their discussion of social justice both in relation to the IAEVG's statement, but also in relation to the fact that the field itself grew out of a concern for social reform. Plant and Kjærgård discuss the origins of career guidance in their contribution to this issue, noting that it emerged as a progressive response to a period of rapid social change. They note that progressives like Frank Parsons emphasised social responses to social problems and situated the new activity of vocational guidance at the heart of this. Guidance was to help individuals to find their way as they moved from the country to the cities, but it was also to serve a social and political function.

The world of the early twenty-first century is both like and unlike the world into which Parsons introduced vocational guidance. It is easy to focus on the differences between our world and Parsons' and to identify, as Staunton does in his contribution to this issue, the growth of new technologies which would have been unimaginable to Parsons. Such technological shifts combine with new social and political formations to transform institutions and create new contexts for individuals to pursue their careers, as well as new contexts within which career guidance operates. As Rooney and Rawlinson argue in their article such changes have resulted in the political economy of neoliberalism within which the objective of all institutions (including the state, the university and career guidance) are framed as serving the needs of capital and the corporation.

However, focusing on the differences between the early twenty-first century and the early twentieth century can obscure the fact that many of the challenges that Parsons faced have either remained

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with us or returned again. Poverty, inequality, shifts in the nature and location of work, a lack of social mobility, and the growth of geographical mobility all remain as social, political and economic themes that twenty first century career guidance has to deal with just as much as the progressives who originated the area. If anything, many of these challenges are bound to intensify given that the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots', measured across a broad range of indicators, has widened in Europe and the US since the 18th century, and is set to increase even further, as Piketty (2014) has famously and conclusively shown.

Now, as then, it appears that life isn't fair, and that the promises of meritocracy remain, for many, somewhat illusory (McNamee and Miller, 2004). The narrative of your career is not a straightforward consequence of your psychology, your intelligence, your attributes or your effort. Nor is it possible for each of us to entirely 'write our own career stories' or 'design our lives' as some in the careers field suggest. As da Silva, Paiva and Ribeiro argue in their contribution to this issue, such attempts to empower individuals need to acknowledge the role that context plays in constraining such narratives and power plays in enabling or limiting their realisation. The poor and the rich do not have access to the same opportunities, nor do they generally achieve the same outcomes. What is more, wealth is only one dynamic on which the unfairness of life hangs, albeit an important one. Ethnicity, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, and nationality all offer other poles around which unfairness congregates, often in ways where multiple, intersectional and overlapping burdens are carried by the same individual and group. This is not news to anybody and certainly not to career guidance practitioners or researchers. There is a long tradition of research which demonstrates that people's careers are socially constructed and socially constrained (e.g. Roberts, 1968; Willis; 1977; Colley, 2000; Hodkinson, 2009). However, there remains a very big question mark as to what to do about such concerns, with some going as far as to conclude—erroneously in our view—that career guidance is ill equipped to redress social injustice, especially since even class-based social movements, such as trade unions, have failed to do so (Roberts, 2005).

Why care about social justice?

The position adopted in this special issue is that the intellectual and practical struggle to understand how the social practice that we refer to as 'career guidance' can be used in socially transformative and emancipatory rather than reproductive and oppressive ways needs to be fuelled by a clear understanding of what is at stake. The moral imperative 'to do something' about social injustices—both as human beings and citizens, as well as in our professional roles as career advisers and researchers—needs to be driven and steered by an *informed* desire to do 'the right thing'. To care about 'social justice' in these neoliberal times, i.e. when our very desires and notions of what it means to be human are shaped by the master discourse of competitive and possessive individualism, requires a firm understanding of how hegemony works, and why it is important to resist. Most importantly, it requires the ability and courage to imagine other ways of 'being in the world'. This is not an easy achievement, for such is the strength of hegemony that it has become almost impossible to imagine alternative ways of generating and distributing wealth, and of relating to each other. Many indeed unknowingly echo Margaret Thatcher's sorry excuse for policies that unleashed market forces onto a nation when she declared: 'There is no alternative'. Hayek, the Austrian economist whose theories underpinned and legitimated the revival of liberal doctrines against Keynesian justifications of the welfare state, set the tone by arguing that 'considerations of justice provide no justification for 'correcting' the results of the market' (1969: 175).

It is salutary and instructive to consider some of the 'results of the market'. Chomsky (2010, 2011) has highlighted neoliberalism and its discontents in a string of publications that marshal evidence from across the globe. He has tirelessly decried the way financial liberalisation has eroded democracy, has facilitated the creation of a 'virtual senate' of investors and lenders who exercise veto power—through such means as capital flight and attacks on currency—against government policies which benefit people rather than profit. Like many others (*inter alia* Harvey, 2005; Stiglitz, 2012), Chomsky has highlighted the way

liberalisation leads to a decline in the ability of states, and as a consequence democracies, to conduct social and economic policy on their own terms. He has shown how the intensification in speculative capital flows, in the interests of the powerful, increase the concentration of wealth, the monopolisation of profits, and the rise of a 'consumer apartheid'. In drawing up the balance sheet for neoliberalism internationally, the evidence is clear that it has promoted the dismantling of the welfare state, intensified global inequality, and led to the individualisation of all actions, with structurally-induced problems such as unemployment, inequality and poverty blamed on individual victims, rather than on the perpetrators (Duménil and Lévy, 2011). As Rooney and Rawlinson note in their contribution to this special issue, and drawing as they do on Foucauldian notions of 'technology of government' when discussing the problematic notion of 'employability', neoliberalism exerts its power through conditions of social insecurity and precarity 'against which people are required to take self-governing responsibility for insuring themselves'.

Being socially just and doing the 'right thing'

It is one thing to understand the bigger picture, and the local and global forces that interact together to provide the context in which we work. It is quite another to use such understanding to shape our everyday practices. Many who work in career guidance and associated fields perceive what is at stake for individuals and societies and seek to do something about them. Career guidance is a helping profession and its practitioners seek to find ways in which they can help the individuals and groups with whom they work. However, providing this help is not always straightforward.

Consider the challenge of a young woman growing up in Kosovo. The country is small, ravaged by a recent war, unacknowledged by many in Europe and poorly served by transport links. The young woman may despair of the opportunity structure around her and seek advice from Kosovo's emerging career guidance sector (Rraci, 2013; Zelloth, 2009). The career worker

that she talks to may point out to her that despite its political isolation Kosovo is not far from the economic heartland of Europe. A short journey will open up a new world of opportunity. This advice would be helpful for the young woman as she heads north and west in search of better opportunities. It would be especially helpful if she is skilled, educated and speaks good German or English. However, would this advice be helpful for her family, her community and her country? This young woman is not making her decision in isolation, but rather against the context of mass outward migration (EurActive Serbia, 2015). Kosovo needs people to care for its sick, teach its young, build its economy and negotiate its way into Europe. The Kosovan government is working actively to limit and slow down migration for the good of the country (EurActive, 2016). What is good for the individual may be in tension with the needs of the society. Where does this leave career guidance?

This is an important question because career guidance as we know it in the West distils within itself the fundamental premises that underpin our often unexamined, taken-for-granted views of what it means to be human. It does this by prioritising notions of a free, autonomous, independent individual seeking to fulfil him/herself through choices made, and to design life projects for oneself. Rosemont (2015: 54), using a Confucian lens to problematize individualism and to rethink the foundations of morality, argues that not only are notions of the individual untouched by sociality an ontological fiction, but also they are ethically questionable. To promote one's freedom unencumbered by others as the utmost value inevitably comes at the expense of the advancement of socio-economic justice. 'The notion of Western individualism', argues Li-Hsiang (2015) in her thoughtful review of Rosemont's book, 'not only does not help alleviate poverty and social inequality; it in fact aggravates it, since the well-to-do and the needy alike are conceptualized as responsible only to oneself and hence only for oneself as well. Each rises and falls on one's own…'

The alternative to this hyper-individualism is not collectivism or totalitarianism, as we in the West have been taught to fear, but rather forms of dialogic solidarity – a point that is powerfully made by da

Silva and his colleagues in their consideration of 'intercultural career guidance' that reconceptualises our work as community action that focuses on social bonds. In developing an 'epistemology of the South', the authors draw on de Sousa Santos to note that social solidarity and collaboration need not necessarily be co-opted and colonised by the logic of neoliberalism and what Habermas would refer to as 'technocratic rationality'. As Hall and Lamont (2013) note, there have been a wide range of responses to neoliberalism. Some of these have been about maintaining strong social networks and forms of social solidarity and collaboration. They view such responses through the lens of resilience, suggesting that it is possible for forms of social solidarity to endure and even flourish under neoliberalism. Within career guidance our work takes place within teams, within organisations and within communities of practice which all offer forms of collaboration and solidarity. However the objectives of such collaborations are shaped by the overarching metaphors of neoliberalism.

Given the reach and impact of the values of the neoliberal regime, it is important for our profession to exercise an anthropological imagination: it is by looking at alternative ways of 'being in the world' that the resilience and resistance can be transformed into political projects. This search for alternative ways of (re-)imagining career guidance and its foundational premises has been explored in relation to Islamic pietist notions of submission to God's will and to filial deference as ultimate goals (Sultana, 2011). It is also pursued in the articles in this special issue by da Silva, Paiva and Ribeiro, and to some extent by Skovhus, who draw on theoretical orientations developed within the cultural and political traditions of Latin America and India respectively. The former highlight critical post-colonial discourses that acknowledge the importance of situated knowledges in order to develop forms of emancipatory practice. In such approaches the career guidance practitioner is seen as a community worker embedded in, and respectful of local epistemologies. The latter draws on Sen's approach to argue that the capabilities of individuals can really only become 'functionings' – i.e. move from a state of possibility to actually being realised – when supported by an enabling and empowering social milieu. Staunton, on his part, considers the potential

of social media and 'connectivism' which, together with associated ideologies, could generate alternatives to individualisation, even if some of the assumptions embedded in these approaches are overly-optimistic and under-estimate the challenges of structure and power.

Defining social justice (or social justices)

In this issue we have adopted the language of 'social justice' as a way of addressing some of these issues, challenges and tensions. Social justice is not merely about 'helping' an individual. It contains within it the sense of righting a wrong and bringing about a fairer society. However, centuries of emancipatory struggles have taught us that there is not a single route to a just society, nor is there universal agreement about what such justice might look like and how to bring it about.

Irving (2009) and Sultana (2014a), among others, have both discussed this in the past highlighting a range of different definitions of social justice, and exploring what implications these competing definitions might have when it comes to conceptualising and delivering career guidance services. An essential distinction is one that was first drawn by Watts (1996) in his oft-cited paper outlining the four key socio-political ideologies underpinning guidance. This paper is discussed in this issue by Plant and Kjærgård who use it to explore a range of themes in contemporary policy and practice. In this paper Watts relates career guidance practices to a range of political positions (conservative, liberal, progressive and radical) suggesting that the different positions are defined by the way in which career guidance relates to the individual and society and stasis and change. This framework challenges career guidance workers to make a fundamental choice: whether, that is, to be technocrats that skilfully help others fit into the world as it is, or whether they are prepared to work within a zone of professional discomfort and challenge injustices evident in contemporary labour markets and social relations more broadly, while at the same time doing their best for their clients within the constraints of the here and now. The latter position opens up a number of agentic options. These

range from Freirian-style dialogic conscientisation and intercultural guidance (as promoted by da Silva, Paiva and Ribeiro), to the use of literature to unpack the imperatives embedded in the 'dogmatic nature of work' (as outlined by Rooney and Rawlinson), and the mobilisation of the 'practice portrait' as a method to develop an awareness of the links between action and social structures (as described by Thomsen). It also points the way towards advocacy and action in the local and wider community with a view to challenging and eventually transforming oppressive structures – a point that is made in an especially strong manner by Plant and Kjærgård.

A key consideration in making this fundamental choice is our understanding of what is at stake. Iris Marion Young (1990) is extremely helpful here when she reminds us that, very simply, a socially just system is one that does not oppress. She furthermore reminds us that even well intentioned liberal societies have generated practices that oppress, and that such practices congeal in—and flow from—structures that generate forces and barriers that immobilise and reduce the opportunities for self-realisation for groups. Young's identification of the 'five faces of oppression', which include exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, can be readily adopted by the career guidance community as clear programmatic signposts. Professional knowledge, skills and research, together with political action in whichever way this is conceived, can be mobilised by the career guidance profession around these signposts in order to further the social justice agenda.

Responding to concerns about social justice

Taking the notion of oppression seriously requires a major rethink of career guidance itself, and of our roles as researchers and practitioners because, as Young argues in her general discussion of oppression, this 'involves adopting a general mode of analysing and evaluating social structures and practices which is incommensurate with the language of liberal individualism that dominates political discourse' (1990: 39). As has already been noted, that same language of

liberal individualism has tended to also dominate the way career guidance is conceptualised and practised. Each practice paradigm carries within it a number of political assumptions. In her article in this issue Thomsen outlines an approach (the practice portrait) which seeks to help practitioners to gain insights into the nature of their practice and to work with researchers to move this forward in the interests of social justice.

Some conventional forms of career guidance send out the message that individuals should make their decisions in isolation from their family and communities, focusing on their needs to the exclusion of all others. Other forms stress the primacy of labour market needs, encouraging individuals to focus on what employers want and to seek to adapt and transform themselves to meet these needs. Theories of career guidance have moved from trait and factor theories (Chartrand, 1991), to developmental theories (Super, 1983) to a range of theories which have highlighted complexity (Prior and Bright, 2011), the importance of systems (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and the capacity of the individual to interpret their own career in the way that they choose (Savickas, 2012). It would be possible to discuss each of these theoretical positions in relation to the definition of social justice that they prioritise.

If we had to adopt a lens similar to that proposed by Young, and imagine the response that career guidance might make if it were to seriously take the struggle for social justice as a way to combat multiple forms of oppression, then this might entail the outcomes shown in Figure 1 below.

The ability to take on 'oppression' and 'social justice' as analytic lenses requires us to challenge the domination of the career guidance field by the discipline of mainstream psychology, and particularly by forms of psychology that tend to ignore what Young (1990: 39) refers to as 'the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation'. Increasingly, however, we note a flourishing of interdisciplinary inputs from a range of other perspectives which have addressed its nature and role in different ways which are of interest to a consideration of social justice. For example,

Figure 1. The implications of Young's 'faces of oppression' for career guidance

Faces of oppression	Scope of emacipatory career guidance interventions
For every oppressed group there is a group that benefits from that oppression 'and is privileged in relation to that group' (Young, 1990: 42).	In terms of conscientisation, advocacy, and political action in a range of contexts (individual, group, service delivery institutions, and wider community)
Exploitation Defined in terms of: • unfair compensation for work done • exploitation in the labour market • coercive relations of force that give workers few options • systematic transfer of power from one group to another	• takes a standpoint around issues of unfair pay • critiques precarious work • helps empower vulnerable groups: e.g. migrants • puts issues around women's work on the agenda • challenges stereotypes • is sensitive to the ways segmented labour markets facilitate exploitation
Marginalisation Defined in terms of: • peripherality and exclusion from the labour market • suspension of rights and withdrawal of respect to those out of work	• is aware of, and develops skills and a power base in addressing issues specific to the marginalisation of groups (youths, the elderly, migrants, indigenous groups, single parents, differently abled, LGBTQ, long term unemployed) • raises awareness about the risks involved in working for sunset industries • shows (and promotes) respect towards those on welfare, fighting the blame-the-victim mentality
Powerlessness Defined in terms of: • always being on the receiving end of orders • experiencing major difficulties due to system-wide constraints	• promotes autonomy at work • increases scope for self-direction in clients • contests all forms of disrespectful treatment • raises the awareness of individuals and groups regarding self-oppression (i.e. operating against one's own self interests through the integration of hegemony) • focuses on the structural source of problems which are often experienced and owned as personal (i.e. contests 'responsibilisation') • learns, and helps others learn, how to 'name' oppression • facilitates the effective projection of 'voice' in the public sphere • promotes progressive agendas through participation in social movements and advocacy on behalf of subordinate groups
Cultural imperialism Defined in terms of: • the 'normalisation' of ruling class culture, which becomes the 'referent' and the 'norm' against which all other cultures are (negatively) judged	• is aware of the way such normalisation of cultural arbitraries leads to 'othering' – i.e. where differing from the 'norm' is not recognised as legitimate diversity, but either perceived negatively or not even acknowledged. • is sensitive to the way in which the assumption of the unique legitimacy of a dominant culture (including interpretations of the role and meaning of work) creates categories of judgement of those who are different • contests the way difference is rendered invisible • is willing to acknowledge and respect alternative visions of life, and of ways of being in the world
Violence Defined in terms of: • fear of random, unprovoked attacks	• has zero tolerance for symbolic, moral and physical violence, including that perpetrated by the institutions delivering guidance services • has the civic commitment, and skills, to combat xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia within oneself and others, and in their embedded forms in institutions • is prepared to shield and defend clients from institutional intimidation

there has been a growing policy interest in career guidance which has been most evident in the spate of reports published by major international bodies such as the OECD (2004), the World Bank (Watts and Fretwell, 2004), and agencies of the European Union such as CEDEFOP (2005). This tradition has viewed career guidance as part of the education and social support system and has argued that it serves social goals, besides economic and political ones. This policy literature typically avoids engaging with the structural factors that inhibit and constrain individual's careers and rarely addresses how discrete changes to education provision might link with a wider challenge to neoliberalism (Bengtsson, 2011; Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2012). However, it has served to open up discussions about social justice issues, particularly in terms of enhancing inclusion and social cohesion, a consideration of citizen rights to security and a decent wage, and to notions of solidarity that require redistribution of wealth through, for instance, the installation of flexicurity regimes that have consequential implications for career guidance (Sultana, 2012).

This 'policy busyness' around career guidance has also served to generate a renewed interest among researchers from a range of disciplines who have increasingly been troubled by the irony of calls to better prepare young people and adults for jobs… that are simply not there! As Rooney and Rawlinson point out in this issue, there is much deceptive rhetoric around notions of lifelong learning and knowledge-based economies when what await many 'knowledge workers' are routinisation, surveillance, and exploitation. In an effort to make sense of the role of career guidance in a time of economic recession, mass youth unemployment, underemployment, and precarity, perspectives drawing on critical sociology, critical psychology, philosophy, feminism, literature, and liberation theology have started to challenge and enrich the field, leading to a (re)emergent interest in issues of social justice in career guidance. Authors such as Barry Irving (Irving, 2009; Irving and Malik, 2004), Nancy Arthur and her colleagues (Arthur *et al.*, 2009; Arthur *et al.*, 2013), David Blustein (2006) as well as both of the authors of this editorial (Hooley, 2015; Sultana, 2014a, 2014b) and many of the other authors featured in the issue have explored the relationship between career education and guidance and social

justice, re-engaging with themes that had been central to authors writing during previous economic downturns, as Watts (2015) has noted.

Conclusions

The authors in this issue draw on all of these different perspectives on career guidance and social justice. They draw from mainstream vocational psychology, the policy literature and from radical perspectives on career guidance. However, they also open up a range of new theoretical influences from which career guidance can draw. Authors explore ideas from critical pedagogy (e.g. Friere, 1985; Giroux, 2014), critical psychology (e.g. Nissen, 2000), critical theory (e.g. Foucault, 2000), connectivism and its critiques (e.g. Downes, 2010; Mejias, 2013), political economy (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Sen, 1992; 2009), southern epistemologies (e.g. de Sousa Santos, 2014) and theories of work and working (e.g. Beck, 2000; Frayne, 2015). The authors examine how they relate to career guidance and increase its capacity to address social justice. This epistemological pluralism is one of the most exciting aspects of the current issue.

Key themes that emerge across all of the papers contained within the issue are of the dynamism of the political economy and the need for complex and creative responses which are capable of rethinking old assumptions and crossing boundaries. Plant and Kjærgård help us to think about what can be learnt from the history of career guidance and particularly from its origins and how these lessons can be applied to the contemporary. Thomsen talks about the need to find new ways for researchers to work with careers professionals to bring about new forms of practice. While da Silva and colleagues, Rooney and Rawlinson, Skovus and Staunton all seek to draw on diverse theoretical and disciplinary bases to imagine what this practice might look like.

A concern with social justice opens up a wide range of new ways of thinking about career guidance which are enriching and suggestive of new practice possibilities. It is our hope that this special issue serves as yet another stimulant towards this end.

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