

Developing interdisciplinary habits of hand, heart, and mind for career development practitioners

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Abstract

Within an edition of this journal that is looking at the contribution of differing disciplines to the study and practice of career development, this article explores the notion of career as explicitly *interdisciplinary*, and examines different understandings and implications of that. From here, it uses Shulman's ideas of surface, deep and implicit 'signature pedagogies' to consider what our interdisciplinarity means for the training of career development practitioners, suggesting reflective practice, criticality, reflexivity, and communities of practice as core concepts. It ends with scoping out some priorities for further consideration and arguing for NICEC's role in articulating the habits of hand, heart, and mind involved.

Key words: interdisciplinarity; career development; pedagogy

Introduction

Dictionary definitions of 'discipline' cover the dual meaning of the term: to control and channel behaviour and to scope a particular branch of knowledge, particularly in the context of higher education study. In the same way, 'subject' has a sense of dominion and control to it as a way to establish boundaries around an area of study. In this journal edition, several articles have looked at disciplines of study and their contribution to career development, which begs questions about the disciplinary status of career development itself: is it a discipline in its own right, bounded and distinct from others? Is it some sort of blend of other disciplines? And what are the implications of this for how it is studied, for

those learning to manage their careers but in particular for those learning the practice of facilitating career development learning, i.e. career development professionals.

Debate about aligning career development with disciplines often focuses on the former: what is the relevance of disciplines in teaching career development to those who are studying a particular subject. When career development content is being integrated within a degree programme, for example, alignment with the subject of study can engage learners, make connections and provide legitimacy. However, as regards the study of career development practice, this article explores the notion of career as explicitly *interdisciplinary*, and examines different understandings and implications of that. From here, it considers the connection of discipline and profession, and the implications of our interdisciplinarity for the 'signature pedagogies' involved in the training of career development practitioners. It ends with scoping out some priorities for further consideration.

Career development as interdisciplinary

The first question to pose must be: is career development interdisciplinary? To answer this, we need to surface the boundaries of disciplines and subjects that we all use as mental maps of knowledges, and which provide so much of the structure of formal education: syllabi, qualifications and organisational units like university departments being based around them. The human desire to sort and code into silos that can be mastered belies an interconnectedness and messiness we find in practice. So, whilst these disciplinary boundaries are often not as secure as they might first appear once we start noticing them, they do still provide structures through which norms are communicated, power is exerted, careers are developed, and resources are distributed. There is a perennial tension between our disciplinary affiliations which inform ways of thinking and the drive to push boundaries and innovate.

Initial and continuing professional development training programmes for career development practitioners in UK Universities are commonly co-located with broad social science clusters such as schools of health and social care or social policy. Some might identify with education and others with strands of psychology such as vocational, counselling or organisational. I hold my own location within a Centre for Lifelong Learning to heart, given the importance of guidance to adult learning choices. However, I posit that we can all broadly accept that we can draw on different disciplines to theorise about career development, and this makes us interdisciplinary by nature.

Even when 'career studies' is co-opted into the field of business and management, the contribution of different disciplines is at least acknowledged. In their introduction to the *Handbook of Career Studies*, management scholars Gunz and Pierperl (2007), draw attention to the broad range of tributaries flowing into one river of career development: citing vocational psychology, sociology, organisation studies, economics, narrative theory and more. A later chapter (Moore et al., 2007) points to roots which are sociological, vocational and developmental. They highlight significant contributions from

- Chicago School sociologists, whose used the word career more broadly than referring to middle-class paid jobs,

- differential psychologists who developed testing tools to support a matching process in the practice of vocational guidance, and
- scholars of life course development, who have explored the significance of life stage and ongoing adaptation across the life span and space.

In the same handbook, Peiperl & Gunz (2007) claim 'career studies' as a sub-category of organisation studies and see this as where it has 'gone legitimate' (p.1) since the 1970s. Perhaps legitimacy is a result of being 'disciplined'. However, those earlier tributaries and trajectories reveal a body of work with shifting philosophical underpinnings. Early work, with its emphasis on matching aspects of the person and the environment, was underpinned by positivism. The shift to a developmental process still assumes generalisability of life stage and span. More latterly, constructivist and social constructionist understandings of how meaning is made through cognitive processes and interaction with the social world have developed. These foreground ongoing processes of learning and decision making with individual action in unpredictable, uncontrollable and constantly shifting contexts. The focus remains on the individual as central player, but the complexity of the game is recognised. More recently, the power dynamics within dominant neo-liberal ideologies are critiqued and the emphasis that placed within organisational studies on certain types of roles and organisations been called out for having 'put the agentic individual centre stage' (Mayrhofer et al., 2020, p.329) attending to 'a limited diversity of career settings' (p. 328). A renewed focus has emerged on the meaning of work across a wider range of global populations and contexts, reflecting differences in economic, political and social contexts with widespread inequality, precarity and disadvantage (Arulmani, 2014; Blustein, 2019; Ribeiro, 2021; Sultana, 2017).

This rudimentary review serves to demonstrate that all of these disciplinary perspectives are partial. Some focus on the individual as agent at the expense of context. Others, in turn, emphasise structural constraints from context at the expense of the leverage of the individual. More problematically, some limit themselves (consciously or unconsciously) to particular types of contexts. This incompleteness relates also to underpinning *epistemologies*; that is, the assumptions about how knowledge is generated within that field. The bulk of research on which the classic theories are based have been large quantitative studies where differences between elements of large samples are examined to generalise objective truth. Moreover, most of these studies were undertaken in what Henrich et al. (2010) coin as WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) contexts.

With such a broad range of theories at our disposal, to use them we need to engage in what Kidd (2006) calls either 'technical eclecticism' or 'theoretical integration'. My contention is that looking at career as interdisciplinary can only help both the widening of scope and this integration. For example, the Systems Theory Framework of Career Development (Patton and McMahon, 2021) provides us with a 'meta-theoretical framework' that claims to hold all extant theory and its range of epistemological underpinnings. Central to the framework is the individual in context, indicating the recursive influencing of components across all parts of the two open systems: the individual and the social/societal.

As discipline crossing has become more explicitly discussed in the academy, we can compare our experience in career development with other work to bring disciplines together. For example, Shepherd (2017) highlights that the sort of systemic mapping

developed by Patton and McMahon is a common feature of transdisciplinary projects: a clue that we have found some common ground. A significant contribution to defining terms was made by Stember (1991) in her article '*Advancing the social sciences through the interdisciplinary enterprise*'. Here she specifies the following continuum of disciplinary boundary crossing:

Intradisciplinary: working within a single discipline.

Crossdisciplinary: viewing one discipline from the perspective of another.

Multidisciplinary: people from different disciplines working together, each drawing on their disciplinary knowledge.

Interdisciplinary: integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines, using a real synthesis of approaches.

Transdisciplinary: creating a unity of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspectives.

Jensenius (2012) has turned this into a neat visualisation (Figure 1):

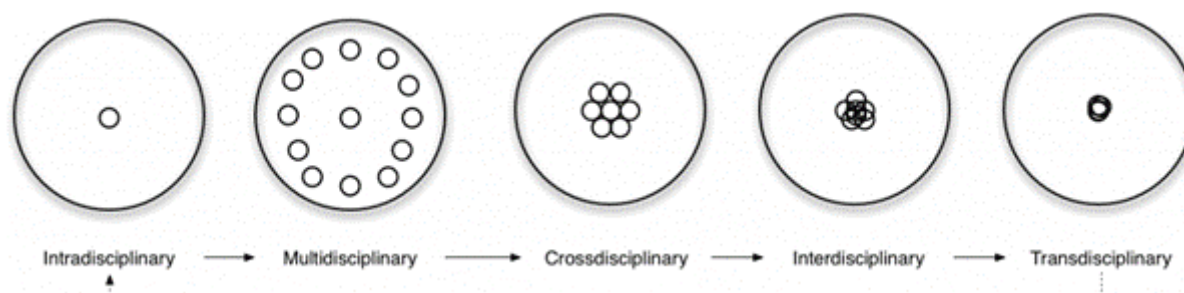


Figure 1. Different disciplinarity (Jensenius, 2012)

Linking back to Gunz and Pierperl's (2007) river metaphor – they seem to be speaking of transdisciplinarity where integration is such that the origins of each droplet of water is no longer evident. I am perhaps more inclined to consider our current state as 'interdisciplinary', where, as scholars and professionals we can still see the contours and the distinctions of the disciplines. Whilst this leaves us short of a 'unity of intellectual frameworks', it does allow for synthesis. It also enables us to use those contours and distinctions as tools to evaluate them, when we choose to, or reject them if needed.

Shifting the kaleidoscope (another metaphor) we can identify a further axis of interdisciplinarity: the bringing together of theory and research, policy and practice as equal parts of career development. These three elements and their intersection are all important in their own way in the training of career development professionals. Interdisciplinarity has been advocated across all domains: in 2018, European career development scholars laid out a research agenda for career development that advocated for an interdisciplinary proactive approach that engaged fully with global issues (Weber et al, 2018) and asks conceptual questions about the purpose and meaning of career development work in practice. It seems that as a community we are committed to using the different cognitive maps that disciplines give us in order to work across disciplines but also across a theory/practice divide. And as Lauder and Neary (2020) note, theoretical

integration was a core argument for the upskilling of the profession through the establishment of a level 6 qualification requirement (Careers Profession Task Force, 2010).

To explore this further, we move to on to consider how the interdisciplinarity contributes to teaching and learning on training programmes for career development practitioners. By examining the initial training and ongoing professional development of career development practitioners we can hunt for clues not only about how different subjects are integrated in career development work but also about how theory and practice gaps are averted.

Signature pedagogies of career development?

The disciplinary differences discussed above are all reflected in how disciplines are taught. Shulman (2005) coined the term *signature pedagogies* to explore these differences and suggests that by identifying them we can usefully identify the habits that serve to reconstruct, legitimise and promote such bounded thinking.

Schulman maps out signature pedagogies at surface, deep and implicit level and argues that all these develop in the learner habits of hand, mind and heart. It is through these habits that learners are socialised into disciplines. Surface signature pedagogies relate to the specific teaching and learning activities engaged in (from case studies to labs, debates to group projects), whereas deep signature pedagogies are the frameworks used to consider how knowledge becomes known. Implicit signature pedagogies relate to our epistemologies: our beliefs and values about learning and about what counts as knowledge. As Schulman writes:

'We internalize our disciplinary Signature Pedagogy when we study and are trained in a particular discipline/profession. Through routine or practice, we come to embody this Signature Pedagogy without having to think about it' (p56).

So, what are its surface, deep, and implicit dimensions of teaching career development? There is not an extensive literature on the pedagogy of career development practice, but clues can be read into policy documents and other frameworks available. *What* is taught to career development practitioners can be read into artefacts like the National Occupational Standards maintained by the Career Development Institute or the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the Apprenticeship standard.

Alongside this we can consider *how* career development is taught. I suggest that our teaching is characterised by signatures of reflective practice, critical thinking, reflexivity and the formation of learning communities.

Reflective Practice is a key component of much career development training. Reid (2016) notes that many professions pay lip service to reflective practice, but I contend that we walk the walk, using reflective practice models as a major plank of career development practitioner training to learn from experience and develop critical reflection. This criticality speaks to the role of context on the career development of people we support, and the importance of practitioners being able to think critically about the inequalities, injustices and barriers that many face. As part of this, practitioners need awareness of their own positioning within wider systems and are therefore encouraged to develop their reflexivity. Finally, practitioners are prepared and equipped for collaborative working with colleagues

and stakeholders through the focus on communities of practice. Learners give and receive feedback extensively, draw on their own career and practice reflections and share these with others.

In my own institution, the 'surface structure' of our blended learning modules, where online delivery of resources and on campus workshops combine to support students, indicates a deep signature that assumes learners are technologically enabled and proficient enough to access resources, geographically disparate from campus and able to find time across subsequent months for private study and preparation of an authentic assessment tasks. Of course, these assumptions need to be checked and challenged to ensure our pedagogy isn't excluding some types of learners. Further deep signatures reflect a commitment that learners be actively engaged and a belief that this is best achieved by negotiating and agreeing a 'learning alliance' (McCash, 2021). This mirrors the way practitioners will work with clients where goals, tasks and bonds (Gysbers et al., 2014) are agreed up front and reviewed. Implicit to this are professional ethics that practitioners are focused on the needs of their clients, a key professional value and disposition that we cultivate. These signatures also feed through to assessment, with authentic professional assessment of the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the career development practitioner through recordings, reflections and artefacts, bridging any theory-practice gap. All of these have implications for curriculum design, delivery, class sizes, resourcing, recruitment of tutors and more.

All these signatures are present in one particular example of a class based activity which fosters community, criticality and reflection as well as a focus on theoretical integration: bringing the systems theory framework to life. An adapted socio-drama activity developed by Mary McMahon allows learners to simulate a career guidance setting and work together to construct a dynamic visualisation of social and contextual systems' recursive interaction. A further example would be the collective academic supervision model developed at Aarhus University (Nordentoft, 2023) where practitioner researchers work in groups to share their dissertation progress and give and receive feedback.

Writing about nurses, Dow et al remind us of the socialising function of signature pedagogies:

'Signature pedagogies are the central vehicle by which educators socialize individuals into a profession. They are the teaching handprint that conveys to learners: this is how we learn in our profession, and this is what we value'. (Dow et al: 2021, p.649)

As such, they tie learning to professional identity and values, building communities of practitioners who support and challenge one another. Once again, this is a potential signature of career development programmes in the networks of professionals that are created and maintained.

There is potential, then, that greater and clearer articulation of the signature pedagogies of our field can enable us to explore and develop the characteristics of the career development professional. Career development's own interdisciplinary signature pedagogies should be further articulated so as to capture their potential as an antidote to Shulman's 'pedagogical inertia' (p57). We model integration, interaction, and collaboration between the pedagogies of different disciplines as we develop our own habits of the mind, of the heart, of the hand (or knowledge, skills and behaviours).

Conclusion

I am advocating that we map out our signature pedagogies and trace that back to the claim of interdisciplinarity. In career development we draw appreciatively on a range of different disciplines with their epistemological differences as all having something to offer and we see value in looking together at theory, policy and practice. We centre the learner reflexively as they are learning a practice just as we centre the individual client in career development work. The emancipatory potential of career development work and the importance of systemic perspectives (acknowledging the interplay of all influences in the individual, social and societal environmental systems that the systems theory framework depicts) are further potential signatures.

To do this, we need access to professional communities that bring together scholars, researchers, policy makers and practitioners in dialogue. An awareness of interdisciplinarity is behind such spaces being integrative and collaborative rather than tribal and inert. With its breadth of scope, I believe NICEC as an organisation and the intellectual stimulus of this Journal can provide such as space. I hope that together, we can specify pedagogies best linked to the habits of hand, heart and mind of the career development professional.



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