

Book Review

Oxford Handbook of Career Development, edited by Peter J. Robertson, Tristram Hooley, and Phil McCash, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 528, £115 hardback, £62.29 kindle edition, ISBN Number: 9780190069704 (hardback) 9780190069711 (ebook)

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The *Oxford Handbook of Career Development* comprises a series of essays from leading figures in the careers world, uniquely bringing together the multiple traditions and international perspectives that now characterise the field. It will be of interest to career practitioners at all stages in their careers, and to lecturers, researchers, and policy advisers.

The editors of the handbook are: Peter J. Robertson, a qualified career adviser and a chartered psychologist. Peter teaches career theory and policy to postgraduate students at Edinburgh Napier University; Tristram Hooley, a researcher and writer specializing in career and career guidance. Tristram is Professor of Career Education at the University of Derby, Professor II at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, and Chief Research Officer at the Institute of Student Employers; and Phil McCash, a qualified career development practitioner with experience of working with young people and adults in a variety of contexts and settings. Phil currently works as an Associate Professor at the University of Warwick's Centre for Lifelong Learning where he is Course Director for the Master's in Career Education, Information, and Guidance in Higher Education and Director of Graduate Studies. All

three are Fellows of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling (NICEC).

The handbook is broken down into three interrelated sections. The first offers a critical examination of the economic, education, and public policy context for practice. The second explores key concepts and the theoretical landscape. The final section considers the translation of ideas into action. Topics extend from professionalism to economic outcomes, cross cultural career psychology to evidence-based practice. The philosophy underpinning the handbook, its aim, and layout is clearly explained in the introductory chapter, where career is eloquently defined as '*The moving perspective through which all individuals interpret the meaning of their lives*' (p.5).

Throughout, there is a sense of a strong editorial hand guiding this volume; providing a consistency in quality and a coherency of approach with contributors stretching their examination of career development to consider what else could be. In this respect it is a 'troubling' volume in the very best sense (as Roland Sultana uses the term): it 'troubles' any complacency with the current state of career development work, but also offers '*territories of hope*' (p.88). Robertson's visionary exploration into widening the remit of career development in chapter 8 exemplifies this excellently. Framing this contribution against the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) he specifically addresses not just those goals directly related to work but considers how 'career' can contribute to many other SDGs. He argues that the potential impact of career development can be extended to contribute to health and wellbeing goals, to environmental goals and to peace and justice. Further examples include: Mackenzie Davey's examination of organisational career development and the ideological focus on individual agency and organizational processes (chapter 10), stretching us instead to celebrate richness and diversity of approaches; Ribeiro's challenging critique of Global North theories and their applicability to different social, cultural and economic conditions of the Global South, alongside the lack of the reverse South to North flow

(chapter 16); and Percy and Dodd's critical analysis and pragmatic three tier conceptualisation of financial metrics and economic outcomes (chapter 3).

Woven within the chapters are direct and implied references to the 'added value' of career practitioner support: the greater value of career assessment when mediated by a professional (McIlveen et al., chapter 22); the increased value of LMI when interpreted by career experts (Bimrose, chapter 20); and the enhancement of outcomes when expertly facilitated (Whiston, chapter 24). This phenomenon is encapsulated by Barnes (chapter 11) where he defines the ability of career practitioners to design career learning experiences that bring about change as 'transformative'. Recognition of 'added value' is fundamental to understanding the interactive relationship of career development with digital technologies and their role as tools and in shaping society, (Barnes, chapter 11, and Hooley & Staunton, chapter 21). These and other chapters offer a rebuttal to the darker side of career development policy, which fosters an illusion of democracy and empowerment, and challenge the rather tiresome reductionist assumption that careers work could all go online.

Underpinning this exposition of career development, we discover the bedrock of career theory; its rationale and application so clearly expressed by Yates (chapter 9) and supported in subsequent chapters that provide more detailed accounts of specific theory, concepts of social justice, and cultural dimensions which are both integrative and practical. The high level of critique and intercultural dialogue illuminates well established accounts of career development and synthesizes them with more contemporary understanding, preserving valuable insights of the past and without disdain for traditional theory or methods. As such, the contributors challenge our views, develop our understanding, and consequently, increase our effectiveness as career practitioners.

As reviewers, stand-out chapters were those that broke new ground, stretching beyond restating what has been published previously. Beyond those already detailed above, personal highlights for the reviewers included chapter 4 in which Hooley invites consideration of the interrelationship between career theory/practice, education, and human capital theory. Drawing on examples from policy instruments, funding regimes and

public rhetoric, he contends that the hold of human capital theory on career development is problematic. Rather, career development practice should be considered as a process of education and learning, with a contribution to human agency far beyond the individual's economic role. Hooley acknowledges that wholesale change is not imminent but argues that small steps towards change are possible. Another stand-out chapter was the persuasive argument of Sultana in chapter 6, where he highlights '*a narrative that serves to mask system failure or to lay the cause of failure at the wrong door*' (p.82), exposing and challenging the authenticity of work education in education settings which familiarity causes many of us to accept without question.

Highlighting a few chapters does not imply other contributions are poor. Indeed, they are of great value and encourage us to reflect on and extend our understanding of career development – as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) so aptly said, 'The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.'

The handbook can be read in part or in whole. Its strength is that its 25 chapters form a cohesive volume, not a mere collection, yet different chapters will be of interest to different readers and stand successfully alone. It succeeds in providing an integrative dialogue across the transdisciplinary field of career development with each contribution well informed and cogently argued, exemplifying that '*career is a conversation between the present and the future. Our pasts frame the way in which this conversation can happen*' (p.8). A limitation is restricted access. Confining subscription to 'Oxford Handbooks online' only to learning institutions, alongside the high cost of purchasing a copy, will impede readership. The handbook makes a strong case for career development, providing an understanding of what it does, and how much more it could do to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and support the development of economic systems that respect our humanity. We would strongly urge you to pool your resources and secure joint ownership of this seminal volume and encourage libraries to subscribe to 'Oxford Handbooks online' so you can read it for yourselves.